

(Through the Bible) 2 Corinthians 9-10

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith's sermon on 2 Corinthians 9 emphasizes the importance of generous and cheerful giving as a reflection of love and faith in God's provision.

Duration: 1:12:05

Scripture: Psalm 112:9, Malachi 3:10, John 16:9, 2 Corinthians 9:6, 2 Corinthians 9:10-12

Topics: "Spiritual Laws", "Giving Generously"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of spiritual laws established by God within the universe. While the speaker admits to not fully understanding how these laws work, they emphasize the importance of living by them and reaping the results. One specific spiritual law mentioned is the principle of giving, where the more one gives to God, the more they will receive. The speaker encourages listeners to prove this law by giving tithes and offerings, as God promises to pour out blessings that cannot be contained.

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles to 2nd Corinthians, chapter 9. Paul has been, in the last couple of chapters, talking to them about the collection that he wanted them to take for the poor in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem had gone through a lot of problems, severe persecution. And the Christians in Jerusalem were in great physical need.

And so Paul is asking the Gentile churches to show their love in the body of Christ for their brothers in Jerusalem by sending an offering by his hand to them. And in chapter 8, he talks to them about the gathering together of these funds. In chapter 9, he continues his appeal to them to give for the aid of the church in Jerusalem.

And so, as touching the ministering to the saints, it's really superfluous for me to write to you. Because, he said, I know how willing you are to do these things. The forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them which are in Macedonia, that Achai was ready a year ago, and your zeal has provoked very many.

So, Paul is talking to them again about ministering to the needs of the church in Jerusalem. And he said that, I know a year ago you were ready to do it, and I shared with others your willingness. And they became excited over your willingness, and it was an inspiration to them to give.

Your zeal has been an inspiration, provoked others. Now I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf. And so, Paul sent Titus and another brother ahead to receive the collections that they had taken up to help the church in Jerusalem.

And Paul's a little concerned now. He's been boasting of how generous and willing the Corinthians were in supporting. And now he's hoping that they'll come through with his boasting of them.

And so, I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf, that as I have said, and as I have declared of you, you might indeed be ready to give. Lest, happily, if they of Macedonia come with me and find you unprepared, we, and we say not ye, should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. So, Paul is sort of trying to cover his bases in a sense.

He's been bragging all about them. Told the churches in Macedonia, oh, these guys are really super givers and all and they're really ready to aid. And now if I come and you haven't done anything, you know, I'll be embarrassed and you'll be embarrassed and all.

So, it's encouraging them in this giving. Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren that they would go before unto you and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had noticed before that the same might be ready as a matter of bounty and not as of covetousness. Now, Paul really didn't want any offerings taken while he was there.

He wanted it to all be done in advance. Paul wanted to preclude any criticism that might come of his ministry saying, well, Paul's just in it for the bucks. And he was extremely careful in this regard, not wanting to bring a reproach to Jesus Christ in the matter of giving.

Unfortunately, there are many who do bring a reproach to Jesus Christ because of the emphasis that they make upon giving. And there are all types of ways to fleece the flock of God. And believe me, these clever evangelists have discovered every way and even some that weren't there.

But Paul didn't want any kind of accusation that he was fleecing the church. And therefore, he wanted it all to be taken care of. He sent a couple of fellows in advance so that all of the giving would be over with by the time he got there, that he could just receive what was given and take it on to the church in Jerusalem, but didn't want any collections made while he was there.

It's, to me, an extremely embarrassing thing to have your name or whatever used as the tool for raising funds. A few years back, I was over in Hawaii speaking at a Bible conference where I'd been invited to speak at this Bible conference. And so the first night, when the fellow went to take the offering, he took about 10 minutes.

And, you know, we have asked our brother Chuck to come over here and it cost, you know, the money and all to get him here. And we want to make sure that he's well taken care of and all. And so we want you to really give tonight, you know, to provide for our dear brother Chuck's needs and all this kind of stuff.

And I sat there on the platform just embarrassed, silly. And so when I finally got a chance to get up, I said, I appreciate what this brother said about your poor brother Chuck, but I want you to know I'm not going to take one penny for being here. For I have an extremely wealthy father who takes care of all of my needs.

And I don't have to depend upon people to provide for my needs because my father so adequately takes care of me, gives me a generous expense account and supplies all of my needs. And so if you want to

take up offerings here, that's fine. If you want to give, that's good, but don't give for poor brother Chuck because he's not going to take a cent from you.

I'm here to give and not to receive. And I was just really embarrassed. I don't like my name used as the, you know, the goat or the gimmick or whatever to give people to give.

I do trust in my father to supply my needs, and he does. And he's very good about it. He's very faithful in that.

And so really I sort of modeled myself after Paul in this regard. I have always been disturbed over the emphasis that churches so often place upon giving. And that is why I've perhaps gone the other direction in the pendulum and say so little about giving.

That is why we never mention to you any needs that might exist. Because we're not looking to you, we're looking to the Lord to supply for the work of the ministry. And when God guides, God always provides.

And I always look a little askance at these who have been led by God into some great program and the whole thing's going to fail unless you bail God out. I somehow don't conceive God as being on the brink of bankruptcy every other week and ready to fold His whole program because people don't come through and rescue Him from financial insolvency. So, Paul had this same attitude towards giving.

Didn't want any offerings taken while he was there. Didn't want any emphasis placed upon money. Go ahead and get it all in before I get there so that when I arrive there will be no collections taken while I am there.

But in the giving, Paul does mention an interesting basic law of God. And that law of God is a spiritual law and it is interesting because it is hard at times to understand just how it can work. And I don't know the mechanics of how it works.

All I do know is that it does work. Now, there are a lot of physical laws that I know work. I don't know how they work.

I understand a little bit about the laws of magnetism. The attraction of opposite poles and the repelling of like poles. I know that the positive charges repel each other.

Now, why they repel, I don't know. Why opposite poles attract, I don't know. I know they do.

From the time I was a child, I knew that I could take a magnet and slowly put it down and finally watch the nail jump up to the magnet and some invisible force that was grabbing that nail and pulling it up to the magnet and holding it to the magnet. Later, as I began to study a little bit of physics, I understood that opposite poles attract. Now, I know that.

Why they do, I don't know. I know a little bit about electricity. Enough not to put my finger in a socket.

I know that we can project, and this I don't know, whether or not the electrical charges are going in the wire or around the wire. That I don't know, but I know that they can be transmitted along a wire. And I understand a little bit about alternate currents and direct currents, but just how it works, I'm not sure.

I know that the laws are there, and I learned to use to advantage those laws. I know that gravity is a natural law, that it works. I know not to defy it.

Now, why it is that mass attracts, I don't know. But I know it does. The same with spiritual laws that are also established by God within the universe.

And though I can't explain how they work, I know they do. And so, you learn to live by these laws, you learn to follow these laws, and to reap the results. Now, I know that there is a spiritual law that declares, Give, and it shall be given unto you, measured out, pressed down, running over.

Now, just how it is that the more you give to God, the more you receive, I don't know how that operates. But Paul brings out this spiritual law here. But this I say, He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Now, that's the spiritual law. And when you put it like this, I can begin to understand it a little bit. How the more you give, the more you'll get.

For Paul here puts it in a framework that I can begin to understand a bit. If I am sowing wheat in the field, it stands to reason, the more seed I sow, the greater harvest I will have. Now, if I want to be very careful about how I sow, and just take the seeds and toss them out here and there, then I'm only going to have little wheat shoots here and there.

I'm not going to have much of a harvest. But if I go out and sow just abundantly, then I'm going to reap an abundant harvest. So putting it in that kind of a framework, I can begin to understand a little bit, how the more you give, the more you get.

The more God returns, the greater the harvest. And so Paul brings it over into this law of giving, saying that if you sow sparingly, you're going to reap sparingly. But if you will sow bountifully, then you will reap bountifully.

That is a law of God. Interesting, it is the only law that God challenges you to prove. A lot of people say, I'm going to prove God now.

But God has only challenged you to prove Him in one area. And that is in this law of giving. And God said, prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, and see if I will not pour out unto you a blessing that you cannot contain.

And that proving Him is in the giving to God of tithes and offerings. So there is a basic law. It works.

I can't explain how it works. All I can do is assure you that it does work. God says, prove Me and see if it does it.

Only in the one area of giving. Now every man, and here is how we are to give. Every man, according as he is purposed in his heart, so let him give.

Not grudgingly or out of pressure. For God loves a hilarious giver. And that is what the Greek word means.

God takes it as a personal affront, and I would too if I were God. When someone gives Him something and then gripes about it. You ever had someone give you something and then they go around and complain about what they gave to you? Giving grudgingly.

My feeling is always, keep it man, I don't want it. I don't like gifts with strings attached. Many times things are given to the church, and I really don't like to question motives, but sometimes people sort of let it slip.

You know, this chair was given to us by our grandmother and we don't want to get rid of it. We don't really have any use for it and we don't really want it, but we thought we'd give it to the church, you know, because we don't want to throw it away. And then it becomes our obligation to put it someplace and to keep it for grandma's sake, you know.

But God doesn't want you to give anything to Him begrudgingly. You know, with an, alright, I'll give it to you, you know, kind of an attitude. And God as much as says, hey, keep it, I don't want it, I don't need it.

Nor does God want your gift to be by pressure. Someone really putting the pressure on you, you know. Everybody's looking now to see what you're going to give.

God doesn't want the gift to come by necessity, by constraint, by pressure. But what you give to God, which God receives and accepts, is that which you give with just a cheerful heart, giving hilariously. Lord, you know, here, I love it.

To give to God, just, it's a joy to be able to give. And only that should you really give to God. That which is given hilariously, because it is only that which God really respects and honors.

So you're better off to keep it than to give under pressure, constraint, or grudgingly. You're better really off to keep it. And you would be better off if you'll just keep it.

And only give what you can give with a hilarious heart. Because of your love for Him. So every man is his purpose in his own heart.

So let him give. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. That is God's return now to you.

You have given to God hilariously. God will never be a debtor to you. Remember that.

God will never be a debtor to man. As the Scripture said, Who hath given, and it has not been recompensed unto him again. And as Jesus said, Give and it shall be given.

Measure it out, press down, running over. Because God's not going to be your debtor. So God is able to make all grace abound toward you.

Taking care of all of your needs. Every good work. As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad.

He has given to the poor. His righteousness remaineth forever. And so He puts together here, actually some of the Psalms.

In this verse, has dispersed abroad, given to the poor. His righteousness remains. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower, or God, both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness.

And so God who gives the seed to the sower, gives us the bread, may He multiply the seed that you have sown, and just increase your fruits. Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving unto God. And so may God just return to you riches untold.

For the administration of this service not only supplies the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God. So it doesn't just, it has a two-fold purpose. It takes care of their need, but it also

creates a praise in their hearts to God.

And so the people who are receiving, as they receive the gifts that you have given, they're going to be giving God thanks. And so through your giving, actually you are provoking a lot of thanksgiving to be directed unto God. As people go away and say, oh thank you God, oh praise the Lord, Lord you've taken care of our needs.

And these praises are going to God, and they are actually praises that have resulted from your giving. I think that's really a beautiful way to look at the giving. In the fact that it is going to bring blessing to other people who in turn will give thanks to God for those blessings.

And so your giving is not only just taking care of their needs, but it's being the cause for bringing praise and rejoicing unto the Father. While by the experiment of this ministry they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ and for your liberal distribution unto them and unto all men. And by their prayer for you, and of course they in turn having received will pray for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God that is in you.

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gifts. So we talk about giving to God, but yet, you know, you think of what God has given unto us, that unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. And what was the motive behind it? God so loved the world that He gave.

And so the motive behind our giving must be love, our love for God. And any other motive is not really valid. Give because you love the Lord.

Give what you've purposed in your heart. What you can give hilariously, that give unto God and God will bless you abundantly for it. So the rule is really about giving.

And I want that those rules should apply here. Really, I don't want you to give unless you are motivated by the love of the Lord within your hearts. And give only as you've purposed in your own heart to give.

Never feel pressured. Never feel constrained. We'll never come to you pleading for funds for God's work.

We'll close the doors before we do that. If things should get bad financially and all and we start really going down the tubes, we'll just close the doors. We won't come up and send you letters and say, well, you know, we're really in desperate straits and all that.

We'll just close the doors and I'll head for Hawaii or something. Don't feel sorry for us. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

Oh, God is so good to us. And in His love, He has given us so much. Not only Christ, but that gift that is through Christ of the hope for the eternal kingdom and those riches in glory that are ours through Christ Jesus.

You know, Christ is just sort of, in a sense, the obvious, but with Christ there comes so much. You know, the fringe benefits never quit. They go on and on and on and on and on.

But they all come to us through Christ. Grace and peace. Oh, these glorious gifts of God.

How do I receive them? Through Christ. Be multiplied to you through our Lord Jesus Christ. So He is the gift that really opens the door for all of these gifts that God bestows upon us.

Now, Paul has finished his section upon the giving for the poor saints in Jerusalem and he goes on to other things. And these other things are very sober and serious things. Again, he deals with the challenge of his apostleship that was made by those in Corinth.

There was a faction in Corinth that were against Paul. And this factious group tried to turn other people against Paul. Divisions within the church are always an ugly thing.

When people begin to align themselves with man or with some system of teaching rather than with Jesus Christ. And so often, when people create these divisions, rather than just saying, well, let's start something new, they have to somehow give a rationale for starting something new by tearing down the old. And by finding fault and by saying things against Paul.

And so these factions were at work. Always an ugly thing in the body of Christ. And so Paul now is writing to these factious groups.

Addressing himself to the criticism that was made of him by these who sort of set themselves up as spiritual authorities. And there's always those around, you know, who pretend to have a greater spiritual insight and a greater spiritual understanding. They go around with sort of a putting off this aura of, well, brother, when you really arrive at, you know, the degree that I am.

You'll understand these things. I can understand now. You just are not ready for these things, you know.

But as you mature and grow, then you can understand these deeper things of God and this malarkey that they come off with, you know. And so, as though they are more spiritual, have greater insight, and you poor paeans, you know, someday maybe you'll arrive. But in the meantime, we feel sorry for you.

Trying to bolster their own cause by tearing down others. There is, you know, they used to have the Confucius say. I don't know if Confucius said all the things he's attributed to having said.

But I can remember one of the Confucius says when I was a kid. And it used to be, you know, one of the popular things, Confucius say, you know, Many men smoke, but Fu Meng Chew. One of the things that they used to say.

But there is another saying attributed to Confucius and probably more accurate. And it was, Confucius say, Man who throws mud loses ground. I like that.

You see, you can't really throw mud without getting your hands dirty and losing ground. They were throwing mud at Paul. Paul seeks now in the next few chapters to defend himself.

As though he needed to defend himself. It's tragic that Paul was put in this posture. And Paul is embarrassed by it.

He's more or less forced now to say things he really doesn't want to say. These are things that were between he and the Lord. These are things that he endured for Christ's sake.

Willingly, gladly. Things that he didn't go around, you know, trumpeting all over the land. But now he's more or less forced because of his position being challenged by these evil people in Corinth to reveal some of the things whereby his apostleship is really proved.

Now, I, Paul, myself, beseech you by the meekness and the gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent I am bold toward you. This is one of the charges that he made. Hey, when he gets away he can write these terrifying letters, but when he's here he's just, you know, so meek and, you know, just so mild-mannered and all, but he gets away and then he writes these terrifying letters to you.

But when he's around, he's an ugly little runt. And they were making fun of his appearance and according to one of the early books of the Apographer written about the year 200, the Acts of Paul, it's called, in Teculum, I think it is, it does describe Paul, and it said he was, you know, a short little fellow, heavy eyebrows that came together, a hooked nose, and sort of bantied bull legs, you know, bull-legged, and sort of bantied little, knobby knees and, you know, just not much to look at. And that's what they were saying in Corinth, hey, this guy's got not much to look at, you know, but he gets away, and man, he becomes dynamic and powerful, you know, he's the, with us he's the 97-pound weakling, he gets away, you know, and he's an atlas, and so they were making these kind of accusations against Paul.

And so he says, I beseech you by the gentleness and the meekness of Christ, who in presence I am base among you, but being absent, I am bold toward you. I beseech you, twice now, the beseeching, not demanding, but just appealing to them, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence wherewith I think to be bold against some which think of us as though we walked according to the flesh. They were accusing Paul of walking according to the flesh.

They were making all kinds of bitter accusations against him, and he's warning that when he comes, he doesn't want to really come down heavy on them. However, if the necessity is there, he will. For though he said we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds, casting down the imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. So we walk in the flesh. That is, we are in a body of flesh.

However, our real warfares are not fleshly warfares. Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. Paul writing to the Ephesians said, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual entities and high places.

Our real battles, our real warfare are not physical battles. They are spiritual battles with these spirit entities that surround us and there is spiritual warfare constantly going on. We do not and cannot imagine the extent to which this spiritual warfare is being waged in the universe around us.

You remember when Daniel set his heart to seek the Lord in fasting and in prayer. And after 21 days, the angel came to Daniel and said, from the day you first called unto God, I was dispatched to bring you the answer. Below the prince of Persia captured me and held me until finally Michael, that great prince, came and set me free.

And now I've come to reveal unto you those things that you desire to know of God. This great spiritual warfare that was going on, hindering the answer to Daniel's prayer for 21 days, as this angel dispatched from God was held and captured by the prince of Persia, by the powers and the spirit forces of darkness, and held until Michael came and delivered him. We are not really cognizant of the spiritual warfare that does go on in the universe around us.

It would be well if we would be more sensitive to the fact that there is a spiritual warfare going on, and many times we get the flack of that spiritual warfare. The byproduct of it oftentimes are feelings that we really don't understand and can't really define. A feeling of heaviness, a feeling of depression, a feeling of discouragement, or a feeling of despair, despondency, a feeling of restlessness, just a feeling of agitation.

These feelings can often result from the byproduct really of the spiritual warfare that is going on around us. There is a tremendous battle over the souls of men being waged by the Spirit of God and by Satan. That desire to control the mind and the soul of man.

And many a time, a person is in the midst of that conflict as it is their soul that is in the balance. God's Spirit tugging, Satan holding on. Tremendous spiritual battles.

And to be aware of them is vital for us as Christians if we're going to maintain a life of victory. One of our problems is that we do not always recognize when Satan is attacking. And quite often, we're prone to just pass it off on just our own nature or our own just feelings.

Or, I just woke up this morning feeling horrible. I just get in these cranky moods sometimes. You're just going to have to forgive me.

And we're not aware of the fact that we are under a spiritual attack. And because we're not aware of the fact that it is a spiritual attack against us, we just go on. Rather than standing against it and resisting it.

For the Bible tells us if we resist the devil, he'll flee from us. But I've got to recognize that it is Satan's attack before I resist it. So there are really the three R's I call the spiritual victory.

And the one is to recognize the source of the attack. This is the enemy at work. He's attacking me.

Having recognized it, then I can deal with it by resisting it in the name of Jesus. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. And then the third key to victory is to rejoice in the victory of the Lord over the powers and the forces of darkness.

And as you rejoice, you find the depression goes. You find that the irritation leaves and you begin to really feel victory in Christ and what a difference the day becomes because you have taken that victory that is yours through Christ over this attack of the enemy against you. But too many times we just bow our head and we, you know, go on being battered and beaten.

Feeling lousy and don't know why. Complaining to God because things are going so horribly. Failing to recognize that it's actually a spiritual attack of Satan against you, against your home, against the family.

And they can be manifested in so many ways. So we walk in the flesh, but we really don't war after the flesh. The warfare is a spiritual warfare and for this spiritual warfare it takes spiritual weapons and God has provided us those spiritual weapons.

And in Ephesians chapter 6, Paul said, Therefore, recognizing that we're wrestling against these spirit forces and powers, put on the whole armor of God that you might be able to withstand the works of the evil one. That you might stand against them. And he talks about the helmet of salvation.

He talks about the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The shield of faith, whereby we quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. And then having armed you completely, he then concludes by saying, Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, let your requests be made known unto God.

So the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. The weapons of the spiritual warfare are spiritual weapons. The Word of God, faith, prayer.

And by these we come against the attacks of the enemy. And by these we can defeat the enemy. None of you as a child of God need to go on being harassed by Satan.

You have the authority and the power through Jesus Christ to put the enemy to flight. And when you come against him in that victory of Christ that was wrought at Calvary, Satan must yield. Resist the devil and he shall flee from you.

Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh unto you. Our problem is that so often rather than coming against the enemy with spiritual weapons, we come against him with the weapons of the flesh. You know, I'm going to conquer over this.

I'm going to, you know, lift myself out of this depression. I'm going to... And we come with our own fleshly devices and schemes rather than with the spiritual weapons that God has placed at our disposal. And so the fight goes on and on and on and on.

And I live in a quasi-world constantly battling, constantly being harassed and attacked by the enemy because I'm trying in my flesh to ward off his power and his attacks against me. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are mighty through God pulling down the strongholds.

And that's exactly what we can do through prayer is pull down the strongholds of the enemy. Now the area of the battlefield is in the imagination of man and in his thoughts. Satan battles you in your mind.

The spiritual battles are waged in your mind. That's where Satan challenges God. Hath God said? Does God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? Does God see? And quite often we are deceived by Satan thinking that we are getting by.

God doesn't see. If God sees, then why didn't He do something about it? And because God doesn't instantly strike, we think, well, we're getting by with it. And we've deceived ourselves into thinking that we are somehow getting by with our evil.

It's going unnoticed by God. We seem to be prospering in our wickedness. But as the old adage goes, the wheels of justice grind slowly, but exceedingly fine.

And it will come out. But in our minds, Satan will plant thoughts, ideas, fantasies. What do I do with them? Do I say, oh, I like that.

And I begin to fantasize and see myself in this experience. And I begin to go on in my mind and play with it. And oh, you know, it would be so good and I could be so happy.

And oh, it's so ideal. And you continue to fantasize. And Satan takes that imagination, that fantasy, and he uses it to trip you up.

The law of metaphysics. The visualization. What do you desire? Put it in your mind.

Put it before your mind. Write your goal on a piece of paper. Put it on your mirror.

And when you shave in the morning, look at it. And just see yourself now in this position of power. See yourself in this position of authority.

See yourself sitting behind the desk, president. And as you are visualizing, your subconscious will take over and will begin to devise the methods and the means whereby your visualization can become an actualization. And so Satan works.

You begin to visualize yourself in these things, doing these things. And your subconscious begins to develop the schemes and the methods whereby it becomes a reality. And suddenly you find yourself caught up in that which you really thought I would never do.

But you see, you first of all did it in your mind. That's what Jesus was talking about when He said, you've heard that it hath been said thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you, whoever lusts after a woman in his heart. You see, there is where it starts.

In the mind. In the fantasizing. You're already guilty.

You're on the road. You're on the way. You've already in your mind done the act.

And so that's where it has to be checked. That's where we need the spiritual weapons to check those imaginations and casting down every imagination and anything that would exalt itself against the law of God that would put me in opposition to what God hath said. Bringing every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Jesus Christ.

If that thought that you have doesn't measure up and match what Jesus would have you to be or to do, then get rid of it. Don't play with it. Don't flirt with it.

Because it can bring you into damnation. So, the weapons of our warfare. We need the spiritual weapons to fight the spiritual warfare.

We may walk in the flesh, but that isn't where the real war takes place. It takes place in my mind. The spiritual battle for the control of my mind.

And if I have the mind of the flesh, then I'm going to reap corruption. But if I have the mind of the Spirit, then I'm going to reap life and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. But the battle is for the mind.

And Satan is trying to captivate your mind. And look at the tools that he has today to captivate your mind and to plant things into your mind that would take you away from the Lord. Look at the abundance and the availability of pornography today.

Satan is working overtime to bring out things to capture your mind and to cause these fantasies to start going. And you've got to stand in the strength and in the power of the Holy Spirit against these onslaughts of the enemy, or else you will find yourself brought into captivity and into the bondage of your flesh. My heart goes out to you.

It's not easy to live the right kind of life today because every ungodly pressure in the world is against you. And you cannot in your flesh maintain a spiritual experience. You must take and use everything God has made available for you if you're going to stand in these days.

And that's how Paul concludes this little talk to the Ephesians on the same subject. He said, And having done all, stand. And God knows, sometimes that's about all we can do.

I mean, after Satan has been through and the battering and the blasting, just the fact that I'm still standing, man, that's all right. Thank God. It's only by the grace of God that I'm standing.

Because surely Satan is out to destroy you and to pull you down. And having then in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. Paul is again referring to those in Ephesus whom he plans to, if they do not change, bring revenge upon their disobedience.

Now, do you look on things after the outward appearance? And this is where they were making fun of Paul's outward appearance. You know, he's weak and contemptible in his presence. His speech is contemptible.

Paul said, Do you look on the outward appearance? If any man trusts to himself that he is Christ, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ, even so are we Christ. So, these people who were saying, well, we're really of the Lord. Paul says, wait a minute.

I'm also of the Lord. Oh, we have the mind of Christ. Paul said, we also have the mind of Christ.

We have received a revelation. Paul said, I've received a revelation. So, these people, they say they're of Christ, but just put this down.

We also are of Christ. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord has given to us for edification and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed. Now, Paul's authority was given to him of the Lord to build up the body of Christ.

And so, be careful. You see, when a person is speaking authoritatively and he is using that to tear down the body of Christ, then that's a dangerous thing to destroy. Paul said, my gift wasn't given to me to destroy, but to build up.

If I have the anointing of God's Spirit and the word of the Lord in my heart, that word was given to me to build up the body of Christ. These people are going around trying to destroy or to tear down the body of Christ. Then I may not seem as if I would terrify you by the letters.

For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak. Spinly little guy. And his speech is contemptible.

Now, let such a one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deeds when we are present. Hey, when I come in the deeds, I will be powerful and weighty. Paul wasn't really one to be messed with.

When Paul was on a particular island, and it's in the book of Acts and it doesn't come clearly, you can go and get the details. But there was this governor of the island, Sergius Publius, and Paul was sharing with him the things of Jesus Christ. And there was this certain sorcerer, I think it was Elymas the sorcerer, who was speaking against the things that Paul was saying.

And Paul turned to Elymas and said, God smite you with blindness, brother. And the guy went blind. So that Sergius and all of them were really amazed at the power demonstrated through this man Paul.

Paul says, hey, as I am in my letters, powerful, weighty, that's the way I'm going to be in my deeds when I deal with these guys when I get there. Man, if I were one of those speaking against Paul, I think I'd take a leave of absence and leave town for a while. For we dare not make ourselves of the number of those who are guilty of the mistake of comparing themselves with others.

For by measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, they are not wise. Now, this is often a mistake that people make. You see, we look around and say, hey, I'm not too bad because I'm comparing myself with you.

And as we use each other as our standard for comparison, we can sometimes feel very heady, very proud, you know, because I'm using another man as my standard for comparison. But Paul said, that isn't wise. Why? Because no man is my standard.

Jesus Christ is my standard. God doesn't call me to be like any man. He calls me to be like Jesus Christ.

And though I may look at some man and say, well, you know, I'm not too bad, when I look at Jesus Christ, I say, woe is me, I'm a sinful man. God help me. So, here in Corinth, there was this little group puffed up because they were comparing themselves with each other.

Using each other as the standard for comparison and thus being puffed up by that. But that's a mistake. That's not wise.

God help us that we don't fall in that trap. That we don't measure ourselves by others, but let's look at Christ as the standard. For an interesting Scripture in John 16, where Jesus said when the Holy Spirit has come, He's going to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

Of sin, He said, because they don't believe in Me. Interesting statement, because we would think of sin, because they're liars, and cheaters, and adulterers, and fornicators, and murderers, and thieves. But not that.

A sin because they don't believe in Me. Why? Because Jesus through His death paid the price for every sin. There's only one sin that can condemn a man now, and that is the rejection of Jesus Christ.

He didn't come to condemn the world, but to save the world. For the world was already condemned, and this is the condemnation. Light came into the world, but men wouldn't come to the light.

That's the condemnation. Sin, because they don't believe in Me. But then He said of righteousness, because I ascended to My Father.

Now that again is an interesting statement. Why would He equate righteousness to His ascension into Heaven? The ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven in the sight of the disciples was God's statement to mankind, this is the righteousness that can be received into Heaven. Nothing less.

If you want to be accepted into Heaven, then that is the righteousness that God accepts into Heaven. You say, woe is me, I'm out. No.

For by faith in Jesus Christ, God imputes to us that righteousness which is of Christ through faith. But it does immediately eliminate any work that I might be seeking to do to be accepted by God. It does eliminate works as a method to gain entrance into Heaven completely.

The ascension of Jesus Christ puts the standard of righteousness so high that I cannot attain it by my own effort. I must accept it as the gift of God through His grace. Of righteousness because I ascend into Heaven.

God's declaration. This is the standard. So He is the standard by which we must measure ourselves.

Not each other. But Paul said, We will not boast of those things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure as though we reach not unto you.

For we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ. Not boasting of the things without our measure, that is, of other men's labors, but having hope when your faith is increased that when we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly. And so Paul says, I'm not going to measure myself by other standards.

The work that I did is sufficient. The labor that I had among you, that's the measure. Your faith in Christ, your following after Him, that's the testimony, that's the witness to the authenticity of my ministry.

You yourselves, the fruit of my ministry, attest to the fact that my ministry is valid. And Paul said, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand. And so, Paul talks about his ministry.

He wasn't really interested in going around and building on another man's foundations. He wasn't really interested in going where the gospel had already been declared. He was interested in going to regions beyond.

And when they had come to Corinth, they had never heard before. Now that they had heard and believed, there were always those fellows ready to move in and to put Paul down and try to build their own little popular followings. And that is always the case.

You know, when people see a marvelous work like God has done here at Calvary Chapel, there's always a thousand and ten ministers around the country that suddenly feel called. Orange County. You know, maybe we can catch some fallout.

Or maybe we can pull some out. Whereas, it is interesting that every week we get calls and letters from all over the country of people pleading to have a Calvary Chapel type ministry in their area. Hundreds of requests every year come in where they say, there is nothing like Calvary here where we can go and just be taught the Word of God.

But yet, why doesn't God call people to those places where there hasn't been already a work established? Why are they called to come five blocks away or nearby and establish a work and then come in and say, folks, why don't you come over? You know, we've got a little fuller. Calvary's good, but you know, they're just lacking a little bit. And so God's called us to complete the work.

You know, they're just a little... It's a shame really when there are thousands of areas around the country pleading for someone to come and teach them the Word that these people don't hear a call of God to go there. And so Paul is faced with this in Corinth. All of these guys moved in.

They weren't going to unreached regions. They were going in and trying to build on the foundation that he established. Why is it that they go into the church and try and take away from the church rather than going down to the beach or going to the public marketplaces? Amazing how many times while we're sitting here saying the Word of God, people are out there plastering your cars with invitations to some event in their church that's going to be happening.

We have a crew that's out there every service to take the things off of the windshields that are put on by these people that come around when the cars are parked there. You'll never know what you've been invited to. But we will call these people and we'll say, why would you come to our parking lot to pass out your literature? Why don't you go over to the South Coast Plaza Mall? Why don't you go down to the beach? Why are you trying to take away from the body of Christ? You know, if you're really valid, why aren't you going out and winning the lost? And Paul says that's the validity of my ministry is to go to regions beyond where the gospel hasn't been heard.

Call of God upon Paul's heart. Go out where the need is. Don't go and build another church and duplicate another ministry.

But go out where the need is to preach the gospel in the regions beyond and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand. Not to come in and try and just take off from someone else's work. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commended. It's not what I think about myself that counts. It's what God thinks about me.

It's not what I say about myself that really matters. It's what is God saying about me. So with you, it's not what you have to say about yourself that is really important.

It's what does God have to say about you. Not what you have to say about your calling or your ministry or whatever. What is God saying about it? It isn't He who commends Himself.

That isn't where it's at. But the commendation of God, that's the thing we need to seek. If we want a glory, let's not glory in our works or in our efforts, but let's glory in what the Lord has done.

I feel so embarrassed many times because as I meet people from around the country, ministers and all, and they'll say, you're sure doing a great work there in Costa Mesa. And I always correct them. I say, the Lord is indeed doing a fabulous work and I have the privilege of watching what He's doing.

I don't look at this as my work. God knows what I can do. I can make a mess out of anything.

Like we used to say, our kids could get juice out of anything when they ate, you know, little kids. Eat dry crackers, but they could get juice out of them. And even as they could get juice out of anything, I can make a mess out of anything.

This is the work of the Lord. It's marvelous in our eyes. We have the joy and the blessing of seeing God work.

And He that glorieth, let Him glory in the Lord for what God has done. And let us not seek man's commendations, man's approvals. Let's seek the Lord's approval.

What does God think of me and of my service? Men might be hailing me, saying how wonderful I am. Hey, that doesn't matter. They could be wrong.

What is God saying? That's what I'm concerned with. What's God's opinion? That has me deeply concerned. God help us.

Father, we thank You again for Your Word. Standard for life. The light for our path.

May we walk in Your truth. And oh God, may we live after the Spirit and after the things of the Spirit. A life that is pleasing and acceptable, Lord, unto Thee.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. May the Lord be with you and may He bless you through the week as God ministers unto you those infinite riches of His love and grace wherewith He loved you before the world ever existed.

And may you come to have a fresh insight of God's love and concern for you. That you in turn might have a new depth of love and relationship with Him. May this be a blessed week.

Blessed of God in every way.

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