



2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 27th March 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

We have just three studies left, including tonight, looking at Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. And as I'm sure you'll recall from our previous studies, that means we're now in the final section of this letter, having summarised it like this...

Overview of 2 Corinthians

- Chapters 1 to 7 - Christian living
- Chapters 8 to 9 - Christian giving
- Chapters 10 to 13 - Christian guarding

Tonight we'll look at all of chapter 10, next week we'll study chapter 11, and then wrap up this series looking at chapters 12 & 13 two week's from now.

Overview of chapter ten

As we look at chapter 10, we can also break it down into three parts:

- Spiritual matters (v1-6)
- Not about physical appearance (v7-11)
- About what God thinks (v12-18)

Chapter ten

Now as we begin chapter 10, I want to briefly mention something that is far less important than what this letter actually says, and that is some scholars and Bible teachers believe this book was originally two letters - in part because chapters 10-13 represent quite the change of topic.

However not all do think that, and they point out that Paul was speaking to the majority of believers in Corinth in the first 9 chapters, and in these last 4, he is addressing the minority that were questioning his authority, hence Paul concludes (rather than begins) with these chapters.

But regardless, the important thing is not one's opinion on whether this was originally 1 or 2 letters from Paul, but the fact that what we read here is the Word of God written through Paul, and we need to be open to hearing what it says.

So, let's take a look at it. We read in verse 1...

2 Corinthians 10:1

Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.

Paul is saying that the way he speaks to them is with intent; that he is following Jesus' example in meekness. And it's good for us to remember that meekness is not weakness. For while Jesus didn't retaliate when falsely accused, He also turned over the tables in the temple. While He is King of all, He was humble enough to wash the disciples feet. In short, meekness is power or strength under control - where possible, it is gentle. Where necessary, it is bold, direct, and decisive.

And Paul continues...

2 Corinthians 10:2

But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

That is, Paul's desire is to be gentle. That he doesn't want to have to deal firmly with any difficulty when he next visits, though if necessary, he will. And this is much like that which he wrote going from chapter 1 into 2...

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:2

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

What do we take from this? Well, I think we should realise that those God has raised up to teach, train and equip us, are also the ones God has raised to correct, rebuke and exhort us too. And while those things not as enjoyable for us as the teaching, training and equipping - they are not only necessary, but they are hard for those who have to do those things too. Like Paul felt, there should be a sadness for them in having to do it. But as there must be a willingness on their part, there should also be a teachable attitude on our part, that we may not add to their difficulties.

Next we read...

2 Corinthians 10:3

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

So Paul, responding to those who said he was walking according to the flesh, says "while we're human, we're not going about things with human methods". This is nothing new. Back in 1 Corinthians, he wrote:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And now, talking about spiritual battles, he writes:

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Earlier this week I read something that made me chuckle, but that also made a great point - and that was "I can do all things through a verse taken out of context". Of course, that's playing on Philippians 4:13 which says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

But just like that verse, many crazy ideas are based on a twisting of *these* verses we just read in 2 Corinthians - and others like them. What crazy ideas? Well, ideas about spiritual warfare - that result in people marching in prayer walks, or trying to cast satan out of inanimate objects, or coming against spirits responsible for certain towns.

But the reality is simple, and of course, borne out by the rest of scripture. So let us answer two questions here; first, what are our weapons? And second, what are those weapons used for?

We read this in Ephesians chapter 6:

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

So, the *armour* of God is; truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the Bible, and prayer. As for our weapons, those things we use in our spiritual warfare... it comes down to three;

Prayer to our God, made possible by our Saviour.

The Word of God in our hearts, that we might not sin against Him.

And the Holy Spirit living in us - for as we read in 1 Peter, greater is He that is that is in us than he that is in the world.

This makes perfect sense when we consider the use of these weapons - when we consider what our warfare is. I really don't think I can put it better than Finnis Dake, who notes...

Four great conquests of spiritual weapons:

1. Destruction of strong holds--We destroy reasonings of pagan philosophers and Jewish rabbis and their dogmas that nullify the Word of God and the facts of the Gospel. These fortifications we pull down and demolish. We put to flight the demon powers and alien armies, raising the banner of the cross high on the field of battle (2Cor. 10:4).
2. Casting down imaginations--We demolish all theories, reasonings, and any high system of ethics, religion, mythology, metaphysics, sublime doctrines or philosophy set forth to defy the knowledge of God (2Cor. 10:5). All the boasted gods, lords, sacrificial and mediatorial systems fell before the Gospel. The high-sounding phrases of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and even Judaism fell before the preaching of the crucified and risen Christ. Heathenism shrank before the Gospel and called on secular powers to defend it.
3. Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ--We take every thought prisoner and lead it into captivity to obey Christ (2Cor. 10:5). Lascivious, vain and evil thoughts of all kinds are brought down and made obedient to His laws. That includes any thinking which is contrary to virtue, purity and righteousness. See Mt. 15:19; Mk. 7:21-22 1Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:19; Php. 4:8; Gen. 6:5; Prov. 15:26; Isa. 55:7; 59:7; Jer. 4:14.

4. Having in readiness to avenge all disobedience--We stand at all times ready, so to speak, to court-martial any opposing the Gospel of Christ, after separating ourselves from them (2Cor. 10:6). The whole picture here is that of a strong fortified city where the enemy makes his last stand; entrenching himself about the walls; raising towers and preparing engines of defense and offense upon the walls to insure victory. The fortifications, walls, towers, and castles are taken by the Gospel and the whole opposition is destroyed and taken captive.

To summarise that, it comes down to our thought life, the thought life of others, and the obedience we each have to Christ (or lack thereof).

Spiritual warfare is not, I repeat, not, hocus pocus, or the kind of exorcism you see in movies.

Let me give you real life example. If you've ever owned more than one cable, you'll know that they have a habit of getting tangled - and it's frustrating, right!? Well, now scale that up to having 50 cables in a bag, or in a box, and that's the sort of thing musicians have to deal with - too often when in a hurry before they are due to play. It's not fun!

My brother once commented on the two reactions he'd seen. At some Christian events, chaos started unfolding as a cable is needed urgently, and all the cables seem to be tangled. Conclusion? Satan must be in it. He's been in the cable box overnight and tangled them up, because he really doesn't want the service or Christian concert to go ahead. So of course the best approach is to cast satan out of the situation. Really?!

Now, in the secular covers band he used to play in, the same scenario would arise - chaos unfolds as that one cable is needed in a hurry. And the cables are tangled mess. Conclusion? We really need to sort out this box of cables - because we don't need most of them anyway!

Same situation, two reactions. The point I'm trying to make here, is that satan isn't in the cable box. He doesn't even care if the cables are tangled. But what he does care about it, is your reaction to it. Because if he can get you in a panic, or better still, get you blaming other people for the situation, then he's onto something.

He'll do the same in your marriage. He won't cause the milk to go sour. But he'll do all he can to get you to blame your spouse for not checking it earlier, or buying any more.

He'll do it when your computer runs slow. He didn't cause it to run slow - it does that because it's a computer and it's old, or it needs an update, or because it had an update! But he'll do all he can to skew your attitude. To get you shouting at it.

Satan won't put roadworks on your route to church - but if he can get the whole family arguing as to why they left 1 minute too late, and are now stuck at a red light, then he's happy.

And of course, there are bigger and tougher situations than sour milk, slow computers or unexpected roadworks. Does satan cause those things? Well, if you've read the book of Job you'll know that satan does cause problems. But his intent there was to get Job to curse God. And there's no need for him to go to all the effort if he can use an everyday situation to draw you away from God, and to dishonour Him in the way you talk, think, or act.

Spiritual attacks are real things – but typically these play out in attitudes, in words, in actions that are not God-honouring. So many times I've seen good and great things discussed, planned, or about to happen in one area or another in the life of this church (often things that are not even publicly shared at that point) – only to see a completely separate situation boil over into an argument, or a criticism, or the like. Satan does not like spiritual growth, he does not like the gospel being shared, and he does not like the Bible being taught. So he'll do anything he can to hamper efforts in that. And if he can't influence those walking closely with the Lord, he'll use those walking at a distance from Him. We all desperately need to be ready for battle, not only for ourselves, but for the good of others in our church family.

Let's read these verses again...

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

So, start your day with reading your Bible, and with prayer. And when these stray thoughts come into your head, take those thoughts captive – don't let them run around, don't entertain them. And go straight to God for help. Ask that He would help you be obedient to Christ in that situation, remembering what we read in Hebrews chapter 4...

Hebrews 4:14-16

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

That's the spiritual warfare we face. Daily. And we need to be rooted in the Word, and often in prayer, for we read in 1 Peter...

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

How do we resist? By prayer, by reading the Word, by God working through His Holy Spirit in us.

Not through speaking harsh words against satan. Note the warning we read in Jude:

Jude 1:8-9

Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

When we find ourselves in the midst of spiritual warfare, we are to go to God.

Now, in verse 7 we read...

2 Corinthians 10:7

Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.

Many have suggested that Paul had a squeaky voice. Whether it be that, or some other characteristic, some of the church in Corinth, not being able to find fault with what he said, tried to find fault with who he was - how he sounded, or how he looked. And he's in good company here of course, for a similar thing happened to Jesus - unable to fault Him, they questioned His parentage, or derided him because His home-town was Nazareth.

But Paul says as Christian's we're all on the same level playing field - for we were all sinners in need of Saviour. And we have the same Saviour. The only Saviour there is - that is, Jesus.

And what matters now, are not our physical characteristics, but our relationship with Jesus. And what He thinks about us. Let's look at what he wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter four...

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Back here in 2 Corinthians, Paul continues to address those who questioned his authority...

2 Corinthians 10:8-10

For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed— lest I seem to terrify you by letters. "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

So Paul says, "look, our authority is from God, for God's purpose. Not for your harm, but for your good. And I'm not going to be ashamed of what God has called me to do."

I can picture a similarity here, perhaps, to an out-of-line teenager who gets a text message from one of their parents rebuking them for something - and they say to their friends "Oh, they're going off on one again - but they'll calm down by the time I get home. They'll not do what they say anyway".

But Paul responds, warning that he will use his God-given authority exactly as needed when in person too, and writes...

2 Corinthians 10:11

Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.

In other words, we'll do exactly as we've said.

He continues...

2 Corinthians 10:12

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

So while Paul would make clear the godly authority he had, he refused to join in with those that would brag about themselves. Whose egos needed to be fed by appearing better than the next man.

And he says, those that continually have to re-inflate their egos through comparison with others, are not wise. Why? Because it's easy to look down on others. To be full of pride. To think we're better than them. But we should take note. For while we may follow many good examples, and hopefully *are* good examples, we are to compare ourselves to Christ. For God's desire is to hear *His* heart beating in us.

Verse 13...

2 Corinthians 10:13-14

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;

In other words, he's not speaking out of turn here. He's keeping in his lane on the race track. He's doing what God had called him to do - not trying to expand his ministry beyond what God called him to. For it's not like Paul just randomly wrote to a church he didn't know. No - this was a church where he had laboured, where he had taught the Word. A church that he had demonstrated much love to.

2 Corinthians 10:15-16

not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labours, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

Again, Paul's not trying to take credit for how the Lord has used others, but is simply being faithful to that which God had called him to - which included teaching the Corinthian church, with the hope that as they grew in the Lord, that would in turn enable ministry in the regions beyond them.

And continuing, Paul says, rather than boasting about how great we are, let us boast about how great God is. Quoting Jeremiah 9:24 he writes:

2 Corinthians 10:17

But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Why? Well because nothing we do can compare to what Christ has done. As such, that's the only thing worth boasting about, thus leaving the only reasonable attitude for us to be one of humility. And I like how simply Charles Spurgeon summarised that:

Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self.

Charles Spurgeon

With that attitude, God can take us, and use us for His glory. Yes, we may be aware of all the good things God has done in us, maybe we'll be aware of some of the things he's done through us. But a humble heart isn't worried about what other people think. It's worried about what God knows! And it knows that a man's opinion, including their own, is worth nothing compared to what God says about someone.

And in our final verse this evening we read...

2 Corinthians 10:18

For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Who does the Lord commend? Well, put simply - look at scripture! Look at what the Bible says. We read in 1 Timothy...

1 Timothy 3:1-13

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Yes, these are the requirements for elders and deacons - but not merely for them. Rather, the way in which they live should be an example that every believer should follow.

Summary

Let's briefly look back at what we've covered this evening...

- Spiritual matters (v1-6)
- Not about physical appearance (v7-11)
- About what God thinks

Application questions

How do we apply this to our lives? Here's 3 application questions to help us think that through in the coming days...

- Are we battle ready? Are we praying, reading, and filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Are we too quick to judge people by appearance, than by what they say?
- Are we more interested in man's praise, than God's (remember - we looked just this morning in John 12:43 at how the many foolishly did just that because they were fearful of the Pharisees)

Let's pray.