

## 2 CORINTHLANS - (Chapter 10)

Conflict was a reality in the first century church especially, at Corinth just like conflict can raise its ugly head in the modern day church. Conflict is a given that it will occur, but will the leaders and the church at large adhere to what the Bible says or will they deal with it their way. Critically important to dealing with conflict is exercising this following: *Forgiveness is a necessary ingredient that makes human relationships workable. Conflict is a given; but we must choose to forgive.* Paul in chapters 10-12 writes to the church to give them guidance regarding conflict and to defend his ministry and apostolic authority.

### *The Spiritual War (vs. 1-6)*

Vs. 1 – The phrase “*Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you*”- Paul introduces this chapter with a change of tone as he resumes his argument relative to the false apostle, who had gained considerable influence by misrepresenting Paul as being despicable in his person, his ministry, and his influence. Regarding the phrase “*pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*” - in these next few chapters, Paul will get a little “rough” with the Corinthian Christians. Yet he does it all in the meekness and gentleness of Christ. The phrase “*who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you*” – here Paul reveals a matter of great contention between he and the Corinthian Christians. They said that Paul seemed reserved in person but very bold in his letters.

**Vs. 2** - Paul hopes the Corinthians will change their attitude towards him and his credentials as an apostle so that he may come to them in gentleness, not severity. Regarding the phrase *“I intend to be bold against some”* the word **“some”** reminds us that we shouldn’t think that all the Corinthian Christians had a bad opinion of Paul. It may have been merely **a vocal minority**. The Corinthians criticized Paul as if he were a dog that barked loudly, but only at a distance. They accused him of backing down in any face-to-face confrontation. They thought (*at least the vocal minority*) how can the same person be in presence lowly and bold toward you at other times? Isn’t this contradictory? It isn’t a contradiction at all. Those who can’t see that boldness and lowliness can be found in the same person don’t know the life of Jesus very well. If Paul was a weakling, then so was Jesus; for Jesus exhibited meekness and gentleness in **Matthew 11:29** and **Galatians 5:22-23** affirms that meekness and gentleness (*self control*) are **fruits of the spirit**. However, Jesus when He needed to be was firm, stern, and exhibit righteous indignation He did it when the occasion demanded it like when he throw out the money changers from the temple twice (**John 2:13-25** and **Matthew 21:12**). Paul was warning them in a loving way please don’t force me to come and show you how bold I can be. Finally, the phrase *“who think of us as if walked according to the flesh”*- this is another aspect of the accusations made against Paul by

some of the Corinthian Christians. They said he was a man who walked according to the flesh. He is accused of this because of the perceived contradiction between his gentleness and his severity.

**Vs. 3-6** – Like Paul we are merely weak humans, but we don't need to use human plans and methods to win our battles. God's mighty weapons are available to us as we fight against the devil's stronghold – ***Ephesians 6:11-18*** *belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet shod in the preparation of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit, and prayer*). The Christian must choose whose methods to use – God's or the unsaved world's. Paul assures us that God's mighty weapons are powerful and effective. These weapons can break down the proud human arguments against God and the walls that Satan builds to keep people from finding God. *Paul was teaching you cannot fight spiritual battles with carnal weapons as reaffirmed in*

**Ephesians 6:11-20**. In **vs. 4** the **Greek** word translated for **warfare** really means **campaign**. Paul was not simply fighting a little skirmish in Corinth, the attack of the enemy was a part of a large satanic campaign. The devil uses fiery darts – they are designed to kill, steal, and destroy ministry. Too many people in the church do not realize that the church is involved in constant warfare and those who do understand don't always fight with spiritual weapons. This is a primary reason Jesus refers to the church as a “house of

prayer” because corporate prayer is a necessary element needed to combat and defeat spiritual enemies. *The spiritual leaders must pray for and claim in faith God’s promise to cast down the wrong thinking that is keeping people from surrendering to God. Once the walls in the mind have been torn down, the door to the heart can be opened.* The Corinthian Christians tended to rely on and admire carnal weapons for the Christian battle: Instead of the *belt of truth*, they fought with manipulation. Instead of the *breastplate of righteousness*, they fought with the image of success. Instead of the *shoes of the gospel*, they fought with smooth words. Instead of the *shield of faith*, they fought with the perception of power. Instead of the *helmet of salvation*, they fought with lording over authority. Instead of the *sword of the Spirit*, they fought with human schemes and programs. Instead of using *prayer to get on God’s agenda*, they used prayer for God to confirm their agenda.

### *Have Pure Motives (vs. 7-11)*

*Vs. 7* – One of the most difficult lessons Christ’s disciples had to learn was that in the kingdom of God, position and power were no evidence of authority in and of themselves. Jesus warned His followers not to pattern their leadership after that of the Gentiles who loved to “*lord it over*” others and to act important (*Mark 10:35-45*). The example we must follow is that of Jesus Christ who came as a servant and ministered to others – Paul followed that

example. Meekness does not mean weakness nor incompetence. Now regarding the interrogatory phrase, “*Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?*” Paul diagnoses the problem with the Corinthian troublemakers. They are looking only at the outward appearances, and by outward appearances, Paul was weak and unimpressive. The false teachers probably made the argument that Paul was abandoning God’s law for some new theology they called “*cheap grace.*” This view made them charge Paul with being worldly since he didn’t believe a person had to follow strict ceremonial rules and rituals of the law. If the Corinthians understood God’s grace they would understand the false teachers were the ones who were shallow and worldly.

**Vs. 8-10** – In ***vs. 8*** when Paul says, “*Even if I should boast somewhat more*” it seems that Paul is uncomfortable writing about his own authority he is a humble, godly man. He uses the word **boast** here in an exaggerated, almost sarcastic sense to show he would prefer not to talk about his own authority because it would feel like “boasting” to him. Paul realizes how much better it would be if the Corinthian Christians would just recognize his authority so that he wouldn’t have to boast about it (read ***Philippians 3:1-11***). The phrase “*Which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction*” means Paul recognizes that Jesus grants authority in the church for one reason. He

does it to build the body of believers up (edification), not to tear it down (destruction). When Paul says in **vs. 9-10**, *“Lest I seem to terrify you by letters. For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”* Paul’s despisers among the Corinthian Christians felt they had “evidence” against him. And their “evidence” was that Paul seemed to be tough in his letters but weak and unimpressive in person. So they used this as “evidence” to despise him as weak and two-faced. Paul’s humility and complete reliance on the power of God instead of the power of his own personality, coupled with his strong letters, were being used against him. They said Paul was like a dog that barks like crazy at a safe distance but is a coward when confronted face to face. Paul knew that when he was weak, it gave God’s power all the more opportunity to work (**2 Corinthians 12:9**).

**Vs. 11** – When Paul says, *“Let such a person consider this”* - Paul writes to his despisers with perfect clarity. He was warning them “If you want the ‘tough’ Paul, you will get him if they would not change. Paul, if necessary, would come to them with all the authority he had shown in his letters.” If the Corinthian Christians knew how serious Paul was, they would have received this as a solemn warning. Jesus was meek and mild but on two separate occasions Jesus went into the temple and over-turned tables and ran out those

with a whip who bought and sold in the temple (*John 2:13-25 and Matthew 21:12*). Paul was teaching servant leadership which says “Let’s go” while the boss says “go.” The boss knows how it’s done but the servant leader shows how its done. The boss says, “I” but the servant leader says, “we.”

### *Limits of Paul’s Authority (vs. 12-18)*

*In verses 12-18 Paul will address 3 questions the text suggests: Am I where God wants me to be in vs. 12-13; Is God glorified by my ministry (vs. 15-17); and Can the Lord commend my work (vs. 18).*

**Vs. 12** – In this segment of chapter 10 Paul is saying too often we use the wrong criteria in measuring ministry...it is not numbers that necessarily reflect ministry growth...there is something called “swelling” that means there is a problem...the growth is not healthy. In Jesus’ examination of the 7 churches in *Revelation chapters 2-3*, the Lord measured them far differently than the people of the church during that era. The church that thought it was poor, Jesus considered it was rich. And the church that boasted of its wealth, Jesus declared to be poor. *It is much easier to measure the external activities than one of internal transformation.* Sometimes those who are growing the most feel like they are less than the least. The more you know about Jesus the more you know how far you are from being like Him. Here in **vs. 12** Paul

criticized the false teachers who were trying to prove their goodness by comparing themselves with others rather than with God's standards. The phrase "*measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*" alludes to the critics making themselves the measure of others and making others the measure of yourself. And there are many who are ready to commend themselves even though they may not do it publicly; but rather they do it privately in their own minds. Whatever we are doing we need to look into the perfect law of liberty, and draw near to God. The nearer we come to God, the more rottenness we find in our bones. Always keep in mind *Colossians 3:17* when we do God's work and Paul's advice to esteem others instead of yourself in *Philippians 2:3-4*. Churches, pastors, and servant leaders should not be in competition with each other. God is not going to measure one church against another – or one pastor against another; one ministry against another. God will measure our work on the basis of the gifts and opportunities that He gives to a particular church - a particular pastor – or a particular servant leader. *God requires faithfulness above everything else as stated in 1 Corinthians 4:2*. The standard of measurement for all of us is Jesus the Christ; hence on our own we will always come up woefully short. If we are going to boast; boast on Jesus.



**Vs. 13-14** – Regarding the phrase “*within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us*” Paul’s authority in the church was not unlimited. God had granted him a sphere of authority, and that sphere included the Corinthian Christians, especially since he had founded that church. The idea of the limits of the sphere comes from the lanes that were allotted for runners in a race.

The Corinthians would recognize this because they loved races and held the famous Isthmian Games in Corinth. Paul is saying, “*I’m running in my own lane and not in someone else’s.*” *And the lane God will have us run in is a lane whereby you are spiritually gifted to run in.* Now all has a sphere. It is important for the person in authority to not exercise that authority outside the sphere, and it is important for the person under authority to recognize the sphere of authority they are under.

**Vs. 15-16** - regarding the phrase “*As your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere*” *As the Corinthian Christians grew in maturity and in outreach, their church would grow and plant many other churches.* This would, by extension, enlarge Paul’s sphere of authority. *A goal of every church should be to grow and then plant other churches in areas where the Gospel is not being shared.* When we get serious about seeing the gospel spread and making disciples then planting churches and/or assisting with church plants is a by-product of the Holy Spirit working in us. The church is not a country club!

We are to go make Jesus known to the world...this is something Margaret is doing in Mexico. Regarding the phrase “*in other men’s labors...not to boast in another man’s sphere of accomplishment*” so why is Paul stressing the point that he has not, and will not, take authority in another man’s sphere?

Probably because that is exactly what his opponents among the Corinthian Christians did. They tried to boast in Paul’s sphere of accomplishment.

Instead, Paul’s passion was to as vs. 16 states “*preach the gospel in the regions beyond.*” He was not interested in building on another man’s foundation, and did not want to hone in on someone else’s sphere of authority. We see this when a pastor leaves church X or says God has called him to start a new work but he really moves in on the same geographical area he was in from the beginning. Now, no one owns territory but if there are 10 churches in E. McKinney why not seek to start a new work where there are only 3 church or no churches.

Vs. 17-18 – Paul is quoting from Jeremiah 9:24 in vs. 17. Paul rebukes the Corinthian Christians who found their glory either in Paul or against Paul. Paul sweeps all that away, showing we should not glory in ourselves, in another, or against another – we should only glory in the Lord. It is base, abominable, and deeply sinful, for a man to thrust himself into other men’s labors, by sowing seeds of discourse or distracting and dividing the people in

order that he may get a party to himself. This is an evil that has prevailed much in all ages of the Church. In vs. 18 Paul is in essence saying it doesn't matter how you testify about your own accomplishments. It is what God says about us that matters and will endure. The final test is not what will be typed up and published in the annual denomination report; the real test is during our judgment with the Lord (Bema and Great White Throne)...It is what God has to say about our work that matters most.