

2 Corinthians 10
3/28/19
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Setting the Record Straight ...

- **On the Real Battle vs 1-6**
- **On True Authority vs 7-8**
- **On What Matters vs 9-12**
- **On Boasting vs 13-18**

Aim: to cause the women to fight the right battle with the right weapons for the right reason.

Introduction:

We are taught to not care about what others think:

- 'Just don't pay them any attention.'
- 'Who cares what they think anyway.'
- 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.'

So why does Paul care so much about what this small faction within the church thinks about him? Why does he not just turn the other cheek or ignore them? The answer: Because this attack on Paul's ministry is dividing the church and distorting the gospel. Paul doesn't care about what they think about him, but what they think about Christ.

From verses 15-16 from our text this week, we know Paul wants the Corinthians faith to increase and for their area of influence to be enlarged, so that the gospel can expand to lands beyond. Paul is having to care about how others view him, because his identity is so intertwined with Christ that if there is a wrong impression of Paul and his ministry, there is a wrong impression of Christ. That's why Paul must do battle.

Today's teaching is entitled, Setting the Record Straight.

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On the Real Battle vs 1-6

Paul knows that he too once had it all wrong. He once was one who was trying to destroy the church. But the Lord was meek and gentle and patient and forgiving to Paul, and Paul desires

to do the same to those who are attacking him. And so, with that in mind, Paul, with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, defends his work in the church.

In these first 6 verses, we pick up that Paul has been accused of 2 things.

#1 - Paul is accused of being inconsistent. Humble when with them yet bold when away. Somehow this is a sign of weakness and even cowardice.

I cannot tell you how many times throughout 1st and 2nd Corinthians that I have felt like Paul dealing with the church members at Corinth is a lot like parenting. Paul loves them, teaches them, pours his heart and life into them, and yet sometimes you know he had to wonder if they had heard anything he ever said. He desired for them to succeed in faith and as a church. He wanted to come and visit and enjoy time with them, not to have to nag and discipline! I feel that same way as a mom. I love when I can enjoy my family around the dinner table and we can laugh and tell stories and celebrate one another's accomplishments of the day. There is such joy in that. But what I don't enjoy is when the dinner table interaction becomes one of refereeing sibling squabbles, reprimanding whininess, and disciplining disobedience. That's when the "Bold Mama" comes out. And Paul says here, you don't want to see "The Bold Paul," so straighten up!

#2 - Paul is accused of being immoral- "walking according to the flesh" (vs 2). Let's get a good definition of "flesh." –

- the soft substance of a living creature that covers the bone and is permeated by blood (like you want to squeeze the cute little flesh of a baby's cheeks or spank the flesh of that cute little toddler's tush!)
- or the human body in general
- But another definition of flesh (and the one I want us to key in on today) is **man's natural tendencies outside the influence and power of God's Spirit. It is our go-to pattern to get our needs met for love, acceptance, worth and security.**

Romans 8:8 says, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Why? Go back 1 verse in Romans 8 and we see (vs 7) that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." That's what a small faction in the church was accusing Paul and his fellow ministry partners of doing: walking in a way completely opposite of God's ways. This is a serious accusation.

Paul says, 'Yes, I am walking in my fleshly, physical body, but I am not walking according to it.' To walk according to the flesh is to be controlled by the flesh. The flesh guides you and determines the things you do and don't do. Ephesians 6 speaks of how as believers who have died with Christ and been raised again, we now walk in newness in life. That newness is to walk according to the Spirit, instead of the flesh. So though we are still in our physical bodies, we are no longer controlled by our flesh (or our sinful nature) but by God's Spirit in us.

Paul says *“though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.”* Paul states that the battle going on is a spiritual one. And therefore, the weapons have to be spiritual as well. The weapons of the flesh in other translations are called *“carnal weapons.”* And at first you might think guns, swords, etc. Remember Peter in the Garden at Jesus’ arrest - He did not take up his weapon of prayer but instead the sword, slicing off a man’s ear? Peter thought he was to fight a physical battle, but Jesus knew it was a spiritual war.

But even more than actual physical weapons, these opponents who had come in with a distorted gospel used the fleshly weapons of manipulation, deceit, and lies. And what powerful weapons those 3 can be! But Paul says those are not the weapons we use. Instead Paul uses spiritual weapons. And we see a beautiful list of such spiritual weapons when we continue in Ephesians 6, verses 14-18 speaking of the armor of God:

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- The shoes ready with the gospel of peace
- The Shield of Faith
- The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,
- Prayer



Every time I walk into the JCC to teach a fitness class, posted beside the entrance door is this sign. So the past couple of weeks as I have been preparing this teaching and thinking about our spiritual weapons, I smile every time I see this sign, thinking ‘Oh but I do have some concealable weapons with me, in fact I am covered head to toe with this concealed armor!’ **When we put on the armor of God, we are women who are armed and dangerous, ready to battle in the spiritual realm.**

And what do these spiritual weapons do according to 2 Corinthians 10:4? They **destroy strongholds**. A stronghold is simply a place that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack. Let’s think about the battle of Jericho. This was my son’s favorite story when he was 3 or 4. We had to read it over and over, night after night. Remember, Joshua is leading God’s people to the promised land and there is this city – Jericho. It is fortified with 2 thick stone walls. It is said that the outer wall was likely 6 ft thick and 20 ft high. The inner wall was 12 feet thick and 30 ft high. It was basically impenetrable. It was a stronghold keeping God’s people from where God intended them to be. That’s what a stronghold does in our life, right?! Something keeping us from where God intends us to be.

In Corinth, these strongholds were arguments, opinions, or thoughts against God. Our strongholds may be a particular sin – pride, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness. Or maybe a particular lie – God can’t forgive me. I am unlovable. I am undesirable. I am alone. I am purposeless. I am not good enough. I am a failure. A stronghold of fear, rejection, failure,

depression, ...The walls are thick, seemingly impenetrable. How could these walls ever come down? Well, how did the walls of Jericho come down? With the divine power of God, divine power to destroy strongholds (not shrink, minimize, weaken, BUT DESTROY them).

Remember the song “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.”? Not only did the Israelites destroy the walls of Jericho but they took the city captive. The Israelites took captive enemy soldiers, and we must take captive enemy thoughts. We must destroy the strongholds, the lies and wrong thoughts against the truth of God, AND *“take every thought captive to obey Christ.”* We must let God alone be our stronghold. Psalm 9:9 says, *“The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”*

My favorite part in putting together one of these teachings is the digging, the research. There is a lot of digging through God’s Word, but sometimes there is some random digging when I am trying to bring together an illustration. So as I was digging the past few weeks, I came across an article published by the National Science Foundation that said the average person has about 12,000-60,000 thoughts per day. That’s a lot of thoughts to take captive. And that made me think about corralling animals. So then I came across an article entitled, “The Secret of Moo-ving Cattle.” :0)

And what stood out to me was that the cattle don’t just corral themselves. There is strategy and consistency needed because the task is quite challenging. The same is true for corralling our thoughts...



So let me give 3 strategies that if consistently applied will greatly impact us in taking every thought captive to obey Christ:

1. Pray - Humbly submit to God recognizing need for help. “God I need your help in corralling my thoughts because they are all over the place.”
2. Praise – Make that joyful noise to the Lord singing of God’s character – his goodness and faithfulness and mercy and love and forgiveness towards us.
3. Ponder – Ponder God’s Word. His Word is truth, and when our mind is set on truth, it cannot be deceived by lies.

When our mind is on those three things – prayer, praise, pondering God’s Word – then our thoughts will be captive to obey Christ.

On True Authority vs 7-8

I love how in verse 7 Paul says, *“Look at what is before your eyes.”* In other words, Paul is saying, “Why can’t you see me and my ministry for what it truly is! Are you blind?”

Have you ever known people that only see what they want to see? Well, there is science to support that we truly only see what we want to see. The optic nerve is the connector between the eye and the brain. Messages are sent from the brain to the eye and from the eye to the brain. But there are actually more impulses going from your brain forward to your eye than from your eye backward to your brain. This means that your brain is actually telling your eyes what to see.



I witnessed this every Saturday on the soccer field. The ref calls a foul against the blue team, and all the blue team parents yell at the ref for the ridiculous call. They of course saw no foul at all! I also witness this in our home when I say clean up your room. When my kids look at their room, they see cleanliness. When I look at it, I see piles of clean clothes not put away, dirty clothes on the floor, and a bed not made. Two very different views.

We should be praying and asking God for His vision and view...to see our world from His perspective and not tainted with biases and blind spots from our own thoughts and perspectives.

There was a small faction in the church seeing Paul's ministry as one of the flesh and not connected with Christ. They were seeing what they wanted to see and not reality, forcing Paul to set the record straight.

We also see in these 2 verses, Paul setting the record straight on his apostolic authority. Paul's authority is ...

1. God given. God called Paul to this ministry starting with that blinding light on the Damascus Road and then clarified Paul's ministry directing him to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's authority wasn't self-appointed based on pride or arrogance. Paul's authority to minister and speak with such boldness was because God gave them that authority.
2. For the purpose of building up. In contrast, those that were coming against Paul's ministry desired to destroy the church.

We all have authority. What authority has God given you? Maybe it is authority over children, authority over caring for aging parents, authority over a ministry, etc. Are you using your authority to build up the church or to destroy it?

On What Matters vs 9-12

The 3rd accusation against Paul was that he was insignificant, saying, *"His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."*

Isn't it true that so often we have an expectation for our leaders to look a certain way – whether it is political leaders, church leaders, etc. They accuse Paul of not “looking the part.” There is an early Christian writing from around 200AD that described Paul as, “A man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.” Wow! Not the most complimentary description to say the least.

So Paul is setting the record straight on what matters (It's not about the unibrow!):

#1 – It is the internal motivation not the external presentation that matters.

It is not the outward bells and whistles that make an effective ministry. So often we want to be dazzled and wowed by church ministries. It becomes more superficial entertainment than spiritual enrichment. This doesn't mean we shouldn't do church ministry well, but a caution not to judge the effectiveness of a ministry based on outward criteria.

Here are some other ways this may speak into our lives today:

- Don't judge the validity of a Christian website or blog because of its trendy graphics.
- Don't assume a Christian author is on point with her message because she looks like a fashion model.
- Don't assume a church is ineffective because it doesn't have fresh pine straw or a fresh coat of paint.

Again, there is nothing wrong with a put together person, church, or ministry. But put-togetherness does not ensure spiritual depth and accuracy.

So Paul is setting the record straight on what matters:

#1 – It is the internal motivation not the external presentation that matters.

#2 – It is not the comparison to others, but obedience to God that matter. Ultimately Paul is saying, ‘Your right, I don't measure up to these other savvy good-looking spiritual speakers, and I don't want to.’

We each are going to face criticism in life. It can come from our work situations -maybe a boss or a coworker. Criticism and wrong judgement can also come from our church family and our biological family. These tend to be some of the most painful situations to face.

There are times when we are going to be told some less than encouraging words, and sometimes that is exactly what we need to hear. Spiritual growth and maturity often can be limited when we are only affirmed and patted on the back. But there is a big difference between constructive criticism/Christian accountability and character assassination. There are many voices that speak into our lives. **We must be wise as to who we let speak in, who we ignore, and who we must speak out against.**

On Boasting vs 13-18

There is a Dr. Seuss book called The Big Brag. It is about these 2 animals, a rabbit and a bear, who both claim that of all the animals in the world they are the best. The rabbit brags about how he can hear the best, saying he could hear a fly cough from up on a mountain 90 mile away. The rabbit announces to the bear, “My ears are the best, so I am better than you!” So then the bear brags that his nose can smell the best, saying he can smell a stale hummingbird egg 600 miles away up in a tree past a pond. The bear boasts that he is the best. Then a third animal pops up out of the ground. It was a worm. And he says his eyes are the best. The worm says that he can see all the way around the world, back to the hill they are currently on. He says, “And on that hill I see the 2 biggest fools that have ever been seen that have nothing better to do than sit and argue who’s better than who!”

Well in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul’s opponents are the rabbit and the bear. They brag. They compare themselves to each other to feel like they are the best. It’s absolutely ridiculous and all self-motivated. It is here that we see the 4th accusation against Paul – that he is irrational in his boasting.

So Paul turns to set the record straight on his boasting. Paul wants the Corinthians to see that there is a world of difference between Paul’s boasting and his opponent’s boasting. And in these verses Paul says 3 things about his boasting:

1. Paul boasts within the limits that God has imposed. Paul recognized that he was called or assigned to share the gospel to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. Paul was “staying in his lane.” (vs 13-14)
2. Paul boasts only in what they have done (not what others have done.) Paul makes a point that there is a difference between boasting and hope. Paul doesn’t boast of reaching the gospel to areas outside what God has assigned, but he does hope that God will expand their territory to share the gospel. (vs 15-16)
3. Paul is ultimately boasting in the Lord, and not self. (vs 17-18) Verse 17 is likely quoting Jeremiah 9:23-24. Here the Lord says, *“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.”* This verse is saying don’t brag about your brains, body, or your bounty. Only boast in God’s character – his love, justice, and righteousness. That is worth bragging about.

Closing:

So, what battles are you currently fighting? Are they battles that affect the gospel message proclaimed?

Some battles are worth the fight: Fighting for your kids to stand firm in faith in this crazy world, fighting for God's Word to be claimed and proclaimed in your church... Other battles are not worth the fight: Fighting over methods of baptism or denominations, Fighting for attention or recognition... Are you fighting the right battle?

Are you fighting the right battle with the right weapons? Are you using those weapons of the flesh (lies, manipulation, deceit) or spiritual weapons (truth from God's Word, prayer, God's spirit, etc.)?

And are you fighting the right battle with the right weapons for the right reason? Not for your own pride and boasting, but for the Gospel to be spread and God to be glorified.

Last week my daughter's school did a production of the Wizard of Oz. Remember how the Scarecrow wants the Wizard to give him a brain, the Tin Man a heart, the Lion wants courage, and Dorothy wants to get back home to Kansas? In the end, the Wizard says he can't give them those things because they already have them. They have had them all along.

If we are in Christ, we too have everything we need to fight well. You and I have every resource we could ever need to fight our enemy, destroy strongholds, and defend the gospel. Be encouraged. We are armed and dangerous! That is something worth boasting about!