

2 Corinthians 10 Commentary-Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS

NEXT

Sermon Index to 2 Corinthians 10

- [2 Corinthians 10:1-3 Before You Do Anything...](#)
- [2 Corinthians 10:4-6 Choose Your Weapons](#)
- [2 Corinthians 10:7-8 The Weakness of Fleshly Weapons](#)
- [2 Corinthians 10:9-18 Who Is and Who Isn't](#)

2 Corinthians 10:1-3 Before You Do Anything...

Turn with me if you will, 2 Corinthians 10. We're going to begin a brand new topic here as Paul opens up with the last four chapters and I'm going to call it "Poise in the Face of Persecution." Today's message, and this is part 1, will be "Before You Do Anything...." Before you do anything there are some things we need to understand, and that's what we'll look at today in chapter 10:1-3.

Well, as I said, this is the last section of 2 Corinthians. It's been a great journey but it's not anyway over. We've been in it a year but we've got four more chapters to go. But it's completely different than anything you've seen so far. I want to take you back and briefly bring you through what we have studied together. Perhaps you've missed a lot of it; perhaps you haven't seen the flow of 2 Corinthians. If I had it to teach all over again I'd do something different: I would start in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6.

It is amazing what five days in a deer stand can do for you. I don't go for shooting deer; I go for the time alone. You see, in the south you hunt by yourself. Out here you hunt with someone because it's so vast, etc. But you don't do that in the south; you see them in the morning and you see them at night. And all day long you're just by yourself. Just you and the Lord and the beautiful creation He's put around you. While I was there He began to minister to me the theme of this book. In my eyes and the way I see it and in my study, I believe the theme is there in chapter 3:5-6, that we are servants of a new covenant and it's all about living life in this new covenant: letting Jesus be Jesus in us.

The apostle Paul said because we're in this new covenant we don't find our adequacy in ourselves. You see, in the old covenant it was up to us. In the new covenant it's up to Him. The new covenant is not about me holding on to Him, it's about Him holding on to me. It's incredibly different and this is what we have to see: that we find all of our strength, all of our sufficiency, all of our adequacy in Christ alone.

Listen to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves." That's a strong statement for an old religionist that obeyed all the Pharisaical laws, 613 of them that they had. That's quite a contrast to Paul's former life. He says nothing comes through us. Our adequacy is not in ourselves, "but our adequacy is from God," out of God, He's the source of it, "who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills," anything that we do under the letter is dead. It produces death, "but the Spirit gives life."

Now with that understanding then, let's look at the whole book that we've studied so far. In chapter 1, what do we find out about Him being our adequacy? He is our comfort. When we deal with the curve balls that life throws at us, and sometimes that's in relationships, we run to Christ to find the comfort that only He can give. There's no place, there is no person that can comfort us like He can in the difficult time. Paul had been deeply hurt by the church of Corinth because mainly they had listened to the false teachers and had sort of swung their way.

And Paul had been deeply wounded by this, but instead of blasting that particular group he ran to God to find the comfort that he needed to find. In 1:3-4 it says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

We also saw in chapter 1 that who He is in our life, the adequacy He is in our life, all the way through 2:17, He's the One who cleanses our conscience. He keeps our conscience clear when we're falsely accused. The thing that keeps our heads above water is that our conscience does not condemn us if we live daily cleansed by Him. It is then and only then in our walk that our walk matches our talk. We know He knows and that's the bottom line. We don't have to tell anybody else. We know that He knows who we are and Whose we are. We don't have to panic or defend ourselves when people say all kinds of false things about us. The apostle Paul was

falsely accused, but he said in 2 Corinthians 1:12, "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you."

In chapter 4 we learned that Christ is our consistency as we let Him live His life in us, He keeps us from going back and doing things our way, or as Paul would say, "losing heart." Remember, that's what that word means: to go back to doing things the old way, the way you used to do it before you got saved. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:1, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart." In chapter 5 we learned that He is our confidence when it comes to facing death whether it be from persecution or just natural death. We don't fear it anymore, because He conquered it. It's just from here to there. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Based on that truth that we don't fear death or what men can do to us as ministers of reconciliation, we can be His ambassadors wherever we go. Conduits through whom He begins to make an appeal through our lives. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

In chapter 6 He's our co-worker as we have the privilege of working together with God. That yoke that we've talked about, working together with God and as a result we do not receive the grace of God in vain. He says in 6:1, "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." You see, we get so excited that Jesus has come to live in us that we forget why He came to live in us, which is to live His life through us. The affects our relationships, it's incredible, to the point that when we realize we're wrong we're willing to repent. This is what the church had done and turned back towards Paul. It was a godly sorrow that he produced in their life.

Second Corinthians 7:9-10, "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

And then in chapters 8-9 that we just came out of, He is our creditor as we learn to distribute His money the way He wants it distributed. God is able, especially in our giving. It says in 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."

Well, that brings us up to chapter 10 and we're going to discover that He is our character; He produces His character in us in the face of persecution. When we have to stand there in the midst of it, be falsely accused and whatever else comes, He produces the character that is necessary in our life. He's our adequacy; He will enable us to respond properly when we or even our friends are mistreated. And in our text today Paul particularly singles that out. It's not just them, it's their friends, and actually it's Paul himself. Now that they've been turned back to Paul they want to see Paul vindicated and he has some things to say to them first.

It's amazing how quickly you and I, our flesh, will cause us to take up an offense for a brother when we want to see him vindicated. It's amazing how we'll do that. We take matters into our own hands and we try to make things right as if we know what we're doing. Well, this is the thought in the beginning verses of 2 Corinthians 10. Now chapter 10, like I said, is completely changing the subject. He's been on giving and other things but he heads in a totally different direction.

In chapters 1-9 he uses "we" and "us" quite often, but now this is just Paul. Paul has a personal word for the church of Corinth that they need to hear from him and it's all about how to handle the difficulties of life. Chapters 10-13 talk about how he defends himself in front of his critics and the church of Corinth needs to hear him say this.

He starts off and says, "Now I Paul myself." That's pretty clear, isn't it? Paul says, "I've got something I have to say to you." If he mentions "us" or "we" from this point on it's really incidental. In these last four chapters of 2 Corinthians he like I said, is going to defend himself and he's going to help us understand how do you stand in the face of persecution? Is there a time to defend yourself? Is there a time not to, and we're going to discover all of that. The believers in Corinth have repented and they love Paul and they really want to see Paul vindicated and Paul is going to warn them about some things that they need to understand before they do anything.

He doesn't want them to take matters into their own hands. Now that they understand that Paul was telling them the truth all the time, now they see the false lies that these false teachers had said about Paul, Paul wants them to make sure that they understand. "Don't you take this matter in your own hands. Don't you take up an offense for me. Don't you do that. There are some things you need to understand before you do anything." So before you do anything in letting Jesus be Jesus in us, in the face of persecution whether it be us or our friend, we need to understand three things.

Before you do anything you need to understand the character that is required out of your life

First of all, before we do anything, before you ever do anything, when you hear a brother of yours has been mistreated, before you do anything you need to understand the character that is required out of your life. Verse 1 of chapter 10, "Now I Paul myself urge you," and look what he does here, "by the meekness and the gentleness of Christ." The word "urge" is the word in the Greek *parakaleo*, and it's in the present indicative active, "I'm consistently coming alongside you, I am begging you, I am urging you." This is what was used in Romans 12:1 when he said, "I beseech you therefore brother." It's the same idea. I'm urging you.

The character in which he comes to them in verse 1 is in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. Now, we all need to understand those two words because that's a character that only Christ can produce in us. We find our adequacy in Him. This has got to be understood before you do anything when in the face of persecution. This character can be misunderstood as we'll see in a moment, and they had misunderstood it in Paul. The critics of Paul had misunderstood these two words.

You see, there were many of his critics that accused Paul of being timid and afraid of confronting the Corinthians face to face. The very fact that he had sent a very bold letter, that third letter we don't have, played right into their hands. He had promised to come but he didn't; we saw this back in chapter 2. Paul alludes to this in a tongue in cheek way in the last part of the verse. He says, "I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!" This is evidently what they were saying. "Yes, he's tough when he's away. He writes a letter that's bold, but he's a chicken. He's a coward. He's afraid to come and face us face to face, to confront us."

So Paul, in using the words "meekness and gentleness of Christ" points us all to the character of Christ that must be present in our lives when we deal with people that oppose us; when we deal with people that are critical of us. And I want you to know Christ in us who is meek and gentle is definitely not weak. It has nothing to do with weakness. These words "meekness and gentleness" is never to be misunderstood as weakness. The word "meekness" is the word in the Greek *prautes*. Though "meekness" sounds like "weakness," really it's not. It's the strength of a person's character who loves others, now listen carefully, more than he loves himself.

Meekness is a disposition that so trusts God that it actually gives one the ability when falsely accused to stand calm and to stand quiet in the face of those who are wrongly accusing him. It's an incredible characteristic. It's the character of our Lord Jesus who lives in us. Listen to the words in Matthew 27:12, "And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, 'Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?' And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed." I would have been too.

See, the governor would not have done it that way. This is the characteristic of Christ. Even when we're falsely accused, we can stand there. You know why? Because we know that God will defend us. And if you've ever studied the epistles of Peter, he talks about that and he says, "Jesus continued to subject Himself to the One who judges righteously." He knew that the Father would protect Him. He knew the Father would vindicate Him. And this is the character of Christ.

But at the same time meekness, when it refers to me or you, when it's ourselves and we're being falsely accused, says nothing, does not defend itself. But meekness, when it's for the sake of others who are being deceived, will confront evil with a vengeance. We see this demonstrated by Jesus when He took a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple. John 2:15, "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise."

You see, what was happening was they were presenting the temple to be one thing when it was to be another and it took it with vengeance to protect the people's lives, to understand what it truly was. Aristotle said that the word "meekness" is a virtue that stands between two extremes. A meek person is not too quick to be angry—you can't really anger him quickly—but at the same time he's not passive either. He knows when and he knows when not to exercise his anger. Now that would be enough. Paul said, "I come to you in the meekness of Christ. I've got something I'm trying to tell you. Don't misunderstand this characteristic in me as weakness.'

But if that's not clear enough he adds another word, the word "gentleness" to complete the picture. The word is *epieikeia*. It's only used two times in the New Testament. There may be other words translated gentleness, but this particular Greek word is only used two times. It completes the picture that Paul is drawing for us all. The word *epieikes*, which is again the character of Christ, builds on that word "meekness." It helps us better understand it. It describes the humble and gracious way a person conducts himself among others, even those who hate him and speak falsely about him. It is seen by the world to be a weak characteristic. It's seen by the world to be somebody who is timid, cowardly, because it doesn't draw attention to itself.

And it's saturated with kindness. The world doesn't understand this characteristic. When the world sees this mild gentle way of life, it says in its ignorance, "Yeah, he has a lot of bark but he hasn't got any bite." But what they don't understand: gentleness is patient restraint. This marvelous characteristic of Christ living in us causes us to patiently restrain our boldness to confront. But when we have to confront it causes us never to go further than is necessary.

This characteristic of Christ causes us to know what is appropriate and what is fitting. Paul, by putting these two words together is saying to the Corinthians, “Don’t you dare mistake my humble, gentle way when I’m among you even in the presence of my critics, don’t you mistake that to be weakness or passivity in any way. I know when and I know how much to be bold towards those who sin and deceive others. I know the timing because God lives in me, but don’t you mistake my character for being weak when I’m among you.”

We must find our adequacy in Christ before we ever deal with those who falsely accuse us or accuse others who are our friends or brothers or sisters in Christ. It’s an absolute requirement. Listen to the verse again, “Now I Paul myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!” You know what he’s really saying is before you go into any kind of situation that people are misrepresenting you or misrepresenting somebody that you care about, make sure you have the garment of Christ on.

He really says this to the Ephesian church, and in Ephesians 4:22 he says you put on the new man, take that old man off, put on the new man. He speaks of a garment and we know from Ephesians 3 you can only be dressed from the inside out. You can’t put it on from the outside in. It only comes to a yielded heart; it only comes to a person who has surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life. You’ll never see that garment, that character, produced in a person that is not willing to obey and surrender to God and to His absolute will. But when you put that garment on as the Holy Spirit dresses you in the character of Christ you begin to discover that His adequacy in you is what you’ve been looking for all the time. His meekness and His gentleness and all of a sudden the way you handle difficulties in life changes. It’s not like you used to do it. It’s the way He wants to do it in your life.

Let me ask you a question. What garment do you have on? Are you dressed today in the sufficiency, the adequacy, of Christ? Is your character around people gentle and humble and meek and mild? Do you have that gracious way with people, even your enemies? That’s the character of Jesus, and that must be understood before ever you enter into a situation that involves conflict with people discrediting you or discrediting somebody that you know.

Before you ever think about dealing with those who falsely accuse you or dealing with those who falsely accuse a brother that you love, you make sure you understand the character that is required. Make sure you’re wearing the right garment because if it’s not in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ, you’re going to do more damage that you’ll ever realize you could ever do.

Before you do anything you need to understand the conduct that is responsible

Secondly, the conduct that is responsible. You see the character that is required; here is the conduct that is responsible. What is responsible conduct when you’re wearing that kind of garment? He says in verse 2, “I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”

The word for “ask” there is the word *deomai*, which means “I beseech you.” It even takes the word *parakaleo*, I urge you. It takes it even further. “I’m trying to tell you something that is extremely important. This is personal. This is from me to you. You love me now, you’ve repented, and I love you, but you need to hear this from me. I know how you feel about me. I know you want to see me vindicated because now you’re hearts have been changed, but I’ve got to say this to you. It’s important that you understand this.”

When I was growing up, when my Mama wanted to say something like that she’d say, “Wayne Allen.” I can always tell when she had something important to say to me. Well, in the Greek it would be the same thing right here. “Listen to me.” Make sure the character is there that is required, but make sure your conduct is responsible.

Paul understands the tendency of their flesh just like his and anybody else’s to take matters into its own hands. The Corinthians had repented, their hearts had turned back toward Paul and they really wanted to see him vindicated in the face of those who said he was a coward. And Paul says, “Don’t you push me. Don’t you force this issue. When I’m with you I need not to be bold. Don’t you try to make me prove that I can be bold so that you might win your case over my critics.”

Folks, listen to what he’s saying here. We are never ever to force an issue when we know that somebody that we love is being falsely accused because Christ lived in Paul and because Paul walked by faith in Him, Paul knew when and he knew how much to deal with these people. But he said, “But don’t you try to make it happen.” He would confront those who were so deceptive in the church of Corinth. He even says in verse 6, “I’m going to punish all disobedience. I’m waiting for your obedience to get right first.”

But Paul knew that those who caused him pain were in the minority. He understood that now. Now, before it wasn’t that way. When he wrote that third letter, they all had sided with the false teachers. They had repented now; the whole church has turned back towards him. He didn’t want to scold the whole church for what only a few were doing. When the time was fitting, when the time was right, he would have to address the deceptive critics who were influencing and deceiving the church of Corinth, but the believers who wanted to see Paul vindicated would have to trust him to know when the time was right.

Conduct that is responsible when you know that somebody that you love has been wrongly accused is the conduct—now listen

carefully—that will never, ever take matters into your own hands. That's not the way the world operates; that's the way God operates. The Corinthian believers needed to learn how Christians deal with such matters. And as we'll see in the next few verses, it's totally not the same way. It's so contrary and contrasting to the way the world deals with it, it just stands as black and white.

Paul says very clearly, there are those “who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.” You see, he understands that this fleshly criticism of him is coming from people who don't even understand to begin with. All they know is the way of the flesh; they're lost to begin with. And he says, “Men, you're not going to get anywhere going their route.”

So the character that is required is the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. And the conduct that is responsible is conduct that never takes matters into one's own hands. I tell you what, I say this humbly, but I've been there and done that. I don't know if you have or not, but I have.

You see, taking up an offense for a brother is what he's dealing with right here. The church says, “Oh man, Paul's been wrongly accused. We're going to help him out.” And Paul says, “Don't you dare force me to prove that I can be bold. I walk in the character of Jesus. I know when to be bold and when not to be bold. And the character of Jesus is not somebody who comes in and just eats everybody's lunch. You don't force this issue.” Conduct that is responsible never takes a matter into your own hands. Once you have the character that is required, God will show you how this is to be dealt with. You've got to let Him lead you through it. But don't take up an offense for a brother. It can bring so much pain in your life.

Before you do anything you need to understand the confidence that is always reliable

Thirdly, the confidence that is always reliable. My next message is going to be “Choose Your Weapon.” What are you going to put your confidence in? What you think about the situation or what God thinks about the situation which you don't even know yet? Until you've been in His presence. Verse 3, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.”

There's such a difference in the character of one who confronts in the flesh. Have you ever been confronted in the flesh by anybody? You won't ever forget it, will you? To prove a point, somebody tries to do that. It's the difference between that person and the one who has discernment and stands in the character of Christ to only do what is fitting and in the way which is fitting. Now Paul explains the difference of daily living in a body of flesh but now allowing its desire to control what he does.

The first word, “flesh,” in the phrase, “For though we walk in the flesh,” speaks of the human frail body. We learned in chapter 4 that apart from Christ there is nothing more than an empty clay pot. And until it's filled with the presence of God it's worth nothing, can do nothing, and if it tries to do it, it fails. We walk in that body every day.

I was teaching in Galatians, and I've taught it here too, there's a bummer in that verse Galatians 2:20, “the life which I now live in the flesh.” It's speaking of the same thing right here: the body we live in, this human, fleshly body that we live in. The bummer is, and the downer is, you have the same body after you get saved as you had before you got saved. You say what's the matter with that? Well, if you're ugly before you get saved, you're ugly after you get saved. I can't help you. If you're tall, you're tall; if you're short, you're short. If you're fat you can lose weight, but you've got the same body, both ways you've got the same body.

We walk in a body that's frail. We live in a body every day that is dying every breath that we take. We're born in order to die so that our bodies can be changed and glorified and we can live with Jesus forever. This body has a mindset to it and that's what he brings up in the second time that he uses the word “flesh” in that verse. The word “flesh” is used in the phrase, “For though we walk in physical, human, frail bodies, we do not war according to the flesh.”

Now this word for “flesh” refers more to the mindset of this body, the way it's been programmed to do things. If you came out of a successful business world and you came into the church, man, you've got a learning curve that's bigger than Dallas. You've got to start all over again, because the way things are done in the church are not the way things are done in the world. It's a totally different way. We don't live according to the flesh. We don't “war” Paul says, according to the flesh.

This refers to the “sinful mindset” that we have to deal with moment by moment. How many of you dealt with it this past week besides me? Anybody else deal with it? We know what it is. Everybody knows: it's the old “I, me, mine.” It does things its own way. It doesn't need God, it doesn't need the Word. It can do it, it can do it, it can do it, it can. That's that old mindset of the flesh.

The word “self” is a good synonym for the word “flesh.” When we're facing the conflicts of life there will always be the tendency to yield to the deceptive ways of the flesh, to treat conflicting situations, to treat persecution, to treat a friend that's been treated wrongly, to do it the way the flesh would do it, the way the world would do it. But then there's that pull on the other side to do it the way God wants it done.

There are two absolutes in life: one is there is a God, and two is none of us are Him. It's amazing how we think we know more than God. There's no vacancy in the Trinity, I hate to tell you, your application is going to be turned down. God doesn't need any help from men. It's incredible how we draw on the experiences of the world and drag it right into our Christianity. And he says that's not

the way we deal with things.

Flesh will always cause you heartache and unnecessary pain. Paul calls the conflict we all have with the flesh a “war.” The word for “war” is a powerful reminder of what we face every day. The word “war” is *strateuomai* in the Greek, and refers to one who serves in the army and has to strategize against the enemy. Paul knows that this conflict is real and he’s trying to get the Corinthians to realize that their flesh is no better than the flesh of the people they’re trying to see Paul vindicated in front of. It’s the same thing. We never stoop to the level of the flesh that people use when they criticize us when they persecute us. You don’t stoop to their level to handle it is what he’s trying to say.

Paul puts his whole confidence in the Spirit of God. He’s chosen his weapon to be spiritual weapons to overcome his flesh and in no way does he want the Corinthians to do anything else or to do otherwise. It’s that confidence in Christ who lives in us that is always reliable. “For though we walk in the flesh,” Paul says, that’s every day, “we do not war according to the flesh.”

We’ll look at verse 4-6 the next time we come as we talk about “Choose Your Weapon.” I want you to read with me what it’s about to say. I want you to see the thought as Paul brings it all the way down. He says, “for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,” boy, I can’t wait to get into that, how the weapons of warfare of the flesh, anger, all the stuff that they use, “but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”

There will be a time, Paul says, that we’ll deal with those who are disobedient. “They think I’m mild, they think I’m weak, they think I’m timid, they think I’m a coward because I can write tough letters when I’m away. I only wrote that tough letter,” chapter 2 says, “because I wanted to spare you from having to come to you.” But he said they are going to be surprised “because when I come to you I’m going to come in meekness and I’m going to come in gentleness. But there will be time I will deal with those who are deceiving your minds and I will do it in such a way they’ll never doubt again that I might not be bold. I’m going to do it in the armored garment of Christ.”

So before you do anything, before you do anything—and right now the first part of the context is they wanted to see Paul vindicated—Paul said before you do anything, make sure you understand the character that is required. You better have on the garment of Christ. You better be in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. And by the way, you try to fake that, you can’t do it. You cannot do it. In the face of somebody who’s lying about you, you can’t do it. You cannot do it.

Secondly, conduct that is responsible is conduct that never takes a matter into its own hands. It knows that there is a time; it knows that there is a palace. It doesn’t force the issue. And thirdly, the confidence that is reliable, the weapons you can depend on are divinely powerful. He’s already mentioned two of them: gentleness and meekness. That’s the character of Christ. And you begin to see the weapons that a Christian has that a lost person does not have.

It’s interesting to me how when you go to snow ski they teach you how to stop before they teach you how to start. That’s not a bad deal. I never listened; it’s taken me years to understand the frailty of my flesh. I never read directions; I don’t think many men do. That’s why I’m always spending time going back and redoing something, because I didn’t read the directions to start with. When I first started learning how to ski I was interested in getting on the slopes. Hurry and get me out of this class. I didn’t pay much attention to it. I got that little V and I didn’t know how to stop. I just faked it.

And so I didn’t get to ski but once a year. I was with a friend of mine and old George had never been on skis in his life and he said, “Wayne, let’s go skiing. I want to learn how to ski.” I said, “I can teach you.” Boy, that’s the blind teaching the blind. And I went up to the lift operator and I said, “Which one is the easiest lift?” And what I meant was, which one is the beginner lift, but I didn’t say that. These were both intermediate lifts. I didn’t know that. And she said, “That one right there.” I said, “Okay, good.”

Just getting George to the lift was one thing; he’d never been on skis before. Finally got him in the chair and we’re going up and I kept expecting it to stop immediately because of the little bunny slope, they’re not very high. We just kept going, steeper and steeper. Further and further and it didn’t take me long, I’m slow but I get there. It finally dawned on me what I had done and the mistake I had made. And George has never been on skis and we’re on an intermediate run.

We get up to the top and I said, “George, when you get off this thing you’re going to fall, but everybody falls. Don’t worry about it: it’s part of it.” Did he fall? He wiped out about 10 skiers. Finally got him back up on his skis and I said “It’s going to be alright. I’m going to teach you.” We got over to where the hill started to go down and I said, “George, put your skis in a V and you’ll stop.” But I noticed I wasn’t stopping. I was moving because I had gotten on that slope. And he said, “Wayne, what am I supposed to do?” And I kept going. And he said, “Come back, Wayne.” I said, “I don’t know how.”

And I had to keep going because I didn’t know how to stop. I didn’t see George for three hours. Dave was on a gondola going over him at one point; didn’t realize it was George at first. Everybody was laughing pointing down and he looked and here’s a guy waist

deep in snow, got his skis on his shoulder and he's trying to walk down the run. He never learned to stop, so he started and boy that can cause you some pain. When I saw him three hours later he said, "Barber, you're going to pay for this." He didn't know that verses, "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord."

There's a word in the Greek that is not used in this context. It's in modern Greek and you don't use modern Greek, but however it's interesting. It means "brakes." And the word is translated "sound judgment" in Scripture. You've got to know when to stop before you ever start. And the apostle Paul says, "Out of your fervor for me, out of your love for me you're about to make the biggest mistake you've ever made. Don't you dare force this issue. Don't you dare step in and take the matter in your own hands and don't you take up an offense for me. I come to you in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. I know when, I know how, and I know how much in Christ. He will handle this situation. Our confidence is in Him. It's not in our flesh and how it handles situations."

You know, I don't know what this says to anybody, but I know last night I couldn't get out the door for people telling me the conflicts they're facing this next week and how this has helped them to put their feet back on the ground, to get over their anger, to get over their irritation with others. But I'm telling you, folks, taking up an offense for a brother is worse than what's happened to your brother: it's worse. It causes more damage in the body of Christ.

You see what happens is we think we understand it. You never fully grasp it. Nobody can tell you because they're going to tell you from a perspective that they have. They don't see the whole picture, but God does. That's why it's important to understand the character that is required, the conduct that is responsible, and the confidence that it is only reliable when you trust God and not your flesh to handle a difficult situation.

Boy I tell you, I don't know how far we're going to get in this thing. It just goes home and reads your mail, doesn't it?

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

Choose Your Weapons

I'm glad you're here today. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10:4-6. Today we're continuing in a little series, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians, and I call it "Poise in the Face of Persecution." This is part 2 today, and we're going to talk about "Choose Your Weapons."

Now let me get you into this. Conflict with people is inevitable as we journey through the Christian life. There's no way you're going to get around it. But the fact that we will have this conflict is not the problem. The problem is, how do we as believers who love Jesus, how do we as believers deal with this conflict when it arises? You see, one of the conflicts we're going to have to deal with is when it doesn't happen to us but it happens to somebody that we like, somebody that we love and they are being mistreated?

Our flesh is so deceptive; one of the first things it tends to do is take up an offense for a brother. That's what we dealt with the last time. This does more damage, understand what I'm saying, this does more damage than just about anything you could do and you can hardly repair the damage that is done. Taking up an offense for a brother is based on several wrong assumptions, and there are two main ones that it's based on. The first assumption is that we know the exact details of what took place and therefore we have all the information that is needed to deal with the situation. That is absolutely false in every situation.

The second wrong assumption is we think we know what God would do in the midst of this circumstance. I said it last week and you've heard it many times, there are two absolutes in life: one is there is a God, but two is we're not Him. And don't make that false assumption and jump into something because you don't have all the information.

Why do I say that? Well, in Corinth, Paul's critics had really come against him and they said that he was a coward, he was afraid to come to Corinth and face them. In jest they would say "he was bold when he wrote the letters, but he's a wimp when he gets in front of us," trying to discredit the man so they could discredit his message. Now this upset the believers of Corinth. Why did it upset them? Because they had repented, remember? This was the reason of the writing of 2 Corinthians. They've repented. It's even said that they yearned to be with Paul. They've turned back toward Paul and when they hear these critics say what they're saying, he's their brother and they want to see him vindicated in front of his critics.

They were just about to take up an offense for Paul. But Paul did not want them to make that tragic mistake so he cautions them in verses 1-3 of 2 Corinthians 10 about three things that they have to make sure are in place before they would ever do anything. First of all, he speaks of the character that is going to be required. If you're going to step into that arena, you better have this kind of character before you do anything. Second Corinthians 10:1, "Now I Paul myself urge you by the meekness and the gentleness of Christ." By the means of, in other words, the words "meekness and gentleness of Christ" denote the character. That's the way Paul confronts them. That's the way he comes to them. It's a character that only Christ can produce in a person's heart.

We can't produce this. God has to produce it in us. Meekness is the strength of one's character who loves others more than he loves himself. That's the bottom line. It's not weakness; it is strength under control even in the face of people who are falsely accusing us and would love to see us taken down. When it concerns us as individual believers, meekness is the grace that gives us the ability to remain quiet and calm when we're being falsely accused because we know that God is the One who vindicates the righteous and He judges righteously.

But meekness is a term; it's a beautiful quality that stands between two extremes. It doesn't rush to get angry. Have you ever known people like that? You're scared to death to say anything. They've got a hair-trigger. I call it a hair-trigger. When you buy a gun and it has a ten pound pull on the trigger and usually you take it back so it can kind of become a hair-trigger, you barely touch it and it shoots. And a lot of people are that way. You have to walk on tiptoes because they're so quick to react. That's not meekness, that's nothing to do with Christianity.

Meekness doesn't rush to get angry; however, it also is not passive. It somehow stands in a beautiful balance between those two extremes. You see, when it affects the Body, when it affects the individual it can be quiet, but when it affects the Body of Christ and deception is causing a problem in the Body, then it will act and sometimes with a vengeance to make the truth known. Jesus took that whip and went into the temple and drove out the moneychangers.

But to balance this, and some people say it justifies what I'm doing and there's a wrong being done and I'm going to fight it. Now careful, careful. There's a fine line between meekness and taking up and offense for a brother. You have to understand that it's a different quality here. And so Paul adds the word, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the word "gentleness." The word gentleness is the word *epieikes*, and it's only used two times in Scripture, the Greek word. Other words are translated "gentleness" but it's not this word. It refers to one's mild and kind and gracious manner even in the face of those who come at him. It's a person who knows how to walk in the Spirit and the qualities of the Spirit are always there. It's a divine sense of timing is with this word "gentleness." They know when to confront, they know how much to confront, and they know how to go about confronting somebody. So it's totally the character of Christ.

Once this character is in place what it will do is it produces a conduct that is responsible. Now conduct that is responsible is conduct that doesn't take matters into your own hands. What have we all done all of our lives? We've taken matters into our own hands and that's caused so many problems.

Verse 2, "I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh." You see, the critics of Paul knew nothing about walking in the Spirit. You have to remember this: if somebody is coming at you they know nothing about walking in the Spirit. They regarded Paul as if he walked according to the flesh just like they did. They would be only too pleased if Paul would get in their face and be bold and take them down. Boy, that's strength, that's what the pagan world thinks is strength. Get in their face, man, make them wilt. That's a man there, that's a man!

Paul said to the Corinthians who desperately wanted to see him vindicated, they wanted to see him come out and get in the face of those who criticized him in a war to be vindicated and Paul says to them, "Don't you dare push me into that situation. Don't you make me have to step forward and be bold when I come among you with your intent of showing me off as to the fact that I could be what they said I couldn't. Don't push me in that kind of situation."

You say, "Why, Paul?" Well, Paul answers it. Because he says even though he lives in a body that is subject to that kind of behavior, just like he was before he got saved, he doesn't war according to that behavior anymore. I don't use those kinds of weapons anymore." That's not the way we deal with conflict and this is something for every one of us to learn.

He says in verse 3, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." Paul knew something that I wish we all understood in the 21st century about being a believer. When you're in the midst of a conflict, the only confidence that is reliable is when you trust God, as you'll see in the message today, only Him, only Him, only Him and never trust the flesh. Because the flesh brings that damage and division and factions to the body like nothing else. We're in a war with our fleshly mindset and that mindset says, "Do things your way. Resolve the conflict your way, and according to the ways of the world."

Evidently we're losing in that war. The pastors this year, they tell me there are more pastors resigning from the ministry because they've been chewed up, spit out by people than ever before. Churches are split everywhere. You could go to cities in the South: 800 and some churches, and 400 of them I think were split off from the others. You see Fellowship Baptist Church on this corner, Greater Fellowship than that Baptist Church, and then you see Boy, You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet Baptist Church. That's what you have because people in conflict choose to solve it their own way. They do it with the weapons of the flesh. They want to be vindicated as being right and that's what Paul is saying is exactly wrong. That is not the way we deal with conflict. That's what he says.

The flesh has its weapons, get in your face, confront with boldness, even lie if you have to, but we don't fall into that trap when we walk surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. There's more to it than that as we'll see in our message today. What I want us to do today is look at our weapons. I want us to look at our enemy as to who he really is and I want us to look at our strategy and I want us to make sure. You see, if you don't understand these three things, then you're going to choose the wrong weapon. That's why I call it "Choose Your Weapons." Weapons of the flesh, is that the way we're going to deal with it? Or weapons of the Spirit?

We need to know our weapons

Here are three things I want you to see. First of all, we need to know our weapons. We need to know our weapons: 2 Corinthians 10:4, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful." First thing you see is that the weapons we need in the battle that we're in to combat the real enemy are weapons that are divinely powerful. They're not these grossly ineffective, weak, and anemic weapons of the flesh.

The word "not," they're not of the flesh, is the word *ou* in Greek. Now there are two words for "not" in Greek language where we only have one. This means the absolute, in no way, shape or form, not. "For the weapons of our warfare are not in any way, shape or form, they're not even similar to the weapons of the flesh, but instead they're divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." The word "powerful" is the word *dunatos*, which means "mighty, capable of accomplishing the task." The literal text includes the word *theos*, which is the word for God, so the King James Version translates it very literally, "mighty through God." The New American Standard, it's okay what it says, it says "divinely"—which would be God—"powerful." That's what it's speaking of. Our weapons are mighty because they're from God. God is the One. If you think about it, when you deal with any conflict in your life, you have to go to God because He's the only One who understands the problem. And He's certainly the only One who has the solution.

Now the weapons, the word "weapons," is the word in the plural which is *hoplon*. It is that which is necessary to accomplish a task. It's a shovel if you're going to dig a hole. It's a pen if you're going to write a letter, but when it's used in a military sense as it is only two other times in the New Testament, it means weapons or armor that are necessary to defeat one in battle. The battle Paul was up against in Corinth was an interesting battle. You see, it wasn't just the people. He was up against the battle of humanistic error. They love humanistic wisdom. Worldly wisdom, false doctrine, all these things were what he was up against. This was what was deceiving the church of Corinth. Paul was up against those who had impressive worldly credentials who were in command of the way people thought and how they behaved. They could control people around them. We can see this by the way he contrasts those who God chooses to uses. You see, God always goes the other way. God doesn't go the way of the world.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-27+ he says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." See, that was what he was up against and God chooses the opposite: "but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong." See, Paul himself was a total contrast to the way the world operates and to what he was up against in Corinth: those polished, successful, persuasive men in Corinth that could bring false doctrine in and seduce the church's mind. Paul was exact opposite of that.

He says in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5+, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." —I didn't come in with all the bells and whistles.—"For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom," like the world uses and uses them to convince everybody, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"—you say, "Paul, why would God do that?" —"that your faith should not rest," ever, ever, ever, "on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Since this word *hoplon* is used two times translated "weapons" in Scripture and means that, we need to look at that. We need to realize that it's not about what these weapons are, and I'll show you, it's Who our weapon is. Don't get hung up in what they are, get overwhelmed by Who He is. The word is used in Romans 13:12 and if you've studied Romans you know this passage and you know what he's talking about, particularly from chapter 8 on.

It says in verse 12, "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness," that old works of the flesh and the way we do things, "and put on the armor of light." Do you know who the armor of light is? That's the Lord Jesus Himself. It's not what our weapons are, but who are weapon is. This is once again showing us that before we ever approach any conflict, whether we initiated it, whether it's against a friend of ours, or somebody else initiated it against us, before we do anything we need to be dressed in the armored garment of Christ. That's what Paul taught in Ephesians. The armor of chapter 6 is the garment of chapter 4. Jesus is the armored garment that God gives to us when He's in control of our lives and we're workers together with Him. Then His armor, His weapons, are weapons of righteousness. But did they accomplish the task?

The word is also used in 2 Corinthians 6:7 and Paul talks about how he lives and how he deals with the situations in his life and he said in verse 7, we've already studied this, "in the word of truth," that's how he lives, "in the power of God; by the weapons of

righteousness for the right hand and the left.” You see Christ in us is the only One who can solve the conflicts that come either from other believers or even from the pagan world. His arsenal is divinely powerful.

Obviously his arsenal does not just include Christ because it’s more than that. It has to include His Word. We walk by faith and Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” The word for “word” there is *rhema*, and it means the subjective, spoken word of God, that which Christ takes and convicts in our hearts. You’re in the midst of a conflict and you run into the presence of God, you get into His Word and God takes His Word that you’ve been memorizing and studying for years and He burns it into your heart and says “You stand on that, it’ll hold you up.” It’s not just knowing God’s Word in your head but having God burn it in your heart as you get in to it to seek Him.

When Israel was just about to go into the greatest conflict they had ever faced, they had to cross that Jordan River first of all, a mile wide, two and a half million people. But that first battle they had was Jericho. Remember when we studied it and God said something to Joshua that we need to take to heart? He said, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that’s written on it for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have success.” And the word “success” in the Hebrew means “then you’ll have the proper discernment at the time when those circumstances and conflicts come at you that you hadn’t expected.”

“Joshua, get into My Word; Joshua, meditate upon My Word. Don’t let anything come out of your mouth that’s not seasoned and saturated with My Word.” When we face hurtful conflicts, folks, we don’t rise up in anger, we don’t get in somebody’s face. Oh, how many times in my life I said, “Oh God, give me five minutes outside the building and I can solve this conflict.” God wasn’t impressed. He made me 6’7”, 265 pounds so I’d have to learn not to use an ounce of it. But God has every time driven me to himself. “Wayne, you come to My Word, son, because you don’t have all the facts and you don’t know what I would do. You come to Me and let Me dress you in My presence; and My character in you is an armor that is absolutely awesome. My weapons are weapons of righteousness.”

The only thing that will disarm our opponent in the midst of a conflict and the hurtful climate that it has created will be His character seen in us and His Word that seasons everything that we say. So we must know our weapons. We better know what we have as a choice. We know the fleshly weapons. Most of us have lived in it all of our life. But we need to know and when you sum all of our weapons up it can be summed up in a person: the Lord Jesus living His life through us. As we renew our minds concerning the situation by the revelation of His Word and we stand in the face of conflict.

So know your weapons. Know your weapons. You’ve got two choices: do it your way, do it God’s way. Remember that old song? “I did it my way.” Buddy, that’s a tragic song when it comes to the Christian life.

We must know our enemy

Secondly, we must know our enemy. We must know our enemy. I wish we could all realize what Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, first part of the verse. He said, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” I want you to put that on your refrigerator every day you get up. Wayne, it’s not my problem. He’s just an irritation. Wayne’s not my problem. People are not your problem. I can hear someone saying, “Well, you sure could have fooled me.” Yes, it involves the person, yes. It’s not just the person, though, that’s causing the conflict. It is what—listen carefully—it is what’s controlling that person.

You see, fleshly weapons won’t touch that which is the real problem. Yes, the symptoms can be there. They said something about you; they ran their mouth when they should have kept their mouth shut. They did something to hurt you; they lied about you. Hey, that’s just symptomatic. That’s not your problem. Your problem is what caused them to do that and only divinely powerful weapons can handle that kind of thing. Fleshly weapons cannot disarm what the real problem is.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, “for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” Now the word “destruction” is the word *kathairesis*, which means “to demolish something, bring it to ruin.” When I was in Reno we had an old hotel there that they demolished. Have you ever seen that happen? I don’t know how they do it, but they put the charges, the explosives, in such a way that when they push one button or push the thing down, that whole building just went poof. And that’s what the word means: to demolish, to bring it to ruin.

The word “fortresses” as it’s translated in the King James “stronghold” is the word *ochuroma*. Now this is a strong fortress in which people put their trust, now listen carefully, they put their trust and they find their security in this. When it’s used metaphorically, as it is here—in other words, it’s a word picture—it refers to the premise or the thought processes that have been built as a fortress in somebody’s mind. It’s controlling them; it’s where they’re coming from. This is where a person finds his security and puts his trust. Proverbs 21:22, “A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.” It’s what you trust in is how you’re going to live. What you trust in, what you’ve embraced somewhere in the fortress of your mind is going to determine how you’re going to act. And that’s the real problem: not how you act, that’s symptomatic. It’s what is controlling that.

Now these fortresses or strongholds in one's thinking, like I said, determine everything we do. It determines everything we think, everyone acts the way they do because they think the way they think. Behind the actions of any person, whether he be a believer or not, is a fortress and that's what your real problem is and when you handle things in the flesh you haven't solved anything. For the believer this is a great stronghold. It's going to go on and say the unbeliever puts their stronghold up against the Word of God. We don't put it against the Word of God. Our stronghold embraces the Word of God.

Proverbs 10:29 it talks about the Word and the ways of God. "The way of the Lord," which cannot be known apart from His Word, "is a stronghold to the upright." That's why when you get out of bounds the stronghold within your life will pull you back to where you ought to be. That's what really controls us. When we renew our minds and the Word of God gets saturated into our life, we begin to behave a different way. So a fortress or a stronghold is the framework that is the structure behind all behavior.

Remember the test that they did years ago on the Gibbon monkey? They had a little container and that container had a chain hooked to it and was bolted to the floor which would imprison it if something was locked in it. They had a little opening to the container that a monkey could put his hand through, but if he balled his fist up he couldn't pull it out. And they put candy inside of that container. And they proved it over and over again. The monkey is free, he's free, but he chooses to imprison himself because he thinks that he needs that candy and when he grabs the candy he can't get his hand out, but he won't let go of the candy.

Now, that's what we're talking about: something inside, I don't know how monkeys work, but something is controlling that behavior. Paul continues to illustrate this in verse 5: "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." Now the substance of the fortress is now being revealed. You want to know what this all is? He begins to tell you. Whatever the mindset is that makes the monkey imprison himself when he could have been free thinking he had to have what he had his hand around, whatever that is, Paul identifies as a "speculation."

King James translates it as "imagination." That's a great translation. It's the word *logismos*; some people translate it "argument." The argument somebody makes for his case that comes from a framework of how he thinks. This word has to do with how a person evaluates what he should or what he should not do. How does he evaluate it? It's his reasoning of a situation based upon a mindset or the understanding from which he's coming and which he has. It's the council he gives himself based on the mindset in which he operates. A person's behavior is determined by the mindset in which he operates. When we deal with behavior that is hurtful or sinful, you see, we don't look at that. We must identify where the wrong thinking is that causes that kind of behavior.

And I'll tell you this: if it's not embracing the Word of God then everything else is a lie and somebody has embraced a lie somewhere. He so believes it, he so trusts in it, that it's hidden behind his wrong behavior. Identifying this wrong thinking is more important than in what a person does or doesn't do. It's where he's coming from. What's his frame of reference?

Now this wrong thinking that has been reasoned out in wrong behavior, Paul says has elevated itself against the Word or the knowledge of God. It shuts down what God has to say. It's not controlled by what God has to say. Verse 5, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." The word "lofty thing" is the word *hupsoma*, which is that which the text says. It's been raised up like the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Above what God's Word has to say. It's something that is humanistic; it's something that man has come up with and built it to such a structure that it won't allow itself to hear the Word of God.

The word "raised" is in the present middle passive, which gives us two thoughts. That's a deponent verb. First of all he's talking about the strong towers, the strongholds of false teaching and deceptive thinking that the false teachers have raised up in the church of Corinth, but not only that, but since it's in a deponent verb it also has to do with how the people have listened to them, bought into it and raised it up themselves. So you've got a huge problem in the church of Corinth. You've got a problem with the way people think which is determining the way people behave.

The truth of God's Word forms the basis of the way a believer thinks. You see, our stronghold is the Word of God. We don't cast anything against it: we embrace the Word and the ways of God. It's what blows the whistle when we get out of bounds. It's what calls us back to behave properly. It's God's truth dressed in God's character that tears down wrong thinking in others.

Let me ask you a question. Think about it. What controls you this morning? What controls your behavior this morning? Why is it that you do some things that you do? There's a piece of this puzzle I was going to wait about 17 months before I shared it with you. I'm going to share it with you today. If you know me for anything, I'm not very intelligent but at least I'm honest. You're going to find me that way; sometimes to a fault.

When I shot that oryx, if you've ever hunted, anywhere you are you cannot shoot across a paved road. When we saw that oryx I got so excited, everybody got so excited, I shot before I crossed that road. When it all caved in on me to realize that we had been in a restricted area which was so humiliating and embarrassing, because we didn't intend that, I didn't tell them that piece of the puzzle. Isn't it amazing what your flesh will do on an impulse? Just to protect yourself you'll lie like a dog. I made that man think that I was on

the other side of the road. Because it was bad enough as it was. I didn't want to have to tell him that I shot from this side of the road.

I came home; we went on a staff retreat for three days and I kind of got my mind off of it as much as I could. It was a wonderful retreat. Came home and Thursday I called the game warden. He wasn't in his office, probably in the field. He called me back that night and told me what I needed to do and who I needed to call and I could send the fine in by the mail. He said, "Oh, by the way, I found a shell in the middle of the road." It was explainable in my mind, because I can't even really remember how all that happened. My second shot I don't have because my clip for whatever reason in a bolt action gun hangs the second shot. It won't bring it into the chamber. I don't know why, I just discovered it a couple of weeks ago and I hadn't had time to fix it. So I figured I probably ejected it and put my gun back in the car.

I went to bed that night and at 3:00 Friday morning God woke me up. What's it like in your life when you get convicted? What's it like? I don't know how you are but it's like a horse that's kicked me in the chest. I thought I was going to die. I literally thought I was going to die. I even felt hot all over. I felt like I had fever. It's amazing. And God was saying, "Son, you have not been truthful with that man." "But Lord, it may cost me more." And God said, "Excuse me? Did I hear you correctly?" At 8:37 that morning I picked up the phone and called me but he didn't answer. I left a message for him to call me back. He didn't call me back; he's probably in the field.

He didn't call me back all day, didn't call me back that night. By yesterday morning I'm thinking, "Thank You, Lord, thank You. It's over, it's forgotten, I'm sorry, I've dealt with You but now I don't have to deal with him." Wrong. I took my car out to get it washed and I got some oil changed in it and a few things I had to do and I came back to the house about 9:00 and the phone rang. It was Ray. And I said, "Hey, man, I called you the other day," and I had a second question I called him for and I said, "I've lost my number that I'm supposed to call. Can you give me that number?" "Yes." He gave it to me and I hung up.

And that conviction, that arrow that pierced my heart hit me again. It's like God was saying, "What are you doing? Pick up the phone and call him back." I picked up the phone and called him back and he was on another call. God made me wait on this thing. Ten minutes later he calls me back and I said, "Ray, the real reason I called you is, you don't know me very well. I wish you did. But I'm an honest person. I live before God the way I want to live before men. This has been a problem. There's a little piece of the information that I haven't told you and I don't know if you're a Christian or not, I don't know if you know what conviction is." But I told him the story. "I have got to tell you this: I shot from the other side of the road. I want to ask you to forgive me and I want to apologize to you as a man and a friend. You've been so nice to me, but I've got to tell you the truth."

I'm not going to tell you the rest of the story because I don't want in any way for this to get back to him in a wrong way, but I'll tell you this: God was so merciful that when I hung up the phone I shouted. If my wife had been there she would have thought I was dying. You could have heard me for three blocks. And you know what God told me? "Now you can take your hand out, son. You held on to it because you thought you could protect yourself. Take your hand out, now you're free."

I want to tell you something, folks, the stronghold in my mind is the Word of God. I've been studying it for years of my life. Can I get out of bounds? You better believe it. You don't have a perfect pastor. But when I get out of bounds the Holy Spirit so blows the whistle in my heart He drives me back to that stronghold and I've got to do what He tells me to do. And when I do the character of Jesus can be worn in my life once again.

What controls what you do? How can people in a church gossip and tear things down and never even confess it? How can they do what they do and never have any conviction at all? I'll tell you why. They don't have the stronghold of God's Word built into their minds. They're not embracing it and they're not letting it dictate to their behavior. Can we get out of bounds? We always do; that's why we confess sin. Every one of us does, but what is the stronghold that controls the way you behave? Not just think, but behave.

We must know our strategy

Thirdly we must know our strategy. What is all this about? When I'm dressed in His character, when I'm seasoned with His Word, what is all this about? What is the strategy of this? Verse 5 goes on to say, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ..."

Now, we already know part of our strategy is that we are dressed in His garment, His character, and part of our strategy is our word is seasoned with His Word, and when we're dressed in His character and our words are saturated by His Word, then the false thinking which is causing the false behavior of the people that we're dealing with begins to get threatened. It begins to be disarmed because it doesn't really have the legs to stand on that it used to have. Paul says that "we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." In other words, there's going to be a behavioral change because the thoughts are going to change.

Paul paints a vivid picture of how the enemy which is the wrong thinking of those who hurt us and do ungodly things to us is captured and is conquered. By implication it would mean in our text to subdue, to bring under subjection. "Taking" is present active; we're constantly capturing the wrong thoughts that are determining the wrong conduct and we're leading them captive. Where are

we leading them captive to? To the obedience of Christ.

Every thought, every mindset must surrender to submit to the obedience to Christ. It's incredible what he's drawn a picture for here. When you're dressed in the character of Christ and when you're armed and seasoned with His Word and you're dealing with a conflict, you're bringing up a whole different paradigm of thought processes that are going to attack and challenge the way another person thinks. And truth will hold its own. And it's kind of like it leads those thoughts away captive to and the ultimate is obedience to Christ. To where they bow before Him and to what He has to say.

Remember Dorie Van Stone that came for Equip a couple of years ago and she was down in part of Irian Jaya that is cannibalistic. And for eight years they saw no behavioral change. The people worshipped pigs, they went naked everywhere they went. She had to go home because her children got sick and she didn't get to go back. Twenty three years later she gets a letter and they ask her to come back. She saw not one convert those first eight years. They said, "You come back." Two hundred fifty thousand of those people of that tribe have come to know Christ and they're a leading evangelistic people in all that part of the world. And her husband, Lloyd, who had died since that time, she said they want to put a statue of him and the chief holding hands with a Bible in their hands. "Come back, come back."

She said when she flew in and the people were lined on the runway because she'd worked with her all those years ago and they loved her. And when she got off the plane she immediately saw that they were all fully dressed and she immediately saw the differences on their faces: they had come to know Christ. What happened?

You see, you can't go in to somebody's thinking without being armed with the weapons of God. And when you're dealing in a conflict, you're dealing with somebody who doesn't have the paradigm of God's Word being the stronghold of their life. What they have done to justify the way they behave, they've built another type of fortress and the only thing that will tear that down is the weapons that God has for us.

Paul gives us an illustration of how God works in his life: Romans 15:17-18, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed." You can tell by what they said and you could see by what they did, how they behaved, something had changed the fortress in their mind. It had torn it down and now God's Word in their minds caused a different type of behavior.

Christ in and through Paul conquered the sinful strongholds of the Gentiles that he was sent to minister to and they were led to obedience to Christ. Now Paul says something to the Corinthians I will not be able to develop today in verse 6. He says to them, "and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."

The word "punish" is the word *ekdikeo*, which means "brings about righteous judgment." That's all it's saying. There were two groups in the church of Corinth just like there are two groups in any church, everywhere you go. One group loves God and has built that fortress in their minds of His Word which controls their behavior; when they get out of bounds they'll come right back, they'll confess it, they'll make it right, they want to walk with God. But the other group is unwilling to let God's Word and God's truth and knowledge of God come in to their mindset and to their thoughts, therefore into their lives.

Basically what I see in this text, I'll be studying it again this week and bring it to you next week, I believe God is saying, "God's going to deal with them and with a vengeance. But I'm waiting on you to let your obedience become complete. I want to see in your words and in your deeds the change that's come in your life so I'll know who is and who isn't."

So we must know our weapon, we must choose our weapon and to do that we must know what they are. We've got two choices: we can go the way of the flesh; we can go the way of the Spirit. We must know what our enemy is and who our enemy is. It is not a person. It's what controls the way they think. And thirdly, we must know our strategy. And basically to sum it up, our strategy is when we continue to proclaim the Word, preach the Word, teach the Word, dressed in the character of Christ, it begins to slowly erode the wrong thinking of people and once the wrong thinking of people begin to erode and become into ruin, God holds His stronghold in their minds and their behavior completely changes.

And to me that's an appropriate message for all of us in the 21st century. What weapons are you using? David had a choice to go with the weapons of Saul, big old giant and he said it didn't fit him. "I'm going to trust in the power of God." And he slew the giant. I want to tell you something. Giants in your life can still be slain if you will choose the right weapon. It's got to be of the Spirit, divinely powerful and cannot be of the flesh. Conflict is nothing more than a test to see what you're going to do, to show you where you are, how you're going to handle it. How are you going to handle it?

The Weakness of Fleshly Weapons

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10:7-8. We won't get very far. There are some awesome things that God is saying to us. I'm calling the whole series "Poise in the Face of Persecution," and this is part 3. And this morning I want to talk to you about the "Weakness of Fleshly Weapons." You have to put that into context of what we're talking about and I'll try to do that.

Now let's get into this. God's Word is absolute truth and if you don't believe that, that's where your problems are starting, right there. It should be the stronghold in every believer's mind. Proverbs 10:39 says, "The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright," but then it adds a contrast, "but ruin to the workers of iniquity." They don't want this stronghold. Everything they do casts itself in front of this stronghold. It's a good thing for the believer that the Word of God is there, but strongholds can be a bad thing. And God's Word, we have the power to disarm and to triumph over every lie which lurks behind all of our wrong behavior.

But the sad thing is a lot of believers inside the church, just like in Corinth, they're not willing to let the Word of God be the stronghold of their mind. Instead they have allowed other things to build strongholds. Maybe it's the worldly wisdom or whatever it is in their thinking and that's determining their wrong behavior. Like that Gibbon monkey we talked about last week. When they did that experiment on that monkey and they had a container and the monkey could put his hand inside of the container but he couldn't pull it out if it was in a fist. They chained the container to the floor and they put candy inside of the container. The monkey was free; the monkey came up and wanted the candy and he put his hand in, grabbed the candy but was unwilling to turn it loose even for the sake of freedom. He imprisoned himself because something in the instinct of that animal told him he needed what he had in his hand. And so he's in bondage thinking he needs what he has.

Now that's what happens with a stronghold that's of the flesh. We think we have to have this or that and God says let it go. His Word is what disarms whatever it is that's causing us to put ourselves into bondage. Now in Paul's day it was no different. It's the same all the time. There were two groups, two distinctive groups, probably more than that, which was causing the people to have the wrong means of thinking, the wrong premise, the wrong thought pattern. These were cancer to the body of Christ.

There were two groups: one was the ones that preached law instead of preaching grace. And they built into the minds of the people that they had to perform for God. And suddenly that measuring everything, that attaining whatever it is, became a stronghold and dictated their behavior, which was completely against the message of grace. The other group was the worldly philosophers who were so enamored with the way men did things and the wisdom of men, they were so caught up in it, that people began to look for that kind of thing that followed them.

Now these people were inside the church, not outside the church. You say how do I know that? First Corinthians 5:12 says, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?" So this was not outside the church, this was inside the church. Now these poisonous people hated the authority of Paul and the other apostles. That was a real problem. This authority was something they wanted themselves so they had to tear the man down, tear the message down, so that they could get their message where they needed it to be and they could have control inside of the church.

Paul and all of the apostles had a God-given authority. Now listen, if I ever tell you that God has made me an apostle—well, you won't have to do it, my wife will do it. She'll walk up, take my arm, lead me away, and have me committed. There's no such thing as apostles like you have in the New Testament today. I don't care what anybody says, and I don't care what any experience they tag to it. These people had authority that we'll never understand. The Word of God has it in our life; the Spirit of God has it, but not in the way they had it. You see, they didn't have the whole Scripture. Paul wrote approximately half of the New Testament and it had not been completed at that time. So God gave a special authority to these apostles during that time.

Now they had all the authority to deal with the church and these false teachers and with gravity. In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul says this, "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan," we don't have that authority, "for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In 1 Timothy 1:20 he says, "Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme." So Paul was determined to suppress the insolence of these false teachers within the church and to destroy their power. But he was also determined, as we see in the text, because he would not let the Corinthian church take up an offense for him to do this dressed in the armor of Christ. Paul knew that only the character of Christ, dressed in the character of Christ and the Word of God renewing his mind and seasoning everything he said, that was the only way he could come against those strongholds that were determining the wrong behavior of the people.

Now you have to understand, make the connection, I hope you're doing this, that it's the same way for us today. Because we are daily in a war against those things which cast themselves in front of the knowledge of God. Every time we turn a TV on, every time we listen to the radio, we're listening to the humanism of this world. And it casts itself in front of the knowledge of God. We have to be so careful to let the Word of God remain where it is in our hearts and in our minds. Whether we're losing or winning the battle is seen in our behavior. You just watch the way a person behaves. Read the person before you read his book and you will find out

whether or not he's got the right stronghold in his mind.

For instance, a person that is caught in immoral behavior. You know, we live in a day in the 21st century, we're scared to death to talk about that. And yet that's one of the problems that people are fighting everywhere, especially men. And it's a problem in the mind: immoral behavior that they fall into. And that's not the problem. It never has been the problem. That's a symptom. But what we do as churches sometimes is that we don't allow a safe environment where somebody who is caught in that trap can come, be honest about it, and not looked down upon and helped and somebody come and say, "Listen, this is how you put the Word of God in your mind and all those things that you're missing in your life, Jesus fulfills."

My prayer is that one day, and I don't know if I'll live to see it or not, that our church will be that kind of safe environment where people who are hurting can come and say, "Listen, can you help me? Can you help me put the Word of God in my mind?" You find a person who is critical, judgmental, bitter; they've got a bigger problem than that. That's just a symptom. And so what we're dealing with is not the action itself, it's what causes that action. It's what's behind it; it's the premise, it's the thought processes that a person has that are apart from the Word of God.

But I want to encourage you today. We have the weapons to conquer that. Whether it be in our own life or in somebody else's life if they'll just listen. It's divinely powerful weapons that we have. Paul says that in 10:4, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses," or "strongholds" as the King James says. If we summed up all of our weapons today, it would not be what they are; it would be who He is.

As we looked at it last week and tracked it through, Jesus is the garment of Ephesians 4 and He's the armor of Ephesians 6. We don't need anything outside of Him. And everything that He does are weapons of righteousness as we studied this past week. We have divinely powerful weapons because they are of God and He lives in us. So if you've got a problem today and you've built the wrong stronghold in your mind and it's determining the behavior that you're in, there is hope for you, especially if you're a believer because the Lord Jesus in you and His Word can completely tear that stronghold down.

In fact, Paul implies here and uses what they call siege warfare. And if you'll think about this, the Corinthians would have understood this. When you would go into a city, a stronghold, and take it over, the first thing you would do would be to isolate that city from its allies and any kind of food supply coming in. You'd cut that off. And if you think about it, when a person has got a stronghold in their mind you've got to give no provision to the flesh. It's got to be out of the way.

Then they would come in with towers that were made of iron. They used to be made of wood but they would burn them down, so they made them out of iron, the Romans did. And they would move these towers in and they were taller than the stronghold that they were fighting. And the archers would get in those towers and they'd just shoot arrows down and finally the men would go over, take the city, and leave a group there to protect it and make sure nothing happened from that point on: anything happen, they would correct it.

And that's the way it is with the Word of God. It's incredible. You see the enemy is that stronghold. It says in verse 5, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." You think about that for awhile. Every thought; it's not every thought that comes against the knowledge of God. That's the war, that's the enemy that we're up against. And it says, "and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." I love that. Once you get in the Word of God, once you begin to surrender to the Lordship of Christ and that immoral thought comes this way—and it's going to come—and when it comes you just wheel around, pull that arrow out and just nail it to the wall because it's taken captive to the obedience of Christ.

There is hope. Victory is never you and me overcoming sin, victory is Jesus overcoming us. And that's what he's trying to tell us. You're in a war. It's incredible how people don't seem to quite understand that and that's why we're teaching it. That's why we're trying to help. This is where the help comes. We can disarm every thought as we get into the Word of God. Renew our minds with the Word of God, and then His Spirit takes over in our life and you talking about a warrior and you talking about armor, then we can walk in the victory God has given to us. Well, the picture is awesome; it's simple, but yet I guess it's more complex when you live it. But it's just learning to think differently; it's learning to let the Scriptures change the way you think and let that become the stronghold in your mind.

Now last week we briefly mentioned 10:6. I hit it and told you I was struggling with it. I think I've landed, and I'm going to tell you where I am. It's kind of up for grabs. It's a tough verse. He says in verse 6, "and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete." I had to really wrestle with that. The context is not talking about every single thing they do. It's talking about false teachers and it's talking about those who accused Paul. And as I was studying it this past week it hit me that Paul has already said something about this. If you'll turn back to 2 Corinthians 6:12-18, Paul has already addressed this. And I think this is what he's talking about.

He says, "You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections." That's where our problems are. "Now in like exchange," he's already been open with them, he says, "I speak as to children,—open wide to us also. Do not be bound together

with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness: Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty."

Now what he's saying is "come out from among them." And I think that's what he's referring to here in verse 6. He's saying, "When I see you come out from them, when I see you understand that they're teaching something that is false, and I understand that you step aside from them and I know that you're going to stand with me, 100%, then I'm ready to deal with all of those who are disobedient."

Well, you say, "Who are the disobedient?" It could be the false teachers or it could be those who are following right along behind them. The word is *parakoe*, which comes from the word *parakouo*, which means "to hear alongside something." In other words, to hear wrongly, you didn't get it. It means to hear but have no intention whatsoever to do anything about it.

Now these are people who understand the truth but they're not about to yield to it and that's what he's talking about. So it could be the false teachers, it could be those he tells them to get away from and stand away from, I don't know. But it appears to me that he's pointing to those who have no respect to Paul's authority as an apostle or to God's Word.

Now in verse 7 Paul begins to address the false teachers and he is dressed in the armor of Christ and armed with the Word of God that he has at that point as he's writing it. He's going to begin to erode and disarm the stronghold that they have built up. He's going to reveal what the flesh is really like. And I want to share something with you. There are a lot of things in this passage. I'm going to share what God put on my heart that I believe is the message for us today. If you're here today and you don't know Christ, you're going to see yourself right here. You're going to see the weakness of your flesh. You have no other option. This is the only way you can live. Only when Christ comes to live in you and you let His Word renew your mind can you be any different.

Or if you're a believer and have not chosen to let Jesus be Jesus in your life and have not chosen to let the Word renew your mind, you're going to see yourself. And it's important that we see ourselves from time to time so that we can understand the importance of what he's trying to do in our life. So let's look at some of the things about the weakness of the flesh, the frailty of the flesh, the pattern of the flesh. It's never going to change, same today as it was back then. This is what you're like if you're not living under the Lordship of Christ.

Flesh looks on the outside and not on the heart

First of all, flesh looks on the outside and not on the heart. Flesh has no spiritual discernment whatsoever. It only looks on the outside. It's only impressed with physical appearances. It's not impressed with something deeper than that which God is doing. In verse 7 he says, "You are looking at things as they are outwardly." You're looking at this stuff that you can easily see and that's your problem, he's saying. Now Paul has already addressed this error earlier on in Corinthians. You'll see him go back and pull out from what he said before.

Listen to this from 2 Corinthians 5:11-17, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart." You see, they don't know how to look at the heart. They can just look at the outward appearance. "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh;" Now this is the problem that the flesh has when we choose to let it dominate our lives. The flesh is impressed with the way somebody looks or the intelligent, convincing way in which they speak or whether they're funny or whether they're not funny or whatever. That's what impresses the flesh.

Even some so-called believers have fallen into this worldly trap. Let me ask you a question as an illustration. Have you ever made this statement? I have and I'm ashamed to say it, but I have. "Boy, if that old boy gets saved, God can use him. He's got deep pockets. God's really looking forward to getting him on His team." Have you ever done that? Is that your thinking today? Well, I want to tell you: that's from the pit of Hell. That has nothing to do with what God does.

Do you understand that God is not impressed with a single one of us? The only time He's impressed with us is when He looks at us and sees Himself. You see, the flesh is impressed. That's a successful man; look at what he has. Look at the size of his house, look at his bank account. And God says, "No, you're looking on the outside, you're not looking on the heart." We see many that have been deceived into this way of thinking in Corinth. No wonder they bought into the false teachers because they had all the credentials; they had all the outward things.

Remember, he wrote to them in 1 Corinthians 3 and I'll tell you, those first four chapters of 1 Corinthians he has to deal with them

big time. They love worldly wisdom and all that kind of stuff and he says in 1 Corinthians 3:1, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ." What he's saying to them is that they've never come out of the nursery.

I was preaching through 1 Corinthians a few years ago, and I was in Sam's one day and I found a big gallon jar of adult pacifiers. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? They're great big things. It wouldn't work for a baby, that's for sure. And I put them behind the pulpit and I wanted to use them when people came up and yak, yak, yak. Just pull one out and say, "Will you go suck on this for a little while and when you're ready to come out of the nursery I'm ready to talk to you."

Well, that's the church of Corinth. And because they had this worldly bent, oh, they were impressed with education, they were impressed with polish, they were impressed with all of this stuff, and because of that they were fair game for the false teachers. Man, the false teachers waltzed in and just took them over because they were already of that bent. They didn't let the Word of God be a stronghold in their mind. They didn't know how to look on the inside. They only knew how to look on the outside.

So the phrase in verse 7, "you are looking at things as they are outwardly," that can be taken as a command or it can be taken as a statement. The indicative ending and the imperative ending there on that verb are the same. If you took it as a command he would say, "Come on, people, look at what's right in front of you. Pay attention." But if it's taken as a statement like it is in the text, and I think that's probably the best way to take it, "you are looking at things as if they are the outward things; you're not looking at the heart."

You see, a person who has chosen the flesh to dominate his thinking, a person who has chosen man's thoughts and man's wisdom to be the stronghold of his life has no spiritual discernment. He doesn't know what is of God; he doesn't know what isn't of God. He's only impressed with what he sees on the outside. He doesn't know if somebody's teaching is right or wrong. He's just impressed on how they did it.

I was at a conference, and a speaker got up to speak. And about half-way in the middle of his message I wanted to stand up and shout, "Why don't you sit down; just be quiet." He obliterated anything I've ever studied in the Word of God. He didn't mention the Word of God. He talked about all the other stuff that fleshly minded people can't seem to filter through. And when he finished his message I was about to say something to my friend who had the same exact response I did, but about that time somebody in front of us jumped up and started clapping and the whole place gave him a standing ovation. And I heard somebody say as we walked out, "That's the best message we've had all week long." And I thought to myself, "Good grief! Are we back in the church of Corinth?"

They had no clue what was spiritual. They had no clue how to discern what was of God and what wasn't. You see, the flesh is much more impressed with outward appearance than it is with the heart. It doesn't even know how to look at the heart of an individual. Paul alludes to some of this in the chapters that follow. In chapter 11:22 he talks about how these people had pedigrees. He said, "Are they Hebrews: So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I." It's almost as if Paul is saying, "So what?" But, you see, to the people that was big stuff. They're probably from Judea. They're from Judea. They're of Abraham; they're Israelites. They've got to be right.

Who you are, where you're from, how much money you have, how successful you are, these are the mistaken observation of the fleshly minded man who has no clue about spiritual things. You know, the natural man cannot understand the things of God. Paul even had to defend the fact that he didn't have a letter of commendation. Chapter 3 he had to explain that to them because they had degrees hanging everywhere. So the false teachers used their pedigree, their prestige, their worldly credentials, to completely deceive the gullible Corinthian church.

Now all of this really was aimed at putting Paul down, robbing him of his authority and tearing down his message so that they could really have control over the way the people thought and behaved. Let me ask you a question at this point in the message: what is your grid in the sense of how you discern things? What grid do you put it through? If you're putting it through the world's eyes, then you're in to this if it's big is must be right because that's what the world says, isn't it?

The term "mega-church" is probably the most damaging church that has come out in the 21st century. Now we're in a large church, but this whole idea that if it's full it must be God. I want you to help me in your study, tell me when Jesus ever played to the crowd in the Gospels. Tell me one time, just one time. In fact, in John 8 He preached the hard thing. Now you don't do that if you want to keep a crowd. He preached the hard things and what happened? It says they left and would never return. So this fleshly mindset gets into everything. If you have the paradigm of a stronghold of the flesh, you're looking at outward things. You're not looking at the things the way God looks at them. You're not looking at the heart.

What you need to be looking at is the changed lives. What you need to be looking at are the people coming to know Christ. What you need to be looking at is the marvelous things that only God can do. He's a good preacher because he makes me laugh or whatever. It's amazing how fleshly people look at church; how fleshly people look at Christianity. They haven't a clue; they have no discernment. They can only look on the outside. That's why the world has such a weird idea of what the church is. But you see

God's people who built the Word of God as a paradigm in their minds, they have spiritual discernment. They look at the heart; they don't look at the outside.

The flesh bases its worth on tangible things

The second thing is that because they look at the outside and because everything external determines everything, the second thing is the flesh bases its worth on tangible things. Now this is interesting. Paul's going to say, "I belong to Christ." He knows that for a reason. In Romans 8 it shows us that there's an inner witness to the fact that a person is a child of God. Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

This inner witness is not based on any outward thing, any outward experience, anything. It's based on something that the Spirit does on the inside. You know because you know. It is spiritually revealed. But a person who walks and chooses to walk after the flesh as the paradigm of his life, he doesn't have a clue. He has to even base whether he's a Christian or not on external things. He has no inner witness of his spirit.

Paul goes on in verse 7, "If any one is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." Now the word "any one" opens this thing up. He does this, he says "such a one," "anyone." It's almost as if he knows who he's talking about. But he doesn't decide to put a name on it. However it does open it up. We just don't know beyond that. We don't know what he's doing with that.

"If any one is confident in himself." The word is *peitho*, and it means he's "persuaded about something." It means to be so persuaded that you live accordingly. It's in the perfect tense, which means evidently something in his past had happened that has caused him to think this way. "In himself" heightens the impression one has within himself. I mean, this is coming from within. Now, what Paul is saying here is if there's somebody there and they think that they're a believer then they'll know that I'm one, because I'm one too. There will be a witness there in their spirit.

In other words, they can't tell me that I'm a false apostle and not even called of God if they're a believer because if they're a believer the witness of the Spirit would be there: they would know that I'm a believer. But he appears to make this a slant towards those false teachers who have completely duped themselves and also the Christians there in Corinth. We just simply saw that they based everything on their pedigree, maybe it's because they were Hebrews and Israelites and sons of Abraham that they'd convinced themselves from within that they're believers.

But by Paul's having to defend himself, we can begin to see the standard on which they base what they are; where it comes from. Whatever their reasons, these false teachers had persuaded themselves that because they were Israelites and descendants of Abraham then they were of Christ. We know that they presented themselves as ministers of Christ which was a joke, but they did and the Corinthian church believed them. It says in 2 Corinthians 11:23 "Are they servants of Christ?" And the word "servants" is also translated "ministers." We know that they brought letters of commendation because we know that Paul had to defend the fact that he didn't.

In chapter 3:1, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" They had degrees running out their ears. They had the audacity to identify themselves as "super" apostles. And Paul says this. I think it's in a humorous way. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:5, "For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles." But at the same time there was something else that the church of Corinth missed. At the same time they were saying, "We're authentic, and we're real," they sought monetary gain. They peddled the Word of God. He mentions that in 2 Corinthians 2:17. Paul says, "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

We also know they indulge in immorality. In 2 Corinthians 12:21 he says, "I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced." And in their deceitful arrogance they duped the Corinthian believers into thinking that they were authentic and that Paul was not.

And Paul says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. If they're believers they would know I'm authentic." You see, this forced the Corinthian believers to say, "Wait a minute. Let's put one up against the other. Let's just look a little deeper than what we've been looking at." They've got all the credentials, the social status, the education, the communication skills. Now where's Paul fit in this whole equation? Paul calls the false teachers in 2 Corinthians 11:13, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." So we know that they're fake but the believers are having to begin to understand the difference: look a little deeper.

Well, we know that Paul's genuineness can be seen by the fact that the church is alive there in Corinth. He didn't go there to start a church: he went to make tents. Second Corinthians 3:2, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men." So we

know by the way he presented the gospel of Christ. It says in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus" sake." It's seen in the persecution that he had to go through. It's time to tell them to get a clue; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, too many to list. It's seen in the fact that Christ Himself commissioned Paul as an apostle; 2 Corinthians 1:1-22, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, 2 Corinthians 10:9, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul says, "What have I got to do?"

The true believers in Corinth knew that he was true. But these others that had built the paradigm, the stronghold of the flesh, didn't have any discernment at all. They looked on the outside; they were not looking on the heart on the inside. Paul was God's apostle and he knew he belonged to God. He knew he belonged to God. And he was not ashamed of being His child nor His servant. Second Corinthians 10:8 says, "For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame." "I'm not ashamed of it."

Let me ask you the question today. They built their whole worth, they said they were convinced from the inside that they were God's people, but they built it on the wrong premise. Let me ask you: if you died right now in this service, if you're a believer that's pretty good, we'll get you right in the sight of God, but if you died right now and you're standing before God in the next millisecond, and God looks at you and He says, "You know, what can you tell Me that will cause Me to say you need to be in heaven for the rest of your life? What are you basing your faith upon right here? What would you say? Here's my question: Do you know because you know because you know because you know that you're a child of God? Or are you basing it on something else? I walked forward when I was 9 years old. I based it on an experience. I prayed, whatever I prayed, they told me what to pray. They said if you get baptized and become a member of the church you can be saved. I went down and did all that stuff.

I went through life for years thinking I was a believer. I was in the ministry, thank God it wasn't the pastorate, but I was in youth work for eight years before God finally convicted me that I was a sinner. I'd been convinced that I had sinned and that was my problem. I'd never been convicted that I was a sinner. And I cried until my nose bled when I began to see the filth of my flesh. And I've never been the same. You try to take away from me my salvation, you're barking up the wrong tree. I know because I know because I know. I know from the conviction of the Holy Spirit when I lied to a game warden. I know I'm a Christian.

Does God confirm in your heart? You know what my biggest fear is in the 21st century? How many people are in churches just like ours that don't know Jesus from a hole in the ground? Billy Graham said, "I pray that at least 20% of all the people that have come forward in my crusades truly met Christ." Don't base your spiritual worth on tangible things. The Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that you're a child of God. And that's what he's trying to show them. The flesh is just left hanging out there. And when we don't get into the Word of God, we have no stronghold or fortress to determine the behavior, our discernment and everything else that we do in our life. That's the key: to let God's Word be where it needs to be in your heart.

Well, I've got a whole other point and I'm so excited not to have to finish it because I'm already ahead of myself next week. You know men are funny creatures. Ladies, don't have to say amen real loud. I'm talking to the guys right now. We're funny people, especially that middle-aged time or when you're like I am and you're over 60. We get that gut and we walk around as if it's not even there. It's incredible. Have you ever noticed that? I have a friend in Kentucky, and he would stand in front of the mirror and his stomach was hanging to his knees and he couldn't even see it. He was in shape. And we can't understand why our pants have gotten longer, because it's the same built, it's just further down. And when we look down we can't see past. We don't even see it.

When I was on television it adds 12 pounds. And I never listened or watched my programs. I'm the worst critic of myself. I think one day it came to me when I was studying, I was upstairs in the video room and they were editing one of my videos. And I was just walking by and I just happened to glance at the screen. And they backed off and gave a side view but I didn't realize it was me at first. I walked by and said "Whoa, who's that fat guy?" And I just kept on going.

I took about two steps and stopped dead in my tracks. That's me. It was a side view and I had my coat open and it looked like the whiteout in the Arctic. It never stopped. So what's that got to do with anything? You know what this Book is right here? It's a video and every now and then when we're going through a text you don't like some of the passages and neither do I, but we need to walk by and take a glance, because we might see ourselves and when we see ourselves we might see something we don't like. Because we may not be walking like we ought to be walking. We may have the same discernment as a pagan outside in the world that has no discernment whatsoever. We may even be basing our spiritual worth on tangible things.

This is not a map, it's a mirror, a video, and we're in some pretty tough passages right now. And I think what God wants us to do is take the meat and throw away the bones, and if it's not speaking to us, but as we go through it, take a glance. You might see what you don't like. How do you measure this church? Based on what paradigm? You see, the way you look at it is totally coming from what's inside your brain, controlling your thoughts, which controls your behavior. And if it's not the Word of God, no wonder from time to time it's not quite as synergetic as it needs to be.

2 Corinthians 10:9-18

Who Is and Who Isn't

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10, and we're going to finish that chapter today. I sometimes do a verse at a time, sometimes a word at a time, sometimes get a sermon out of a comma, but we're going to do a few more verses today, because there's a beautiful flow here of the contrasting character that a believer has and the kind of world in which we live.

We've been talking about "Poise in the Face of Persecution." This is part 4 of that series. Actually it's going to last us all the way through the last chapter of this wonderful epistle. And I want to talk today about "Who is and Who Isn't," 2 Corinthians 10:12-18. The oddest thing happens when a believer chooses to obey his flesh. Has anybody done that this past month besides me? Are you willing to be honest? All of us lie anytime we choose to obey our flesh, and that's not a good thing. You don't fool anybody but yourself and not only that, you always wind up on the wrong end of the stick.

Two hunters were out hunting and they found a hole, the biggest hole they'd ever seen. One said to the other one, "I don't think that hole has a bottom." "It's got to have a bottom." "I don't think so. I think it goes all the way through the world." The one says, "It can't be, it can't be. Get a rock and throw it in and we'll listen for it to hit the bottom." They threw a rock in and it didn't hit the bottom. He said, "I told you." He said, "Get a bigger rock." Got a bigger rock, dropped it in; it didn't hit the bottom.

So the two of them carried a bigger rock over and dropped it and they listened and listened and it didn't hit the bottom. So they said they had to find something bigger. He said, "No, no, I'm telling you this hole goes through the world." He said, "No, it doesn't." So they found a railroad tie and they carried it over and dropped it in the hole. Suddenly out of nowhere came a goat. That goat was running faster than any goat they'd ever seen in their life. It ran right between them and dove in the hole. And one of them said, "Did you see that?" He said, "Oh my goodness, I've never seen a goat run that fast in all my life. He committed suicide right there in that hole." About that time the farmer drove up and they said, "Come here, come here." He said, "Have you ever seen this hole?" He said, "I've had this farm 25 years and I don't remember seeing that hole." He said, "Well, you won't believe what we just saw. A goat came out of nowhere. We have never seen a goat run that fast in all of our life, and dove in that hole. Could that be your goat?" He said, "Oh no, my goat's tied to a railroad tie."

What's that got to do with anything? I told you, you always end up on the wrong end of the stick. You need to be careful what you attach yourself to. You attach yourself to the flesh and you're going to pay. I'm going to pay. What you sow you're going to reap. And that's just a law that God set out. You see a better word for flesh is "self" and a better word for self is "sin" and sin will take you further than you ever wanted to stray, keep you longer than you ever intended to stay, and it'll cost you more than you ever dreamed you'd pay. I know that personally.

In our text today we get to observe Paul, a true apostle, and he's up against these fleshly-minded false apostles that have come into the church of Corinth. And we're going to see a contrasting lifestyle with Paul and the way fleshly people live. The false apostles of Paul's day employed every deceptive means of the flesh to try to deceive the believers of Corinth. And before we assault those false apostles and say that's bad, you have to remember something: that flesh is flesh no matter whether it's the flesh of a false apostle or the flesh of a believer. It doesn't get any better. In fact, it gets worse.

That's why we are told to say yes to God, never to obey the flesh. We should never stoop to the level of those like the false apostles who walk according to the flesh. And this is what's so different. You see, the audience they had that was fair game were the people that listened to them, people that were living that way themselves. They weren't living walking in the Spirit and they had no discernment when they heard the false message of the false apostles.

Last week we saw the weakness of flesh; we saw its sick anemic state. In verse 7 of 2 Corinthians 10 we saw how the flesh has no ability to look on the heart. It only looks on the outside, the external. Paul says in verse 7, "You are looking at things as they are outwardly." The way someone looks, the presentation in which he presents himself, the way he speaks is so much more impressive to people who walk according to the flesh than the heart of the speaker, where he's coming from. Believers who walk after their flesh are no different than the world. That's the sad thing. They view people externally and that's what I'm saying: the false teachers, that's all they could do, but the fleshly minded Corinthians fell into the same trap and they missed the whole picture.

It's totally the opposite when we walk according to the Spirit because the Spirit of God, that's His character and He doesn't do things the way the flesh does them. He looks at the heart. God said to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." So if He's living His life in and through me, He's going to cause me not to look on the outside but to look on the heart.

Not only does our flesh look on the outside instead of the heart, but it also bases its spiritual worth on tangible external things. There

were those false apostles in Corinth that had convinced themselves and the Corinthians that they belonged to Christ, even that they were apostles and they even got the Corinthians believing that Paul wasn't an apostle. But they based all of this on their polish and their prominence. Paul says of them in the last part of verse 7 in chapter 10, "If any one is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." Paul says this tongue in cheek but he says, "Hey, if they're convinced and convinced themselves that they're believers, then they would already know that I'm a believer. They'd already know that I'm legitimate."

The difference was that Paul had the inner witness of the Spirit. He wrote that in Romans 8. That's the way you know you're a believer. Not by external things, not because you walk forward, not because you pray the prayer, but the inner witness of God's Spirit that we're a child of God. He knew because he knew because he knew because he knew that he was God's child. They had to convince themselves based on tangible things.

The flesh has to tear somebody else down in order to build itself up

Well, if we would have gotten to verses 9-11 we would have seen another characteristic of that flesh, and that is that the flesh has to tear somebody else down it's so insecure, in order to build itself up. In verses 9-11 Paul says, "for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible." Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present."

You see the spiritually blind false apostles of Corinth spent most of their time accusing Paul, trying to tear him down. Why? Because they had to get into that position of authority that God had given to Paul, the authority of an apostle. For instance, they said things like, "Yeah, he just writes his letter to scare you to death." That's why Paul had to defend himself. In verse 9, "for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters." The word "terrify" is *ekphobeo*, which means in our language to "scare somebody to death." And Paul said "I'm not writing my letters to scare you to death."

The word "letters" shows us it's more than one. I think he wrote four to them and 2 Corinthians is the fourth letter. He says, "Even though my letters to you have been tough, I know they've been tough, but I'm a father to you. I love you and I'm saying the hard things because I love you. I'm not writing to scare you to death." But that's not all.

The false teachers also couldn't say enough condemning things about Paul so they attacked his personal appearance. They say his letters are weighty and strong but his personal presence is unimpressive. Now, that's cold, folks. The word "unimpressive" in reference to his physical appearance is the word *asthenes*. It's the word that means "weak." It's the word translated "sick" in many places. It means without any physical ability, to be anemic. Paul must not have been much to look at. That's all I can get from it. Somebody had said once, bow-legged, hook-nosed, bald-headed little Jewish guy. He wasn't much to look at.

But, you see, they would say "we don't like the way he looks." Boy, does that ring a bell to the 21st century? I don't like the way he cuts his hair, I don't like the way he doesn't wear this or wear that. And they would say he's not physically handsome, he's not impressive when you see they tore him down with that. As if that matters; remember, God looks at the heart. God's not looking at the outside.

But as if that were not enough they attacked the way he talked. They said "his speech is contemptible." The word "contemptible" is *exoutheneo*. It's the word for "scornful." It's the word which is that which is despised. You know, Paul was one of the most intelligent people in the New Testament outside of Jesus. And he stood there on Mar's Hill and argued with those philosophers. He was incredible, but they said his speech was contemptible. Peter said in one of his epistles "Our brother Paul writes some hard things to understand sometimes." I'm not exactly sure what that all means, but the word means that which is despised.

Have you ever been around people like that in the church today? Remember, this is inside the church, it isn't outside the church. People who are more impressed with the way a person dresses or doesn't dress, people are more impressed with the way a person looks but never looking on the heart. Always tearing a guy down trying to build themselves up to make themselves look better.

Well, Paul had this to say to them, verse 11, "Let such a person consider this, that what we are in the word by letters when absent," and what was that by the way? Bold, strong; remember he said he wrote some tough things. Then Paul delivers a stern warning: "such persons we are also in deed when present." Not only are we consistent in our character, but Paul had refrained from disciplining the Corinthian church up until this point. He'd asked them to take care of it but he says over in 13:1-2, you have to read ahead to know where he's headed, he says "This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses." And then he says something very to the point. "I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone." In other words, here comes the judge. He says, "Buddy, when I get there you're going to find out if I'm a weakling or not," but in a right way, armed in the character of Christ.

Well, the lessons we can learn from these fleshly-minded people in Corinth, whether they be the false teachers or whether they be the fleshly people that bought into their message. When we choose to walk after the flesh, just remember what you've chosen. You've chosen the weak, sick, anemic characteristics of the flesh. Always looking on the outside and never on the heart, bases its worth on tangible things, external things, its spiritual worth, it's so insecure it has to tear others down to build itself up.

Well, today we're going to see in Paul's life another total contrast to the way he lived and the way the false teachers lived. He helps the Corinthians to realize who is and who isn't. It's like he's saying "will the real apostle please stand up." And he does in verses 12-18. Three things about him and I want to encourage you in your walk with the Lord, listen to these things carefully. I think it'll help us all if we can melt down that application to our own life.

Paul dared not commend himself

First of all Paul dared not commend himself. Verse 12, "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding." The false apostles who were deceiving Corinth were experts in commending themselves.

Paul didn't have to commend himself because Jesus was the One who commissioned him and Jesus would be the One who commends him. The phrase "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves," is more literally, "for we don't dare rank or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves." Paul said, "I'm not going to put myself in their class." Why? Because the way they commend themselves, the way they try to present themselves as apostles and convince the people, they use a standard that was totally false. He said, "I'm not going to be involved with that. I'm not going to have to get into their game. I'm not going to step into their arena." You see, the fleshly standard by which the false teachers measured themselves in their ministry was a standard that they came up with themselves. Now that's convenient. Look at the last part of verse 12, "but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding."

Now, let's go back and look at the word "commend." The word "commend," those who commend themselves, is the word sunistao. Sun means "together," histemi means to place yourself or to stand." It's to come up beside somebody and stand there. They're trying to contrast themselves to Paul. They're standing together, trying to convince the people that there is something that they're not. So here in our text that's what it basically means, they're there to commend themselves, trying to gain the acceptance of the people.

Then the next characteristic of the standard they used to try to convince the people is ridiculous. They commend themselves, they measure themselves by themselves, they compare themselves with themselves. In other words, the standard that God has, that's why Paul said, "I'm not getting over there. I'm not going to compare myself with them. I'm not going to play their little game because they've thrown away God's standard and they've come up with their own standard to use to convince the Corinthians that they truly are the apostles and Paul isn't one."

Oh my, what we can learn from this. Let me give you some illustrations and just see if you can come in with me. When I was growing up I loved basketball. I think I was born 5'2", but we had an elementary school where I went and they had an outdoor court, chain nets, and the goals were 9" high. This was awesome. I was the smallest guy in five guys and we loved playing on that 9" goal instead of a 10" goal. We'd have pick-up games. We made up our own rules. In fact, we made up our rules as we went and if you came to play with us and you had a rule book, you might as well leave it in the car. We don't play by those rules. We play by our rules. We measure ourselves with ourselves. We compare ourselves with ourselves.

Maybe a better illustration would be if you've ever played golf with me. You know, most people only play with me one time. I play by my own rules. I use a foot wedge. Do you know what a foot wedge is? That's when the ball is laying there and you see it but they don't think you've seen it and you walk over and say, "Where's my ball?" Oh, there it is out there. I use a foot wedge quite often. I take mulligans wherever I need them. A mulligan is a shot if you mess up a shot. You can have one or two mulligans the whole game. What do you mean one or two? I use one or two per hole. I played with a guy from Canada once and he said, "Play Canadian rules. Hit till it feels good." I play Canadian rules. I may tell you I got a 91, I probably got 191, I just didn't count the other 100 strokes. I made up my own rules.

In other words, I'm measuring myself by myself. I'm comparing myself to myself. We see churches that have fallen into this trap. And they base their credibility, they base what God is doing, on their own standard, not on God's standard. Particularly those in our day who love numbers. They have their own standard of how they get those numbers. There may be 1,600 seats in the auditorium and it's full. But at the same time 200 dogs, three cats and 20 people on bicycles went by at the same time. So instead of saying 1600 they added them all to get 1,823. And that's what they had on Sunday morning.

It is incredible the big churches in our country that are padding the numbers to look big. They measure themselves with themselves. They compare themselves to themselves. That's what the flesh does. The flesh comes up with its own standard. The end justifies

the means. It's like a hunter that I know that told the game warden, "I shot across the road but nobody was coming." Do you get the point? Flesh has its own false standard with which it measures everything and we saw in the false teachers, even their salvation. Even its own credibility and this is the base of how the false teachers commended themselves as apostles who supposedly they wanted the people to think had authority over the church of Corinth.

Paul said, "I'm not going to dare compare myself with them. I'm not going to get in this game of having to commend myself. In verse 12 again, "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding." They just don't know; they just don't understand.

The word "understanding" is suniemi, which means "without the ability to pull it all together and come up with the right answer. They don't know how to come up with the right results. They don't understand the things of God. Remember that's in Corinthians the first epistle that the natural mind does not understand the things of God, can't comprehend, can't grasp the things of God. The false apostles were clueless and Paul said, "I'm not going to get in this game of playing their clueless little trick here of having to commend myself.

Could he commend himself? But he knew he didn't have to do that. He wasn't into their game. So the way Paul countered them who measured themselves by themselves, compared themselves with themselves, was not to commend himself according to their standards. Paul was willing to rest in the fact that God would commend him. He was willing to rest in the fact that who he was and whose he was in Christ Jesus, and his security, his identity was in Christ, not in this, not in that, not in what they wanted to get him into that game. No way.

We don't have apostles today, but we do have the Word of God which is the authority in our life and the Spirit of God living in us who commends us. He commends us. When we season our mouth and our words with His Word, when we renew our minds with His Word, when we are dressed by the Spirit and the character of Christ, that commends us wherever we go. They don't have to ask any questions. Nobody can refute a transformed life. Nobody has any questions when they see Christ in an individual. They see the radical contrast to the way the flesh does what it does. We don't have to have numbers to commend us. We don't have to have a strategy of how to build a church; if we can't build to start with Jesus said, "I'll build My own church. You just feed it, equip it, I'll take care of building it."

It's incredible how far off center sometimes we can get. I was at a conference—and I hesitate to use myself in this because I'm not trying to commend myself, so don't hear me wrong. But I was in a conference with a speaker you would know very well, from a large, large church. And after we finished the morning sessions they asked us to come to a pastor's meeting. Most of these pastors were from churches of 100 and less. We went in and they said, "We want to ask you a question." They had already set this up. "We want to ask both of you to tell us how you built your church."

I knew immediately. I can understand what Paul is saying. I'm not going to get in that game. We did this and this and if you do it, it'll work. But the first guy went first and I was so grateful. I kept praying that the meeting would go too long and they'd have to call it off and I wouldn't have to say anything. And he walked through how they got their ushers and put certain colored jackets on them and how they had visitors meetings after the service so everybody could feel like they knew somebody and he had a list of about this long of creative ways in which they had "built" that church.

I was standing there thinking, "Oh, dear God, the rapture would be awesome right now. Come, Lord Jesus." I didn't want to get in that arena. And they turned to me just as clear and said, "Wayne, could you share how you built your church." I said, "I'm not trying to put anybody down, I don't know what to say. I'm not creative as these other people are. I can't build anything. You put a hammer in my hand and you'll definitely never put another in there. I haven't built anything. All I have done is to preach the Word of God for 18 years at my church. All I have done is to preach the fullness of Jesus Christ in people's lives and the combination of those two things, God has chosen to do a great work in our church. And yes, we're running this and we used to be running that, but listen, it's what God did. We never tried to grow the church bigger. We tried to grow the church deeper and God added the breadth." When I finished they realized the contrasting two things that we had just said, and they looked at this other pastor and they said, "What do you say to that?" And he backed up with tears in his eyes and he said, "I wouldn't touch that with a 30" pole."

After it was over with they were lined up all the way out the door to talk to me. Those young pastors said, "This has given us help. God builds His church." God has a unique way of commending you. God has a unique way of when it needs to be said, He'll bring it out, but He'll do it. You don't have to jump up and commend yourself. That's what the world does. And that ought to have been the first clue to the church of Corinth. Something's amiss. They're trying too hard to commend themselves and in the meantime they're tearing down Paul. Something is not quite right. Paul dared not commend himself based on the false measurements of this world. And he stood as a contrast.

Paul was determined to only speak within the bounds of his authority

Secondly, he answered when he was asked, but he didn't step forward to do that. Paul was determined to only speak within the bounds of his authority. Did he speak of his authority? Did he speak of his apostleship? Absolutely, but he didn't do it the way they did it. He didn't do it to commend himself. When Paul said he was an apostle, he was just simply stating a fact because God had told him he was an apostle. God had set him apart as an apostle. He was just answering questions or he was just making a statement to help in a time of need, but he stayed within the bounds of the authority that God had given to him.

Verse 13, "But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you." Now, the false teachers, who were self-proclaimed apostles, had crossed the boundary of authority—now, authority was given to Paul, not to them—by falsely commending themselves. And God's apostle, His appointed referee, the apostle Paul himself blew the whistle. It was Paul, not the false apostles, that had been given by God the ministry of being the apostle not just to the church of Corinth, but to the whole Gentile world.

Galatians 2:7-8, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter with the gospel to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles)." So God singled Peter out to the Jewish world and singled Paul out to the Gentile world as apostles with authority of an apostle. So he says in verse 13, "But we will not boast beyond our measure." The word "boast" is *kauchaomai*, which means to "speak or bring recognition to oneself or to something or to someone that you consider to be worthy."

It can be bad, but it also can be good. Paul had the right to bring recognition to himself as the God-appointed apostle of Corinth. He had the right; God had set him aside. God had appointed him. So he never had to commend himself; he never had to come alongside and persuade people that he was something that he wasn't. He didn't do this; the false apostles did, and he's not going to get in that game. You see, Paul was the rightful spiritual father of the Corinthians, and in a spiritual sense they were his legitimate spiritual children. He reminded them of that in 1 Corinthians 4:15, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."

This is what he said earlier on in Corinthians. He said, "You wouldn't even be in church if I wasn't who I say I am, because it was God through me that raised you up. The very fact that you're believers," So Paul says in verse 14, "For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ." He said, "Don't you understand? When I say I'm an apostle I'm not trying to commend myself. I'm not boasting in a wrong way. I'm just telling you what God did. You are the result of the labor of the Holy Spirit working in our lives."

But the false teachers kept on commending themselves based on their own standards. Why? They were trying to usurp the authority that God had given to Paul as an apostle over that group. They were laying claim to that which was not even their own labor. Paul said, "They don't get it. They don't understand." Paul says of himself in contrast to these false apostles, "not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors." So then Paul not only was their spiritual father, but Paul had great hope for the Corinthian church. They had repented, but they needed to continue to get to the point of understanding his authority amongst them. Why? Because much was at stake. He wanted them to become a base—you talk about missions—he wanted them to become a missionary base for him so that he could go on beyond Corinth into the unreached people groups of the world.

He says in verse 15 at the last part, "but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you." He wanted the Corinthians to grow in their faith and become mature enough to stand beside him and his team as they ventured out. Verse 16 says, "so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you." Man, this is critical that you get this together; understand the authority that is amongst you.

Now, today we don't have apostles, we have the Word of God. And when people come to the Word of God and they let it be the authority in their life, they let Jesus be the Lord of their life, then God can use them to extend the message to the unreached people groups of the world. But they can't do this if they don't understand where the authority is: who is and who isn't. They couldn't do this if they were going to let the false apostles continue to deceive them.

And what I learned from this is that it's so awesome to know that when God's in charge of your life He has greater things out there. Oh, my friend, a church has to come up under the authority of God's Word. They have to come up under the Lordship of Christ before God can use them to touch the world for His sake. And that's what Paul is telling them. Get this thing straight. They didn't have the completed Word at that time, so, "I am your authority, I am the apostle. I'm writing close to half of the New Testament. I am your authority. God's put me there and if you're willing to submit what God is putting through me to you, then God can use you for greater work." But there's no need to have to commend yourself. There's never a need to half to step outside the boundaries of the authority God has given to you.

And I share this illustration, I'm just walking on thin ice because I don't want you to hear it the wrong way, but God has a way, just like He did in that other illustration, He'll have a way of bringing out what He wants to bring out from you in such an arena that you don't have to work it up. It'll come as a result of His working in your life.

I preached one time and I shared the burden for mission. And my heart is for Eastern Europe; always has been. Eastern Europe, South Africa, and Australia are the areas God has put me in. I've been over there so many times I can't count them. And I made the statement about Eastern Europe and that we needed to have a burden and that we needed to pray that God will give us a burden to reach those precious people that had just come out of communism and now they didn't know what to do. Well, this young lady came up, and first when I saw her I thought she was attractive. You know, it's funny. People physically can be attractive, but when you start looking at their heart sometimes it just makes them ugly. And I could tell she had a chip on her shoulder bigger than Dallas.

She was about 22, just old enough to get out of the nursery. She walked up and said, "You talked about missions to Eastern Europe. I just got back from a 10 day trip. I doubt if you even know what you're talking about. You don't know how bad it is over there." I just stayed and God said to keep my mouth shut. And she started telling me that I need to know more about it. She's been there for 10 days and is going to write a book on missions in Eastern Europe. Finally she said, "Well, have you ever even thought about going over there?" Isn't it interesting how God does this? He just puts in right in front of you. I said, "I've been 12 times, three times under Ceausescu, 27 days at a time, lost 22 pounds every time I'd go over, ministered to five people that are now part of the whole leadership of the whole nation of Romania right now. We disciplined five men, taught them how to get into the Word, taught them to look out for the cults that are coming." When I finished, her face, the blood had just run completely out of it.

And I thought to myself, I can't speak about Asia. I've only been there a couple of times, but God had so led to go to Eastern Europe and I can speak about that, I can say something about that, and I kept my mouth shut until she asked me the question and I just tried to be as gracious as I could in answering her. And it dawned on her, "Wait a minute, who am I to commend myself when I'm standing there with somebody who has been 12 years in a row?"

Isn't it interesting how you don't have to worry about that, folks? Just rest in who God is, rest in the authority that He's laid on your life and when He wants something said, He'll set it up for you. You don't have to set it up for yourself. You don't have to commend yourself like the false apostles. You don't go and try to build on somebody else's experience to try to usurp their authority. You can just be who you are and when God wants you to speak, you can speak. Like Paul said, "I boast, I speak of the things. Yes, it does bring recognition I guess to me, but it's because God did it."

And so, what is the contrast here? When people have to go and tell everybody about what they've done and where they've been trying to build themselves up somewhere to give credibility, that's something wrong. There's something wrong, something's missing. The flesh has gotten involved somewhere. God's perfectly capable of defending Himself and the people that He's called.

Paul was devoted to give all the glory unto God

But finally, thirdly, and this just is the icing on the cake. Paul dared not commend himself, was determined to only speak within the bounds of his own authority where God has commissioned him, where God had led him, but thirdly, he was devoted to give all the glory unto God. Paul had no trouble at all to give all the glory, the credit. When you hear the word "glory," doxa, the root word means "recognition," proper recognition, he was totally willing to give all the proper recognition to God because he knew what only God could do in his life. He knew he wasn't worthy to be an apostle. He knew he wasn't worthy to be a child of God so he's going to give all the recognition back to God.

It was God who found him on the Damascus Road. Paul certainly wasn't going looking for God. And in verse 17 he says, "But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." I don't know if he had this passage in his mind or not, because it's used several times, but I think maybe he had Jeremiah 9:23-24 on his mind. Because in verse 23 it shows what the fleshly people boast about. But in 24 it shows what they ought to be boasting about. And it says in verse 23, "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the might man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches.'" Don't we love to boast? That's the flesh. And then he says, "'but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord."

You see, Paul knew and totally understood some things. He'd been on the other side of that. He used to boast of what he knew. He used to boast about what he could do as a Pharisee. He used to boast about what he had. He came from one of the richest families over in the Greek world. Even though he was Jewish he knew this; he was a Roman citizen. But he knew now something different. He knew that he could do nothing apart from the eternal power of God working in him. Nothing eternal could ever take place; only that divine power of God working in his life: he understood this. Boy, he understood it very well.

Paul's adequacy was only in Christ, never in himself. Second Corinthians 3:5-6, we looked at this and studied it, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant." This is why Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I'm overwhelmed. It's not me that lives; it's Christ that lives in me. Why would I ever take any of the glory? I don't know anything, I don't have anything. Anything I do I have received from God."

Paul also knew and totally understood that when it came to ministry, God set a person apart for ministry and God opens the doors

for the ministry of the individual. He experienced it all through his ministry. We studied this back in chapter 2. When it was a door opened to him in Troas. In 1 Corinthians 16:9 it was a door open in Ephesus. In Colossians 4:3 it was a door open in prison to preach the Word of God. And to sum it up, in Acts 14:27 it was in the whole Gentile world it says that God had opened doors of ministry. Paul knew that no man could close those doors.

Revelation 3:8, "What God opens no man can close." He knew and believed what every believer needs to know about: God working through them today in the 21st century. I mean, he wasn't anything about himself. He knew the wickedness of his flesh. He knew that it was getting worse every day. The only credibility that he had was what God had given to him. And he's not going to get in this game of commending himself, trying to assert an authority that he didn't have. He's not going to get in the game of measuring himself with himself or comparing himself to himself. He's not going to do that.

He's not going to speak and when he does speak about his authority, it's when God gives him that permission and he's not going to step outside the bounds and speak of somebody else's labors, because he's going to give all the glory unto God. He knew that God was the One who commends. That's beautiful, based in His standard.

"For it is not he who commends himself as approved, but he whom the Lord commends." If God did not put his seal of approval on Paul, and the work done, all that Paul had done, every bit of it—listen to me, every bit of it—would burn at the judgment seat of Christ. It's nothing more than flesh; religious, stinking flesh. But what God does, He commends. And it lasts, and Paul knew that, and that's the difference of him and the false apostles that were getting into the church. Paul dared not commend himself. He was determined to speak only within the bounds of his authority, where God had led him and what God had done. He was devoted to giving all glory to God.

I told you, and I hope that you're this way—I've talked to so many of you that are—that when I came here I prayed, "God, I want to finish well." I tell you, the thing I look forward to, folks, hope, is to stand before Him one day and Him to say, "Wayne, son," because He knows me and He knows you by name, come to me and take me into His arms and says, "Wayne, well done, good and faithful servant. You didn't take credit for yourself. You didn't try to commend yourself with stuff that doesn't matter anyway, and you gave Me the glory. You didn't preach yourself but you preached Christ Jesus."

Now, what's your heart this morning? Can you stand in the contrast to what this world is today? Have you come to that place in your life that you want to give all the glory back unto Him?