

“Godly Fighting”

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

If we’ve been reading or watching any news lately, we’re aware of election campaigns happening south of us. And our own Parliament has returned to work after a long Christmas break. Sadly we’ve seen it all before; mudslinging, character assassinations, witch hunting – they look for anything they can to undermine the character of the leader so that their message won’t be heard.

Of course this isn’t limited to the political realm but sadly is a major form of attack against followers of Jesus. When a believer says something inappropriate or even speaks truth, haters of Christians pounce all over them, exaggerate their words and make hyperbolic accusations that most people blindly listen to and take it as gospel truth.

In 2 Corinthians Paul has to address these kinds of attacks against his own character by false teachers who had joined the Corinthian church under the guise of being teachers of truth but their message was not according to God’s Word. In order to spread their false teaching they had to undermine the Apostle Paul. While Paul had planted the church in Corinth in Acts 18, he had yet to return even though he said he would. According to 1 & 2 Corinthians, Paul had to deal with sin in the church from a distance and tell them they needed to stop being divisive and put an end to an immoral relationship in the church. And they did, but Paul’s opponents took advantage of Paul’s absence and accused Paul of being two-faced. Nice and humble and quiet in person, but harsh and overbearing in his letters!

Unfortunately, some fell for it and now Paul has to defend his character because he has to defend the gospel.

Coming to faith in Christ increases the risk of being hurt, not reduces it. People are threatened by different. If you want to avoid being hurt conform to the world. The world loves people who think like they do. Believers in Jesus Christ are under a lot of pressure to conform and accept the world’s standards. And some are caving in to the pressure of a loud small minority who have convinced the majority that their way is the norm.

If we’re in Christ, how should we respond? Should we lash back, arrogantly quote Scriptures in Facebook arguments fighting back in the same ways? Or is there a better, godly way to battle the lies of the enemy? How does God’s Word help us in this area? The dilemma we find ourselves in is we have this new nature by the Spirit indwelling us and yet still wrestle with the old sinful nature that wants to lash back when we’re hurt. God has a better way of course. And who better to learn this from than Paul, who anchored his responses in the truth, humbly confident in his secure position in Christ.

After explaining his absence and his letters in Ch’s 1-7, Paul feels free now to deal with the matters at hand. First, in Ch’s 8-9, he encourages the Corinthians to remember to help out the poor in Jerusalem. And now, he wants to confront the false teachers and those who are still listening to them with the error of their ways firmly yet graciously.

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! ²I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I intend to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³For

though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage battle according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

Many of our translations omit the first word “now”. “Now” signals a clear change of direction from what he’s been saying. Then he emphasizes his own authority with “I, Paul, myself”. He reluctantly uses his apostolic authority to correct what needs correcting. And in addressing the criticisms against him Paul begins by

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

I urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you ... I ask that I need not be bold with the confidence with which I intend to be courageous against some ...

Paul’s 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 reminds us that if Christ is in us

Let them see Christ is in you (v.1)

‘Some claim I am a two-faced 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.’

We’re in Christ once we’ve placed our faith in Jesus and His payment for our sins. Jesus now lives in and through us. Nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ. I am Christ’s; He will take my burdens, be my strength, and shield against enemy attacks.

‘But don’t you hear what people are saying about you?’ “Yes, but what Jesus says about me is far more powerful than what others say about me.’ We are His child, totally forgiven. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. We can’t let what sinful people say define us but what Jesus says defines us. So, Paul writes with compassion and grace, not harshly.

Rather than let their misunderstandings divide them, Paul wants to clear all this up so they can grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus together. That’s a mature Christian approach to false accusations. Forgiveness and restoration if it’s possible

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 opposed Paul but they opposed the gospel of grace. Either way Paul is

Be confident in the Spirit's power (v.2)

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 God's power through God's Word is enough to answer the opponents and Lord-willing those believers who they've caused to doubt Paul's integrity, will also see this clearly through God's Spirit. 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 Christ and trusts the power of God will work through him because that gives him the peace that surpasses all understanding.

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

**Use God's Weapons Not Your Own
(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 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

More powerful weapons (vv.3-4)

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

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 weapons were his kindness and patience in 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 so he challenged that accusation. 'Have we built you up or tore you down? Even when confronting sin, did we not do that so you would 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 we didn't share with you our own theories but the gospel. Why? Because we wanted to see what God would do through His message not how we could convince you with our own wisdom. God changes lives through His Words.

Another example from Paul how God's power is more effective than ours 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 who are in Christ use in response to attacks. We don't retaliate back, we are willing to suffer for the gospel, we're content with what God has provided for us and 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.

When we use God's weapons against human responses, Paul says

They demolish human reasoning (v.5; 2:14-17)

Paul uses military language - fortresses/strongholds - things people believe trust in. But the gospel and the non-retaliatory responses rattle the strongholds and arguments people have based on their own limited thinking. When we who are in Christ respond as Jesus would, sharing truth graciously that puts holes in their self-confident arguments, the truth will demolish the very things these people are trusting in. So, when people falsely say things about us that are untrue, or give us hurtful labels, our best response is trusting God's weapons of response. God's weapons disarm God's opponents.

And this is how we take captive those untruths and don't allow them to do the damage they intend. When we hear hurtful things thrown at us we have to stand those thoughts up Against the Word of God. Are they true? What does God say about who we are in Christ? We have to take captive those thoughts with the Word of God, stopping them before they damage our fragile hearts and minds. And when we do that and see what God says about us,

We are built up with 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 hurled against us we capture those words and don't let them take root in our minds. We deny them and say 'That's not what God says'.

When attacked or falsely labeled we respond gracefully not harshly. We who are in Christ need to be slow to speak, not quick with sharp witty insults. Our offense is our obedience, our faithful lifestyle, our gospel presentation, and our willingness to suffer for Christ.

Paul let his faith and testimony speak for him. He used God's Word to respond to the negative words about him and about God and his people to be his defense. The Corinthians were spiritually mature allowing these false teachers to damage Paul's testimony and as a result the gospel itself.

Sometimes we are guilty of harming one another. We need to remember we are all in Christ if we know Christ and Christ is in each one of us. Let Christ shine through you. If we've been mistreated, be mature, love back, show grace and kindness, trusting, and using God's Word as our defense. Let's watch God destroy the weak arguments the world attacks us with and trust His Word - which Jesus says cannot be destroyed - accomplish the purposes for which He sends it.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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