

Monday AM Session – Every Thought Captive 2 Corinthians 10:1-11 & 11:1-15

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-11 and 11:1-15.

In this passage, we find Paul defending his apostolic ministry. An apostle was a man personally commissioned by Jesus Christ to proclaim His gospel. Paul had a life-changing encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, after which he was sent to be a light to all people (Acts 9:1-19, 22:3-16, 26:12-18). Paul faithfully devoted his entire life to this calling (2 Tim 4:7-8). However, a number of people in the Corinthian church were trying to disrupt his ministry by questioning his authority as Christ's apostle.

-When we think of Paul, we are often awestruck at the man who authored so much of the New Testament. So why do you think the Corinthian church lacked respect for Paul?

- He was 'bold' in his writing but appeared 'timid' when face to face (10:1) – seemed to be hiding behind his letters
- He was perhaps not impressive as a speaker (10:10, 11:6)
- He spoke to the Corinthians free of charge (11:7-8) (so he couldn't have been anyone special!)
- The Corinthians were judging Paul (specifically, whether he should qualify as an 'Apostle') by standards of the world (10:2); they thought that someone in the position of an Apostle should appear more 'bold' and substantial than Paul apparently did – he didn't 'impress them'
 - they preferred false teachers over Paul because they were not well-grounded enough and were therefore being led astray (11:3)

-Why do you think Paul interacted with the Corinthian church in an "unimpressive" manner?

- He appeared timid because he loved the church and wanted to be gentle with them (10:1)
 - was following the example of the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ'
- He preached free of charge, not because he was second-rate, but because he didn't want to be a burden (11:9)
- In all things, Paul acted out of love, trying to build the Corinthians up in the Lord (10:8)

-What were the false teachers were doing that so impressed the church? What are the "standards of the world" (10:2) by which the Corinthians were comparing the false apostles to Paul? (see also 2 Cor. 10:12; 11:20)

- 'standards of the world' can also be translated as "according to the flesh" – refers to the wisdom/thoughts of the world/natural man
- The false teachers looked impressive 'on the surface' (10:7) because
 - they pretended to be servants/apostles of Christ (11:13,23)
 - they were skilled orators (11:6)
 - they came with impressive credentials and commendations from each other (10:12)
 - they were boastful (10:12, 11:12,21-22) – i.e. always pointing out how good they were (and how bad Paul was)
 - in contrast to Paul, they charged a lot for their services (11:7) – so they must be really good!
 - they dealt with the Corinthians in a demeaning manner (11:20) – and were tolerated since they seemed so great
 - the leaders of the Gentiles lord it over their subjects (Matt. 20:25), so it would seem appropriate by the standards of the world for someone in a position of authority to treat others rudely or harshly – which Paul didn't do
- Unlike Paul who lowered himself to minister to the Corinthians, these false teachers looked down upon them and received admiration because of it! In contrast, Paul did not seek to glorify himself, but rather sought to point people to Christ (1 Cor 2:1-6)
 - shows how the standards of the world were opposed to God's standards and methods

- Paul fought a spiritual battle on a totally different plane than the false apostles. Although Paul appeared weak and ineffective to his opponents, what was he in reality capable of doing through the words and authority entrusted to him by Christ (10:4-11)?

- Able to demolish strongholds, arguments, and human pretensions set against God
- Turn every thought to the praise and glory of Christ, i.e. to the obedience of Christ
- Build the church, punish disobedience (e.g. Mt 16:19, Jn 20:23)

-How can we prepare ourselves to fight the same spiritual battle as Paul? How can we, like Paul, have a positive and eternal impact on the people around us? (you might also consider 1 Peter 1:13-16)

- need to prepare our minds for action (1 Pet. 1:13), setting our hearts & thoughts on the right things (i.e. things eternal)
 - no longer conforming to the evil desires we had while living in ignorance, but setting our lives apart for God (1 Pet 1:14-15)
- emulate those who walked by God's standards,
 - e.g. like Paul, act with kindness & meekness, rather than trying to impress people or setting self over them
 - don't be obsessed with accumulating worldly honors, but store up spiritual treasure
 - point people to Christ (not to self), even if it seems foolish or weak to them
- be aware of strongholds, arguments, pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:4-5)
 - be able to recognize them, especially in subtler forms – practice discernment
- learn to assess things not by the 'standards of the world', but by the standards of God (2 Cor 10:2) – i.e. from Scripture
- counter error with truth – take every thought captive to obey Christ; demolish strongholds, arguments, pretensions with the truth of God – i.e. from Scripture
 - need to know the Scriptures and how to handle/apply them properly!

-need to use spiritual weapons that God provides, not the weapons of the world – link into Eph 6:10-20

-Read Ephesians 6:10-20. Here, Paul commands Christians to put on the full 'Armor of God' in preparation for spiritual battle, and describes the weapons and armor needed. What do you think is the significance of each of the pieces of armor?

- open discussion, at least two possible interpretations for each – how each piece allows us to withstand the time of trial/judgment

- "Belt of Truth"
 - the Truth of Christ (Jn 8:31-36)
 - honesty and integrity in all of our dealings that protects us from other attacks
- "Breastplate of Righteousness" (v.14b, 2 Cor 6:7, Eph 4:24)
 - i. 'justification' – i.e. our unbreakable gift from Christ – defends us against the slander of the Accuser
 - ii. righteousness of character – defends us against the slander of the world and enables us to resist temptation
- "...Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (v.15, Eph 2:13-18)
 - i. Peace – we cannot fight effectively if overcome with personal guilt/struggles
 - ii. must be ready to preach the gospel to others, both far and wide (i.e. readiness to go)
- Take up the "shield of faith"
 - i. God himself is a shield to those that take refuge in Him, and it is by faith that we flee to him for refuge, i.e., faith in his goodness and his promises
- Put on the "helmet of salvation"
 - i. Both our assurance of the measure of salvation we have already received (e.g. forgiveness of sin, deliverance from Satan's bondage, etc.) and the expectation of full salvation on the last day (e.g. Christ-like glory in heaven) – 1 Thess describes this as the 'hope of salvation', no doubt that God's saving power is our defense against the enemy of our souls
- Take up the "Sword of the Spirit", which is the Word of God
 - i. The sword is the only "offensive weapon" in this list; all others are "defensive"
 - ii. The Word of God is living and active because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16)
 - iii. God uses His Word to cut through people's defenses, to prick their consciences and stab them spiritually awake (Heb 4:12)
 - iv. Ultimately, it is also a sword in that it is the only effective weapon that will 'demolish strongholds' by destroying false arguments
- Pray!
 - i. Paul commands Christians to pray at all times, with all kinds of prayer and supplication
 - ii. Scripture promises that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (Jas 5:16)

Reflection and Application

"The true Christian is called to be a soldier, and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death, he is not meant to live a life of religious ease, indolence, and security... With whom is the Christian soldier meant to fight?... The principal fight of the Christian is with the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are his never-dying foes. These are the three chief enemies against whom he must wage war. Unless he gets the victory over these three, all other victories are useless and vain. To keep that heart from going astray, there is need of a daily struggle and a daily wrestling in prayer. A general faith in the truth of God's written Word is the primary foundation of the Christian soldier's character. He is what he is, does what he does, thinks as he thinks, acts as he acts, hopes as he hopes, behaves as he behaves, for one simple reason—he believes certain propositions revealed and laid down in Holy Scripture. – J.C. Ryle

As we depart from our retreat this weekend, let us be encouraged seek after God's refinement of our thoughts, our motives, our attitudes and our actions through prayer and study of His Word, that we might put on the full armour of God as we engage in spiritual battle, both for the sake of our sanctification and for the sake of the lost. Let us pray for the wisdom to use God's spiritual weapons to 'demolish every stronghold', and for the discipline to 'take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ', that we may possess nothing but a worldview that honors and glorifies Jesus Christ.