

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHARACTER IS QUESTIONED

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

Beginning in this chapter, the tone of Paul's letter completely changes. Thus far, it was as if all the problems he had encountered with Corinth were solved. All difficulties were worked out. Even in his exhortation to collect the offering for Jerusalem, Paul makes it clear his confidence in the Corinthians had not waned the least bit.

Now things are different. In fact, Paul's tone is so contrary to the first nine chapters, some scholars have suggested chapters 10-13 represent another letter entirely which scribes "attached" as an addendum to the first nine chapters. However, other than a very subjective "hunch" no real evidence exists to substantiate such a claim. Simply put, whether we fully understand it or not, Paul had good reason to change his tone at this point in his letter to Corinth.

Evidently, there was an influential group at Corinth who not only held contempt toward Paul but also who were swaying many to embrace fallacious views concerning sound Christian doctrine. The vicious minority hurled one charge after another toward Paul and his companions. And, for the sake of the church's health, Paul faced their insults head-on.

As we begin our study of 2 Corinthians 10, let's follow the outline below:

- I. Paul's Approach to the Conflict: a Soldier (vv. 1-6)**
- II. Paul's Appearance for the Conflict: a Builder (vv. 7-11)**
- III. Paul's Achievements in the Conflict: a Pioneer (vv. 12-18)**

I. Paul's Approach to the Conflict: a Soldier (vv. 1-6)

Paul begins his duel with his challengers by identifying his service as a Kingdom soldier in Christ's army. He writes, "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you: But I beseech *you*, that I may not be bold when I *am* present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) 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; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

Evidently, Paul's critics hurled toward him a charge of hypocrisy, alleging he was weak in personal appearance but brave when he wrote letters from a safe distance. In other words, they were saying his bark was far worse than his bite! However, as Paul makes clear, the Corinthians did not understand the nature of spiritual warfare. Hence, he deemed it necessary to offer some elementary instructions. We are glad he did, for Paul reveals basic truths necessary for every child to God to understand spiritual warfare.

First, Paul defines the war we wage. The war Paul fought along with every believer in Corinth (and everywhere else) was not a war with one another. The divisions the Corinthians experienced were but distractions from the real battle we face. The war we fight is not "after the flesh." Could the Corinthians not perceive this? Can we not perceive this today? When Christians fight one another, they are not fighting God's battle but their own.

According to Paul, the Christian life is the life of a soldier. Elsewhere Paul affirmed, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a



soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4). Life is not a playground as some suppose. Instead, life is a battleground. Pleasure is the goal on the playground. But on the battleground, victory is the goal.

Since we are not players, but warriors, we walk not in the flesh but in the spirit. Understand: it is true we live life like everybody else. Christians work, eat, laugh, attend school rallies, and pay doctor bills like every other person. Nevertheless, we face battles in those arenas like no other person. Indeed in each of these arenas, Christians face “strongholds.” Strongholds are those structures where sin and evil are entrenched. And the believer must challenge each and every stronghold in life.

Reflection Connection

As you reflect on your everyday walk with the Lord, how does the image of soldier fit into your life’s pattern? Explain.

Second, Paul describes the weapons we wield. Since we do not walk according to the flesh, nor war according to the flesh, it should not surprise us if we do not wield weapons of the flesh. Our weapons are not “carnal” but, “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” We cannot win spiritual battles with fleshly weapons. Worldly methods must forever be abandoned. Indeed it is useless to use human strength against spiritual forces.

What weapons are worthy for the spiritual war we wage? While Paul is not particularly detailed concerning our battle array in this passage, we find him most pedantic in another (Eph. 6:10-18).

Most significantly, for our purposes here, is Paul’s identification of our offensive weapon. He writes, “And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Our weapon, Paul affirms, is unequivocally the Word of God. If we recall our Lord’s encounter with the prince of this world, Scripture was His preferred weapon (Matt. 4:4). Four times Jesus responded to Satan’s temptation, “It is written”!

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In addition, Paul mentions another offensive weapon at the believer’s disposal—*prayer* (Eph. 6:18). The Word of God coupled together with prayer to God constitutes the Christian’s arsenal in doing Kingdom battle with the devil’s soldiers. Are these two weapons enough? Paul is confident that prayer and the Word of God succeeds in “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” and will finally bring into captivity, “every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Yes! Our weapons are sufficient to procure victory on the battlefield with the enemy. We conquer the enemy and take captives for the glory of our King.

II. Paul’s Appearance for the Conflict: a Builder (vv. 7-11)

Apparently, some of the Corinthians were unimpressed with Paul’s personal appearance. Paul writes, “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. 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: That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible. 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.” (2 Cor. 10:7-11).

The Bible rarely focuses on the personal appearances of its characters. One tradition says Paul was very short, bald-headed, bow-legged, and sported a big, hooked nose. Hardly flattering one may suppose. However, while Samuel looked for a beautiful specimen to fill Israel’s throne, God was spying out a worthy heart (1 Sam. 16:7). The Corinthians were about to learn the very same lesson about Paul as did Samuel about David.

Some people wrongly assume one must be personally attractive to be effective for the Lord. Often we seek out celebrities who have Hollywood’s eye to offer testimony for Christ when we should be seeking a person with a godly walk. Paul’s point is, we should not judge by outward appearances. Instead we must use spiritual judgment.

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Reflection Connection

Reflect on several of the most common television ministries. Do you think there is an unhealthy focus on physical beauty in the programming of the shows? Why or why not?

The Corinthians mistakenly assumed since his “bodily presence” was “weak” and his speech “contemptible” therefore Paul was a coward for writing such bold letters while he was a safe distance from his accusers. Paul’s response to their mistake was twofold.

First, the Corinthians failed to understand our true *identity* in Christ (v. 7). “We are Christ’s,” Paul thundered! Plainly put, Paul said something like, “I know I’m not much to look at; but I belong to Jesus.” Personal appearances are not what matters most. The fundamental question is, do we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior?

What gives us our self-worth? Is it our physical beauty? Our financial success? Our educated minds? If we are saved, it does not matter if we have short stature, bowed-legs, hooked noses or a thousand other idiosyncrasies society deems defects. We belong to Jesus Christ. Our identity is special.

Second, the Corinthians did not understand the Christian’s true *authority* in Christ (v. 8). Our authority, Paul insists, is for edification, not destruction. Anyone can tear down. But that is not what the Christian battle is about. Rather tearing down is what fleshly battles are about. It takes a real builder to do constructive work. In addition, as we noted before, physical beauty has nothing to do with the success of a builder. Do homeowners who are searching for a carpenter to build an addition to their house choose a carpenter based upon his physical appearance? Again, the authority we possess is in no way connected to our appearance. What really counts is whether we are working—building—for Jesus Christ.



III. Paul's Achievements in the Conflict: a Pioneer (vv. 12-18)

Paul began with the image of a soldier and moved from it to the image of a builder. Now Paul focuses on the discovery of a pioneer, "Not boasting of things without *our* measure, *that is*, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, 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. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. 10:15-18).

Paul chastised the Corinthians for their lack of understanding the commission the Apostles had been given. Corinth was God's choice for Paul to preach. Before he arrived, Jesus was unknown. In essence, Corinth had been a pioneer effort to spread the Gospel only a few short years ago. The Corinthians had forgotten their roots.

Paul's apostolic mission included the role of pioneer. In other words, 'pioneer missions' was going into an area having never heard the Gospel and proclaiming the Gospel there. That is what Paul meant when he reminded them about preaching the Gospel, "in the *regions* beyond you." Paul never saw a ship he did not want to board in order to preach the Gospel to the passengers. He was always looking for lands to preach the Gospel.

Our vision today can be no less than world saturation with the Gospel of Christ.

Reflection Connection

Are you confident you are where God wants you to be, doing what God wants you to do? Explain.

The Lord Jesus gave the church His commission to reach the world with His Gospel (Matt. 28:19-20). Hence, there are always regions beyond, regions which remain untouched with the Gospel. Our vision today can be no less than world saturation with the Gospel of Christ. Paul boldly asserted, "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all those that believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). How burdened is your heart to reach "regions beyond you"? How passionate is your church to reach "regions beyond" them?

Second, Paul corrected the Corinthians because they failed to understand the apostolic *commendation* (vv. 12, 18). Adding to the Corinthians' misunderstanding about apostolic mission was their notable lack of perceiving a suitable standard by which to discern success. They unfortunately possessed a habit of judging themselves in light of one another rather than alongside Jesus Christ. God never judges us by looking at our peers. Instead He judges us by what really counts: are we living obedient lives, lives directed by His specific directions to us? The only way we will be "approved" is living by His standards, not ours.



Golden Greek Nugget

Paul insists our battle is not fleshly but spiritual. Hence, we have spiritual weapons, one purpose of which is bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (v. 5). The phrase "bringing into captivity" is one word in the Greek and literally means "to take captive," "to take prisoner." The term was commonly used of those captured as prisoners of war. Paul's meaning is clear: our goal in spiritual warfare is to capture every enemy of God's Kingdom and parade them before the King Himself as the defeated foes they remain.

Wrap Up

The last thing Paul wanted was to engage the minority at Corinth. Yet for the church's sake, he faced his opponents head-on. More importantly, he was able to communicate to them and the entire congregation his battle was not with the conflicting minority. Instead his real battle was a spiritual one. He was a soldier in God's army, armed to take down strongholds and capture every rival thought against God. Paul's was a spiritual battle. So is ours.

