

Lesson 19: 2 Corinthians 10:5-18

1) Chapter 10:5-18

a) Verse 5: Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

i) Our warfare is not against people but against thought patterns and philosophies that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

(1) False religions are examples of such philosophies, but we must include the secular religions of humanism and naturalism in that category as well.

(2) When we engage someone in a discussion over the merits of evolution, for example, we have taken the battlefield to wield our sword against a spiritual foe. But we must wield that sword in a spirit of love because we are not wielding it against the person but against the false philosophy that has taken that person captive. Absent love, why enter the battle at all? Isn't the entire point of the battle to save that person?

ii) The Greek word translated "high thing" refers to a wall or a tower from which defenders discharge their weapons against an advancing army.

(1) Our spiritual foes today are most certainly firing at us from elevated fortifications. Some are in ivory towers casting ridicule down on the advancing army; some are in places of political or financial power; and others are high in the court of human opinion. Hollywood shoots ridicule at us from their lofty towers.

(2) But Paul tells us that we can cast them all down.

(3) Obadiah 1:3-4 The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? 4 Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

iii) "And we lead captive every thought to obey Christ."

(1) "If one text in this epistle spells out Paul's battle triumphs in spiritual warfare, it is this one."

(2) The conquest is to subdue not people but thoughts. There is no mention of bloodshed and killing on this battlefield. Rather, human theories and thought patterns are conquered for Christ and brought into conformity with his teachings. Paul's aim is not to destroy people, but rather to destroy

their specious arguments.

(3) The key word in this phrase is "obey." When people repent, there is a complete reversal in their thinking and there is a desire to obey Christ.

(4) Proverbs 23:7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.

(a) We are what we think. Our thoughts determine our actions. Thoughts are at the root of sin and disobedience. If we want to change mankind or change ourselves we must begin with how we think and what we think about.

(b) Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

(5) Satan's battleground is the mind.

(a) 2 Corinthians 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

(b) 2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

(c) 2 Corinthians 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. [The word translated "devices" in that verse is the same word translated "thought" in verse 5.]

(6) Let's consider a concrete example -- abortion.

(a) What should we do about that issue? Vote in the right person? Picket the clinics and shout at the abortionists and their clients? Bomb the clinics? To quote Paul, **God forbid!** The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

(b) If we want to do anything about abortion we must go to the root cause - - the thinking that causes people to have abortions. The naturalism that devalues life. The humanism that denies mankind is created in the image of God. The narcissism that says I am all that matters and I can do with my body what I please.

(c) As long as those false philosophies flourish, abortion will continue regardless of what nine robed justices have to say about it.

b) Verse 6: And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your

obedience is fulfilled.

- i) Paul is planning to punish those who have wrought such havoc in the church through their disobedience, but he does not intend to do it alone. The congregation as a whole will play a part when their own obedience is fulfilled.
 - ii) The matter of false teachers touches every member of a congregation, and all must take part in seeing that it is eradicated.
 - iii) As we saw in Titus, the elders bear a special responsibility in that regard, but they cannot do it alone anymore than Paul was planning to do it alone.
 - iv) How would their obedience be fulfilled? How would they recognize the false apostles, and then having done so what would cause them to do something about the problem? They needed two things: knowledge and zeal.
 - v) In Romans 10:2 Paul spoke about those who have zeal but not according to knowledge. We can use that verse to categorize Christians into four groups.
 - (1) Some have neither zeal nor knowledge. This group follows the teachings of Christ in so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.
 - (2) Others have knowledge but no zeal. They are the first to detect error, but also the first to bolt from the building while the final "Amen" is still sounding. Mark Twain may have had someone from this group in mind when he once described a person as "a solemn, unsmiling, sanctimonious old iceberg who looked like he was waiting for a vacancy on the Trinity."
 - (3) Others have zeal but no knowledge. They would be happy to fight error if they could only detect it!
 - (4) The remainder have both zeal and knowledge -- as this is how the Corinthians would be classified once their obedience was fulfilled. This is the group that can detect error and that has the zeal for God to do something about it --- and this the group we must all be in!
- c) Verse 7: Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.**
- i) Verse 7 could be translated to have Paul say "You are looking only on the surface of things."
 - (1) If so, Paul would again be saying that they see only things that are superficial and temporary (5:12).
 - (2) Because externals easily impress them, they are taken in by ostentation

and swagger. The false apostles who serve the master of disguise, Satan, have dazzled and bamboozled them.

ii) Verse 7 could, however, be rendered as an imperative so that Paul would be saying, "Look at what is before your eyes."

(1) In every other occurrence of this verb in Paul's letters it is an imperative.

(2) The problem is that they looked at Paul when he was present with them and came to the wrong conclusion about him.

(3) Paul demands that the Corinthians reconsider the evidence about his status as an apostle of Christ.

(4) The phrase "If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again" implies that they have neglected a key piece of evidence.

iii) What does "to be of Christ" mean?

(1) It could refer simply to being a Christian, but it is unlikely that the Corinthians doubt that Paul is a Christian and that Paul needs to reestablish that fact.

(2) It could refer to being a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry, but Paul could not make this claim.

(3) A more likely option is that it has something to do with a special relationship to Christ that bestows some kind of distinctive authority as Christ's apostle. The reference to his boasting in his authority in the next verse would confirm this view.

(4) It could also refer to having the power of Christ working in or speaking through the individual and would parallel the statement in 13:3, "proof that Christ is speaking in me." They apparently want more proof that Christ speaks through him (13:4) since he is so rhetorically subpar.

iv) It seems clear that at least some of Paul's opponents asserted that he did not belong to Christ in the same way as they did.

(1) Perhaps they were still casting up at him the fact that once he had been a persecutor of the Church.

(2) Perhaps they claimed special knowledge. Perhaps they claimed a special holiness.

(3) In any event they looked down on Paul and glorified themselves and their

own relationship to Christ.

- v) Paul might have appeared weak in the flesh, but those with spiritual perception could see beneath the surface.

- (1) Paul is saying: "Look at the evidence before your very eyes but look at it with spiritual perception so that you can see beneath the surface. If anyone doubts that I am Christ's, then how did it happen that this church was founded through my preaching? Your existence as Christ's church is the primary evidence that I am Christ's servant and that the Spirit of Christ works powerfully through me."

d) Verse 8: For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

- i) The issue of boasting that is so prominent in these final chapters first surfaces in this verse.

- (1) Paul seems to be defending himself against the charge that he inappropriately boasted of his authority. Presumably, someone took issue with his authoritative demands in the previous letter of frank criticism.

- ii) The rivals are trying to dislodge Paul from his rightful role by challenging his authority and belittling his adequacy as a speaker.

- (1) In these chapters, the struggle was "with rhetorically trained opponents for the support of his rhetorically fastidious converts."

- (2) Paul's deficiency in this regard caused them to disparage any claim he made to authority over them as vain boasting that he could not justify.

- iii) But Paul did not boast excessively because his boasting was not beyond limits but according to the field assigned him by God.

- (1) He did not boast in the labors of others but in his own (10:15), and his boasting was therefore in the Lord (10:17).

- (2) Consequently, he defends his authority as something given to him by God; and he will not be put to shame for speaking of it.

- (3) Shame comes when one exceeds one's social boundaries; and he certainly has not exceeded his, as he will argue in 10:12-18.

- (4) Paul has in view Christ's judgment seat (5:10): "It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor 4:4). He will not be condemned or dishonored by Christ for

exercising the authority God gave to him.

- iv) Paul insists that this authority, expressed in his frank criticism, is not for destroying them but for building them up.
 - (1) His task is not to attack and to tear down others. God called him to found and build up congregations.
 - (2) He was not chosen to be a divine disciplinarian or inquisitor, smelling out heresy and dishing out punishment.
 - (3) He will watch over them and discipline them when necessary, but it is for their good.
 - (4) They should not perceive the frank criticism found in his letters to be some kind of verbal wrecking ball aimed their way to level them to the ground.
 - (5) He exercised his authority in his letters to build them up not to build himself up.
 - (6) Paul was not engaged in a witch hunt, and that is a lesson for us today as well. If we ever find ourselves engaged in a "witch hunt" then we are certainly not following the example of Christ or of his apostle, Paul.
- v) Paul's goal is to disassociate himself from the authoritarian way the 'false apostles' conducted themselves.
 - (1) Paul does not seek to influence the members by improper means, boast to them of his preeminence, dazzle the church with his rhetoric, or manipulate and control his converts.
 - (2) The contrast was stark between Paul and the swaggering, pompous, manipulative false apostles.
- e) **Verses 9-10 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. 10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.**
 - i) The definite article in front of "letters" indicates that Paul has specific letters in mind.
 - (1) If the weighty and powerful letters include the "severe letter," which seems likely, then that severe letter could not be Chapters 10-13 as some have argued.
 - ii) Some versions translate these verses as saying that "some say" (plural) his letters do not match his presence, but the verb is third person singular and

means "someone is saying." Paul may be alluding to the ringleader of the opposition.

iii) Paul's quotation of what persons are saying about his letters attests that even his opponents recognize that they have rhetorical power. They could not deny that Paul was powerful writer.

(1) What they called into question was his physical presence and his speaking ability. He seemed to make an unfavorable impression as one who was physically unpresentable and less than articulate.

(2) An unpolished and halting oral performance would have given the impression that he was uneducated.

(3) Some in the church would have liked him to be more like the golden-tongued orators who were lionized in Corinth.

(4) His opponents fastened on to this weakness to advance their bid for influence over the church.

iv) What was unimpressive about Paul?

(1) The key problem seems to have been his speech. The ancient world placed a premium on rhetorical skills.

(2) "In Hellenistic society, the practice and expectations of rhetorical eloquence were pervasive. Not only were political leaders expected to speak persuasively and eloquently, but so also those who claimed authority in philosophy and religion. Among such people there was great competition, and success depended upon one's ability to express the power of the divine in his or her performance-not only through miracles, but also through rhetorical performances."

(3) Paul apparently did not fit the bill when it came to these qualities.

v) We should be careful, however, not to interpret this statement in light of the widely known account of Paul's physical description from the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which dates to around A.D. 200.

(1) It describes Paul as "small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man and now he had the face of an angel."

(2) We may see ugliness in parts of that description (Barclay says, "It is so unflattering that it may well be true!"), but the ancients might well have had

the opposite view.

- (3) This apocryphal description of Paul probably derives from contemporary sources depicting the ideal political leader where meeting eyebrows were a sign of beauty, a hooked nose a sign of royalty, and small stature a sign of quickness.
 - (4) We have no reliable witness to Paul's physical appearance and should avoid speculations about it.
- vi) Paul's allusions to the Corinthians' dissatisfaction with his work at a trade suggest that this may have been a contributing factor behind their disdain for his public face.
- (1) Lucian contrasts the "sublime words" and "dignified appearance" of truly great teachers with the filthy clothes and unkempt appearance of the craftsman who does not pursue eloquence or learning, but who clutches his tools, "back bent over his work ... altogether demeaned."
 - (2) You almost get the impression that the church at Corinth was full of snobs!
- f) **Verse 11: Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.**
- i) Paul does not need to defend the power of his letters since they recognize their effectiveness, but he does need to convince them that he can be no less effective when present as he is in his letters.
 - ii) He continues to prepare for his future visit by contending that there is no discrepancy between what he writes and what he does.
 - iii) So far he has spared the rod because he is a loving father not a hanging judge.
 - (1) Even now he hopes that this letter will reinforce their repentance and lay the groundwork for a peaceful visit.
 - (2) They do not need an arrogant, overbearing preacher throwing his apostolic weight around. There were plenty of such characters in Corinth already.
 - (3) They need to see instead the example of Christ. Paul first preached to them the gospel in weakness and in fear and much trembling (1 Cor 2:2), and he continues to minister to them in this way.
 - iv) Striking terror in the hearts of his readers (10:9) does not ultimately build then

up.

- (1) It might lead to worldly sorrow, but worldly sorrow leads only to death (7:10).
- (2) Paul wants to create in them a "godly sorrow" (7:9), and berating people rarely creates deep converts and is liable to stunt any Christian growth.
- (3) He does not want to bring them down but to build them up. He wants them to understand that he is a true minister of Christ.
- (4) He also wants them to recognize his arrogant, boastful, domineering rivals for what they are --- not ministers of Christ, but minions of Satan.

g) Verse 12: For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

- i) In verses 12-18, Paul establishes the proper ground rules for boasting. He also tells us what constitutes valid commendation.
 - (1) In the process he also turns his attention to the rivals who have invaded his ministry field and boasted inappropriately over the fruits of his labors.
 - (2) In their scheme to undermine Paul's influence in Corinth and promote their own, his rivals have accused him of having nerve in his letters but no boldness in person (10:10). Paul responds to this criticism with wry sarcasm that he lacks the nerve to classify or compare himself with those who commend themselves.
- ii) The crux of the matter is that they have commended themselves while denigrating Paul's authority.
 - (1) How are the Corinthians to validate what is true or false when faced with competing claims?
 - (2) Paul offers two criteria to evaluate the boisterous claims of his rivals: boasting within limits and commendation from the Lord.
 - (3) Paul does not try to assert his superiority over others by comparing himself with them. He measures himself only by what God does in him.
 - (4) Paul does not crow over his own achievements or strut about in a grand procession of one. He does not boast about his personal merit because he knows that his power is not his, it is God's (10:3-6).

- iii)** In the ancient world "comparison" was a common "rhetorical exercise practiced in schools," and comparing oneself with other teachers was a common tactic for a teacher to attract students and their fees.
- (1)** In the political arena, vicious smear tactics against rivals was common.
 - (2)** In the cutthroat competition for pupils, one had to advertise oneself publicly with audacious praise while impugning the qualities of other contenders for honor.
 - (3)** People were constantly vying with others to attain elusive glory and engaged in a constant game of one-upmanship.
 - (4)** Self-boasting was considered an act of honor. Boasting about one's status and achievements and comparing oneself favorably against others were routine tactics for those who aimed at gaining a following for themselves.
 - (5)** In a "comparison" one would amplify one's good deeds and another's bad deeds to show superiority.
 - (6)** Such topics as a person's race, upbringing, education, status, physique, pursuits, and positions held were all fair game in sizing up their relative merits and standing.
 - (7)** It was into this setting that Paul first proclaimed the gospel! No wonder he came to them in fear and trembling! Yet look what he accomplished by proclaiming the simplicity of the gospel.
 - (8)** These false apostles in the church had likely come straight from the street corners of Corinth, following the money as they now peddled the word of God. Their only rival was the absent apostle Paul, and so they turned their guns in his direction.
- iv)** Paul does not respond as they would have expected. Instead, he disparages their boasting with mock self-deprecation.
- (1)** Speaking tongue in cheek in this way also raises the question whether his rivals are comparable to him at all. No comparison can be made where no similarity exists.
 - (2)** In all their boasting they presume to be Paul's equal, but in his view they are false apostles. If he is going to stoop to compare himself with them, it will be only as a fool.
 - (3)** They claim to be in a different league than Paul; and Paul would readily

agree -- they are in league with Satan.

- (4) They may have won status in the eyes of some Corinthians with their boastfulness, but they have won God's judgment in the process.
 - (5) They tried to dismiss Paul, but 2000 years later who are we talking about? And whose names have been lost in obscurity?
- v) Paul also challenges their criteria: "They have set themselves up as the measure of their ministry."
- (1) They judged themselves and Paul according to their commanding presence, concrete displays of power and authority, impressive speech, worthiness to accept full compensation, Jewish pedigree, endurance of hardships, and mystical visions.
 - (2) According to these criteria, they passed with flying colors and Paul failed in their eyes.
 - (3) But Paul would insist that they not only have usurped God's role as the one who appraises ministry, but they have used false criteria and ignored the only measure that counts -- what God has done in and through them.
- vi) The statement "they are not wise" is an understatement. In Chapter 11 he will be more direct: they are fools who deceive themselves and others.
- vii) Ironically Paul says that he would never dream of comparing himself with those who are forever giving themselves testimonials, and then, with unerring precision, he puts his finger on the spot.
- (1) They can give themselves testimonials only because their one standard of measurement is themselves and their one standard of comparison is with one another.
 - (2) **Barclay:** It is easy enough to say, "I am as good as the next man," and no doubt it is true. But the point is, are we as good as Jesus Christ? He is our true rod of measurement and our proper standard of comparison and when we measure ourselves by him there is no room left for pride. "Self-praise," says Paul, "is no honor." It is not his own but Christ's "Well done!" for which a man must seek.
- h) **Verses 13-15a: But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. 14 For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: 15 Not boasting of things**

without our measure, that is, of other men's labours;

i) Verse 13 reads literally "according to the measure of the canon which measure God assigned to us." It is translated in some versions as "the field God has assigned us."

(1) A "canon" was a measuring rod, authoritative standard, or norm; but it could also apply to a measured field or jurisdiction. It is probably best to retain the meaning "standard of judgment" or "norm."

(2) The proper norm for evaluating Paul's claims of authority is that he was the founder of that church.

(3) He argues that Corinth belongs to the sphere assigned him by God by virtue of the fact that he got there first and God blessed his work with growth.

(4) His complaint with the rivals is not simply that they have wrongfully invaded turf assigned to him but that they tried to discredit his influence and take credit for what God had done through him.

(5) Paul counters their criticism of him by saying that he does not "meddle in other people's territory and then compare our performance with theirs."

ii) What follows in verses 14-15a basically repeats what Paul says in verse 13 but takes it a step further by making it more specific.

(1) Paul does not overextend himself because he was the first to come to them with the gospel (10:14).

(2) He does not boast beyond measure because he does not boast in the labors of others (10:15a).

i) Verses 15b-16: but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, 16 To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

i) Paul does not boast in another's labors because he does not work in fields already tilled by others.

(1) He expresses his sensitivity about working where others have already established churches in Romans 15:20, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

ii) His opponents, however, have no qualms about building on another's

foundation or claiming an equal, if not greater authority over a congregation that they did not found.

(1) They have conferred no benefits on the Corinthians and have done nothing to expand the field of God's work.

(2) This is hardly surprising. **Heretics always make inroads among believers, not unbelievers.**

iii) Even now Paul has set his sights on new areas of mission.

(1) The text is difficult and reads literally "but having hope [that] as your faith increases to be magnified among you [or by you] according to our canon for abundance."

(2) The NIV translation suggests that Paul wants his work to expand among them. But he states in 10:16 that his goal is to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.

(3) In Romans 15:24 we learn that he intends to go to Rome and then on to Spain.

(4) Clearly, he wants to settle the problems with the Corinthians so that he can concentrate on missionary endeavors elsewhere with their support.

(5) If Paul constantly has to be putting out back fires, he cannot move on to new work.

(6) But he expresses confidence that the Corinthians' faith will grow. This will allow his area of activity to expand, not in Corinth, but in territory beyond them.

(7) Trouble in the church always causes us to look inward rather than outward. It always hurts the work of the church.

(8) **Barclay:** Paul was haunted by the regions beyond. He never saw a ship riding at anchor or moored to the quay but he wished to board her and carry the good news to the regions beyond. He never saw a range of hills blue in the distance but he wished to cross it and to carry the story of Christ to the regions beyond. ... The man who loves Christ will always be haunted by the thought of the millions who have never known the Christ who means so much to him.

j) **Verses 17-18: But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. 18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.**

i) For the second time in his correspondence with the Corinthians Paul alludes

to Jeremiah 9:23-24, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

- (1)** Paul boasts in the Lord, whose commendation is the only one that counts.
 - (2)** This boast in the Lord has nothing to do with Paul's own pedigree or prowess. It has to do with what the Lord has accomplished through him.
 - (3)** Artificial comparisons with others based on human criteria hardly compare with the work that Christ has done in and through him.
 - (4)** His boasting is not inappropriate because it is based on what God has done in his life.
 - (5)** The results of his mission work are so self-evident that he need not trumpet his commendation as his rivals do.
 - (6)** That is why he says that the Corinthians should be commending him (12:11); they are his letter of commendation, to be known and read by all (3:2).
- ii)** The false apostles no doubt sought commendation from others by making them feel good about themselves. As with the false prophets of the Old Testament, they said "Peace, Peace" when there was no peace. "We are all so wonderful, and so spiritual, and so good, and so knowledgeable. The only person standing in our way is that awful apostle Paul, who writes those mean letters and is so judgmental."
- iii)** All human boasting is groundless because it is based on appearances, not reality.
- (1)** It is also temporary. When mortals die, their praise usually dies with them. By contrast, the Lord's glory is eternal.
 - (2)** The Lord's scrutiny is also far more exacting. Paul knows that he might preach to others and find himself disqualified as unapproved by God (1 Cor 9:27).
 - (3)** He constantly examines himself and urges the Corinthians to do the same (13:5).
 - (4)** If they fall under the sway of chronic boasters, who self-assuredly commend themselves, they are liable to ignore God's measures and find themselves disqualified.
 - (5)** We may be in every book of Who's Who known to mankind, but the Book of Life is the only Who's Who book that counts, and it lists those who are

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