

“Strategies When Under Attack”

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

If I were to write a book with the title “Sticks and Stones May Break Your Bones But Names Will Never Hurt You”, the subtitle would be ‘And other lies we were told growing up.’

Verbal arrows hurt far deeper and can stay with us much longer than physical injuries. God has designed our bodies to heal when breaks are corrected and cuts are stitched up. So why didn’t He design our minds to heal the same way? Our mind is who we are. Our soul. What we think of ourselves and, sadly what we’ve let others’ words shape what we think of ourselves.

And coming to faith in Christ increases the risk of being hurt, not reduces it. The world is threatened by different, by people who believe in God and faith in Jesus and that we can know we have hope after death. They are threatened by our morality, by our convictions about God and truth and right and wrong. In order to protect themselves they lash out at us even when we haven’t attacked them.

And sometimes we sadly lash back, an inappropriate response from the child of God. How then do we respond when attacked? Does God’s Word help us in this area? Absolutely. Do we want to hear it and obey it? That’s the dilemma we find ourselves in as we have this new nature by the Spirit indwelling us and still wrestle with the old sinful nature that wants to lash back when we’re hurt. God has a better way of course. We’re going to learn from one of God’s human dart boards, the apostle Paul, who basically wrote 2 Corinthians to respond to those who maligned his apostleship, his teaching and even his appearance! What can Paul teach us how to respond to those who malign us?

When we come to 2 Corinthians we need to be aware that Paul has already visited and corresponded with the Corinthians on many issues. He had planned to see them at one time but that didn’t pan out and some were offended so he wrote 1 Corinthians explaining why he hadn’t come and to address some theological concerns they had. And direct them as to what they should do with the sexual offender. Their punishment is unduly harsh, Paul expresses his disappointment, which opens a door for his critics to sneak in and spread lies about Paul. Now he writes 2 Corinthians to smooth over the harsh feelings and respond to the attacks against his character, particularly in Ch.’s 10-11. The sad part is some of these attacks come from believers and some from unbelievers. Even against one another we need to learn how to respond to verbal and written attacks. What does Paul do?

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ²I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

Here Paul addresses one of the criticisms against him. Some had said Paul is two-faced; he writes bold letters but he’s a wimp when he shows up. What a hypocrite!’ But Paul begins by

Stand Firm in Your Identity in Christ **(10:1-2)**

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.

Paul over-emphasizes his personal desire to unite with the Corinthians in Christ. Literally, 'Myself, I, Paul' and appeal is not a command but an invitation. I'm appealing to you as Jesus would; in meekness and humility. As an apostle he could use his authority to tell them to stop listening to the lies others have made against him. Instead, he acts like Jesus. We hear Jesus' words echoed in Paul's appeal.

'Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth'

'Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden for I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you for I am gentle and humble in heart for you will find rest for your souls.'

While Paul will make a defense of his apostleship and his identity with Christ, it is Jesus Paul wants them to see not himself. So, Paul models a great perspective we need to have when under attack

Let Christ be seen through you (v.1)

'Yes, others claim I am two faced or a hypocrite, supposedly harsh in my letters and soft when face to face, but seriously I want to show you how Jesus makes the difference when we allow Him to by His Spirit.'

Paul knows who he is in Christ. He's saved by faith in what Jesus has done. It is Jesus who now lives in and through him. Nothing or no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ. I am Christ's; He will take my burdens and be my strength and shield against the enemy.

'But Paul, don't you hear what people are saying about you?' "Yes, I do but they don't know me like Jesus does. That's not what Jesus says about me so why should I let it define me? I am His child. I am totally forgiven. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. And I'm not going to let what sinful people say about me define me but what Jesus says about me defines me. So, you can accuse me of being two-faced and inconsistent but Jesus and myself know that's not true.

Paul and the Corinthians have had some misunder-standings along the way. But Paul refuses to divide them. He wants to clear all this up so they can grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus together. He has more he wants to teach them. So, he continues;

² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

Some of Paul's critics were Jewish legalists who hounded him wherever he went. These are the 'some people' whom he anticipates needing to be bold against because they not only oppose Paul but they oppose the gospel of grace through Jesus. Either way Paul is

Be confident in God's power (v.2)

Not his own knowledge or self-confidence. The word for 'bold' means 'confidence, what you've put your trust in.' Paul's boldness isn't because that's his personality, it's because he trusts that in God's power and through God's Word the opponents will be silenced and Lord-willing those believers who they've caused to doubt Paul's integrity, will see his quiet confidence in God and not boldness in his own strength; according to the flesh. The temptation to defend ourselves by human reason or 'according to the flesh' arguments is always there. But Paul refuses to go there. Instead, he relies on who He is in Jesus and trusts the power of God will work through him; even if its only to give him a

calm heart as he responds to his accusers.

So instead of relying on his intellectual background, his spiritual knowledge or his strong personality, Paul chooses a better way.

He is Strong in Weaknesses **(2 Cor. 10:3-6)**

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Yes, Paul says, I live in the same world as you do. And I see what people say and do on Facebook but I'm not going there. I could – I could even use my knowledge to embarrass you; and oh, have I ever got some sharp one-liners to insult you with; but that would be me responding, not God. That's not how Jesus taught us to respond.' So, Paul chooses

Use God's weapons (vv.3-4)

Like what? Let's look at some Paul has already used.

^{6:3} We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴ Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Paul's credentials were suffering. He commends his hardships, his being persecuted, his kindness and patience as a response to harsh treatments. His consistent attitude in good reports and bad. His joyful attitude in plenty or in want. What are some other ways he uses what God is doing through them as his defense?

⁷ We live by faith, not by sight.' (2 Cor. 5:7)

Paul trusted God for everything. He wanted to see God work around him so he lived by faith not necessarily in what he saw or could touch.

^{12:19} Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.

Paul was accused of being harsh. Have we built you up or tore you down? Even when confronting sin; never easy to do; we did that to help you mature and grow in Christ. He also said in 1 Cor. 1:23-25,

²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Paul says what did we share with you? Our own theories? No, the gospel. Why? Because we wanted to see what God would do through His message not how we could convince you with our own arguments. God changes lives through His message. And one more example of how Paul used God's power and not his own in Rom. 12:17-21,

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

These are the kinds of weapons we are to respond with when attacked by the enemy. We don't retaliate back; we are willing to suffer for the gospel; we're content with what God has provided for us; we proactively share God's message by faith believing that our witness and His Word can change lives. Our weakness is God's strength to change lives.

What happens when we respond this way?

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Paul employs military language. "Pretensions" or fortresses/strongholds are the things people believe that they trust in and are confident in. But the gospel and the non-retaliatory response lifestyle of the believer disarms those strongholds and arguments because we're not reacting like the world does. When a believer trust Christ and responds as Jesus would, sharing the gospel, putting holes in their self-confident arguments, we eventual demolish the very things these people are trusting in. The weapons of God

Which destroy human reasoning (v.5; 2:14-17)

So, when people falsely accuse us, say things about us that re untrue; label us with erroneous and hurtful labels, our best response is trusting God's weapons of response. God's weapons disarm God's opponents.

These responses counter the false accusations and labels with what God says and in that way we take captive those untruths and don't allow them to do the damage they intend. And we do this all

Through the Word of God (v.6)

Paul said in Eph. 6:17 that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. When we use God's Word to counter the false accusations of our detractors, we capture those words and don't let them take root in our minds. We stop them and say 'that's not what God says'.

This is the 'things above' perspective that we need to have when attacked or falsely labelled. We respond gracefully not harshly. We are slow to speak, not quick with the sharp witty insults. Our offense is our obedient, walk by faith lifestyle, our gospel presentation and willingness to suffer for Christ. We put on Jesus and take off our sinful nature that we were reminded of back in Col. 3.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ... you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice,

slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator ...

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Paul let his faith and testimony speak for him. He let God's Word respond to the negative words about him and about God and his people to be his defense. The Corinthians were not a very mature church. They allowed these Jewish leaders to damage Paul's testimony; they spoke ill of Paul when they should have known better.

We can all be guilty of harming one another. None of us are perfect. But we each need to put on Christ and let Christ live through us. If we've been mistreated, be mature, love back, show grace and kindness and let God deal with it in His way. We are to grow in grace and knowledge. The more we know the more grace should show.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message, please contact us at olivet@rideau.net