

THE MINISTER: HIS WARFARE AND WEAPONS

2 CORINTHIANS 10:01–06

Introduction

This section begins a sharp break from what Paul has been saying and teaching. He disassociates himself from Timothy. He no longer says “we,” but “I appeal to you — I Paul.” The phrase is forceful. Paul is now going to deal primarily with his critics, both with the false teachers who had crept into the church and with any of their followers who had not shared in the revival of repentance that had taken place (2 Cor. 7:2-6).

This was necessary, for the church needed to make sure that the false teachers did not *regain* a foothold in the church. They needed to know that Paul intended to personally confront any who had not repented. He was going to deal with those who were attacking him and teaching false doctrine.

The present passage deals with the minister: his warfare and weapons.

- I. Paul accused of *living* by the standards of this world (vv. 1-2).
- II. The minister wars and fights, but not in a worldly way (vv. 3-5).
- III. The minister stands ready to deal with rebels — but only after genuine believers are clearly seen (v. 6).

I. 2 Corinthians 10:01–02 *Accusations Against Paul*

Paul was accused of living by the standards of this world. (See *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22.) This charge can be seen behind the words of Paul in these two verses. He was answering “some” who thought of him as walking after the world (v. 2). They were saying two things about Paul.

- 1. Some were saying that Paul was a coward (v. 1). This is what is meant by the word “timid” (*tapeinos*). They were saying that Paul was bold in his instructions; that is, he rebuked the church when he was writing to them, but he was a coward when it came to speaking face to face with them.

Note Paul’s answer to the church and to his critics; it was that of tenderness in the midst of warning: “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ I appeal to you.” Christ was meek and gentle in handling the insults, attacks, rumours, lies, wrong and evil done to Him. Paul was saying that Jesus Christ was his example in dealing with people; that is the reason he was meek and gentle when preaching and confronting people face to face. He was not base and lowly because he was a coward, but because Jesus Christ demonstrated how people are to be handled, even people who are evil and in error. Jesus Christ confronted people in meekness and gentleness; therefore, he, Paul, was meek and gentle.

2. Some were saying that Paul was carnal — that he walked after the flesh. This means several things:

=> that Paul was unregenerate, that is, not really saved.

=> that Paul was preaching and ministering in the flesh; he was not really called of God.

=> that Paul was living in the flesh; he was an ungodly and immoral man seeking only to please and live for himself.

=> that Paul was only ministering in the flesh; he was only after a personal following — only seeking to sell his own ideas and position — only interested in lining his own pockets and in securing personal recognition and honour.

Very simply, Paul says that he will confront these critics when he arrives in Corinth. He has the confidence, that is, the inner strength and boldness, to confront them; and he will. But note a crucial point: even in this declaration of spiritual strength and boldness, Paul was meek and gentle. He appealed to them twice in these two verses: that is, he begged and pleaded with them to turn to God — to repent of their attacks and false teaching — so that he might not have to confront them. Paul longed for everyone in the church to make sure that they had trusted Christ as Saviour and that they held to the truth of the gospel: that they “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (Ph. 1:27).

Thought 1. Every minister needs to pay close attention to the meekness and gentleness of Christ and of Paul when dealing with people. They approached everyone with meekness and gentleness, giving everyone a chance to repent. And they continued to demonstrate meekness and gentleness for the longest time. True, there was to be a day of confrontation: Paul says so in these verses, and Christ certainly confronted false teachers and their followers who opposed Him. But the first approach was that of meekness and gentleness.

Isa 53:7 *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*

Mat 11:29 *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Acts 9:29 *He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.*

Acts 19:8 *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.*

Heb 12:3 *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

1 Pet 2:23 *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

1 Th 2:7 But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

2 Tim 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

II. 2 Corinthians 10:03–05 Believer's Spiritual Warfare

The minister wars and fights, but not in a worldly way. This is a great passage of Scripture. It deals with the believer's spiritual warfare, a passage that every believer should memorize and chew upon often. It often stirs the believer to discipline and gain control over his mind and thoughts. Note three significant points. (See Rom. 8:5-8; 12:2.)

1. The believer is in a spiritual warfare. Scripture is perfectly clear about this:

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The war is not waged against flesh and blood, against physical and material beings, but against spiritual forces. Spiritual forces lie behind man's evil and lustful behaviour, unbelief and arguments against God. These spiritual forces attack and prey upon the imagination and thoughts of men. They inject selfish and devilish ideas against God and against other men. And from the energy of these ideas come the evil acts of men. Note two things:

- => Selfish, evil and lustful thoughts are mental and immaterial. Ideas and thoughts are not physical and material substances. They are invisible and mental substances.
- => Selfish, evil and lustful ideas are by nature not of God. God is not evil, selfish or lustful; therefore, such evil thoughts and reasoning are often injected into the mind of men by spiritual forces that stand opposed to God.

Paul's point is this: he and other believers "live in the world"; that is, they live in a body just like all other people. But they do not wage war as the world does. They do not fight the struggles of life using only their own strength. Why? Because believers know that there is a spiritual warfare going on for the minds and lives of people. Believers know that the evil forces of the spiritual world lie behind...

- sin and evil
- disorder and devastation
- corruption and deterioration
- death and hell

Believers know that they cannot "wage war as the world does;" that no man nor any combination of men can conquer the spiritual forces that tear and eat away at man until they destroy him. No matter how strong, educated or scientific man may become, he cannot deliver himself from the spiritual forces that cause sin and death.

2. The believer's weapons are not physical but spiritual. Physical or carnal weapons would be human weapons of the mind and body such as...

- discipline and control
- knowledge and intelligence
- ideas and thoughts
- laws and principles
- health and esteem
- eloquence and personality
- education and social development
- strength and ability
- science and technology
- beliefs and doctrines
- resolutions and rules
- wealth and welfare
- appearance and attractiveness

Naturally, every human power and weapon available should be developed and used to the fullest extent possible. The human body and the world are said to be the temple of the Lord, two of the places where He dwells. But the believer knows that there is nothing in the world that can conquer the spiritual forces that lie behind the evil and death of this world. Therefore, he fights the spiritual battles of this life with *spiritual weapons*, weapons that are of God and are made mighty and powerful by God.

Note that the believer uses spiritual weapons to “demolish strongholds.” The evils of this world are deeply entrenched and fortified. This is clearly seen in the daily newscasts and behaviour of people day by day. Evil and its inevitable consequence of destruction and death can never be permanently overcome by carnal weapons. Only the spiritual weapons of God can permanently conquer evil.

3. The believer's method of conquering the forces of evil are clearly described.

- a. The believer demolishes *arguments or imaginations* (logismos) that wage war within his mind and heart: thoughts and imagination that are uncontrolled, wild, evil, lustful, immoral, unjust, wrong, untrue, devilish and set against God.

Rom 1:31-32 *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

The believer wars, fights and struggles to “demolish” arguments. He fights to bring his arguments under control.

- b. The believer *destroys every lofty thing “every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God:”* false ideas about God, false doctrine, false teaching, false reasoning; the human pride and arrogance, self-sufficiency and self-righteousness that set themselves up against God.
- c. The believer *seeks to captivate every thought* to the obedience of Christ. *A phenomenal statement* — every thought controlled and subjected to Christ! This is the spiritual objective of the true Christian believer. God created man for fellowship and communion, and the believer knows it; therefore, the believer wars — struggles and fights — to captivate every thought and focus it upon God and His righteousness. He seeks to walk in an unbroken fellowship and communion with God. How is the control of every thought possible? By the Spirit of God and by Him alone. Note what Scripture says.

Rom 8:5 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

1 Cor 2:16 *“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

2 Cor 10:5 *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.*

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Phil 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

Eph 4:23-24 *To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Isa 26:03 *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*

III. 2 Corinthians 10:06 Church Discipline

The minister stands ready to deal with false teachers and rebels, but only after genuine believers have stepped forward. Paul had just shared how he struggled and fought to live for Christ every day — struggled and fought to conquer every imagination and thing that

exalted itself against the knowledge of God. Therefore, he would not hesitate to punish all disobedience. But note: he would discipline only after giving everyone a chance to be obedient. The Corinthians who were willing to submit to the truth had to come forward first. Then Paul would act swiftly. He would never resort to severity until he knew for sure who stood for the truth and who stood against the truth. He would make no mistake in discipline. Therefore, the church had to step forward for God first. Every means of repentance and correction had to be exhausted; the disobedient had to have every conceivable chance to repent through the appeal of this letter and the corrective action of the church. (See 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 5:6-13; Mt. 18:15-20.)

Mat 18:15-17 *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

Luke 17:1-3 *Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”*

Acts 16:4 *As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.*

1 Tim 5:20 *Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

Titus 1:13 *This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.*

Titus 2:15 *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

Titus 3:10 *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.*

Heb 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. ■*

THE MINISTER: HIS RIGHT TO BE ACCEPTED

2 CORINTHIANS 10:07–18

Introduction

The minister has many rights, but the one right that means as much to him as any other is the right to be accepted. Every church, no matter the situation or circumstances, should open its arms and accept the minister. If he needs help, then the church should help him — no matter the problem.

- I. The minister is to be accepted because he belongs to Christ (v. 7).
- II. The minister is to be accepted because he is set for edification, not for destruction (v. 8).
- III. The minister is to be accepted because of the authority God has given, not because of appearance (vv. 9-13).
- IV. The minister is to be accepted because he ministers and preaches the gospel (vv. 14-16).
- V. The minister is to be accepted because he boasts in the Lord and not in men (w. 17-18).

I. 2 Corinthians 10:07 Accusations Against Paul

The minister is to be accepted because he belongs to Christ as much as any other minister. The troublemakers and critics of Paul felt that Paul ranked less than other ministers. They said that Paul did not measure up as a minister, that he was not as called or gifted as other ministers of God; therefore, he did not belong in the pulpit at Corinth, nor should his authority be accepted at Corinth.

Paul's claim is that all ministers are equal. Note how Paul exposes the shameful emphasis upon "the surface of things" and upon the ranking of ministers. Apparently some were judging Paul...

- because of his past sinful life as the persecutor and murderer of early believers (see Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2).
- because other ministers and teachers appeared to have stronger and more appealing gifts.
- because other ministers and teachers had more charisma and were stronger speakers (see v. 10).

Paul is forceful in his rebuke: "You are looking only on the surface of things. If any man claims that he belongs to Christ and that Christ has called him, I too make the same claim. Think about it, and think it over again. A claim is a personal conviction, and a personal conviction is subjective. One man's personal conviction and claim is as good as another man's. Therefore, if a man says that he belongs to Christ, I too belong to Christ. I belong to Christ as much as he does. My claim is as valid as his."

The point is explicitly clear: personal conviction is a factor in the ministry, and a man's conviction that he has been called by Christ must be listened to and heeded.

But much more is needed to prove whether or not a man is a true minister of Christ.

1 Cor 1:11-13 *My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul;" another, "I follow Apollos;" another, "I follow Cephas," still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?*

Mat 23:27 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean."*

John 7:24 *"Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."*

2 Cor 5:12 *We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.*

2 Cor 10:7 *You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.*

II. 2 Corinthians 10:08 Works of Edification

The minister is to be accepted because he is set for edification and not for destruction. The charge against Paul was that he destroyed people...

- by claiming to be a minister of Christ when in fact he was not
- by preaching his own ideas and philosophy
- by seeking to secure a personal following

Paul forcefully claimed that Christ had called him for edification, not for destruction. He was called to build up people, not to destroy them. In no way had he ever damaged or destroyed the church. Note: Paul says that he could boast in his ministry and in his faithfulness. He could even boast more than most other ministers; and if he chose to do this, it would not shame him, for he had every right to boast. He had served Christ faithfully and well in the ministry of building up the church.

Rom 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

1 Cor 14:3 *But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.*

2 Cor 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.*

Eph 4:11-12 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

Eph 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

III. 2 Corinthians 10:09–13 God–Given Authority and Rule

The minister is to be accepted because of the authority and rule God has given him. not because of appearance. The charge against Paul was that he was weak in appearance and a poor preacher; therefore, he could not possibly be called of God nor possess the authority of God. William Barclay says:

“A description of Paul’s personal appearance has come down to us from a very early book called The Acts of Paul and Thecla. It dates back to about A.D. 200. It is so unflattering that it may well be true. It describes Paul as ‘a man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and with nose somewhat hooked, full of grace, for sometimes he appeared like a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.’ A little, balding bandy-legged man, with a hooked nose and shaggy eyebrows — it is not a very impressive picture, and it may well be that the Corinthians made great play with it. We might do well to remember sometimes that not seldom a great spirit has been lodged in a very humble body.” (The Letters to the Corinthians, p. 271).

In addition to his personal appearance, Paul was apparently what most people would call a *poor preacher*. He was not eloquent; some people even went to sleep during his preaching (Acts 20:9). His critics in Corinth called his preaching contemptible, that is, of no account, unimpressive, a waste of time, unauthoritative. Note that his preaching was being compared to his writings, which were said to be weighty and powerful (impressive and strong, stirring and vigorous).

Thought 1. This criticism hurt Paul. The fact can be seen as one reads and looks behind the words of this passage and others (cp. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-4; 2 Cor. 11:6). Paul could do nothing about body features, the way he looked, and his gift to preach had been given by God. He could and did work at improving, as any true preacher does; nevertheless, he was who he was, and he could not change the gift of God. So the criticism was bound to hurt. Lay believers should always build the minister up, not tear him down.

Note Paul’s answer to the criticisms.

1. There is a definite time for authority and discipline within the church. And if authority and discipline are needed, Paul will exercise it when he visits the church with the same bold authority that is evident in his writings (v. 11). (See 2 Cor. 10:1-2.)
2. Human commendations and judgments are unwise. Paul would never do what his critics and some others did: seek the praise and testimonials of men. Apparently, some were seeking letters of commendation in order to secure more recognition, honour and position.

With clear insight, Paul says that such self-seeking only pits one minister against another; it compares one to another. And such measuring of ministers is not wise.

3. A minister is to exercise authority only in the area and within the limits God has given him. The minister has no other legitimate authority, but he *does have that authority*. And it is that authority that is recognized and acknowledged.

2 Cor 3:5-6 *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

2 Cor 4:1-2 *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

2 Cor 5:19-20 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

Eph 3:7 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

2 Tim 1:10-11 *But it [God's grace] has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

IV. 2 Corinthians 10:14–16 Authority of the Minister

The minister is to be accepted because he ministers and preaches the gospel of Christ. This is the authority of the minister, the only authority that he has: the authority to minister and preach the gospel. Paul forcefully declares that he *did not stretch himself beyond this limit*. The false teachers in Corinth were the ones who were stretching beyond their limits, not Paul. Paul had been called and gifted by God to minister and preach at Corinth, not they. The implication is this: the false teachers needed to *repent and become one* with the other believers of the church and work and strive together with the believers for the sake of the gospel.

Note: Paul used another term to spell out exactly what his concern and area of ministry was: their *faith and its growth*. He wanted their faith to grow, and note why: so that they could help send him and the gospel to other parts of the world — to regions beyond.

Thought 1. What a lesson! There is no room for division and competitiveness in the church; no room for tearing down the minister of God. The minister has his area of concern and authority:

=> that of ministering and preaching the gospel.

=> that of building up the faith of the people.

=> that of leading people to send the gospel to other regions of the world.

No one should hamper or stop this work of the minister. He is the minister of God to do the work of God among God's people.

Mat 28:19-20 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

Acts 1:8 *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

2 Cor 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

2 Tim 2:25 *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.*

Heb 13:7 *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

V. 2 Corinthians 10:17–18 Boast in the Lord

The minister is to be accepted because he boasts in the Lord and not in men. Paul has had much to say about boasting throughout this passage (v. 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16). Now he forcefully drives the point home: he that boasts must boast in the Lord, or he is not approved or accepted by God. A minister is not a true minister, no matter what he thinks, preaches or claims if he...

- exalts himself
- craves recognition
- seeks praise
- seeks his own things
- loves position
- is puffed up

A true minister of God does not commend himself; he seeks only the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom 15:17-18 *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.*

1 Cor 1:27-29 *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.*

Psa 34:2 *My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*

Psa 44:8 *In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.*

Jer 9:23-24 *This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord. ■*