

Day 108, 2 Corinthians 10

by David Servant

Paul defends himself against false apostles in Corinth, emphasizing the importance of consistent character and the power of God's Word in spiritual warfare.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:15

Topics: "Apostolic Authority", "Christian Character"

Description

David Servant delves into Paul's defense against his antagonists in Corinth, who were false apostles boasting of their credentials to gain the allegiance of Corinthian believers. Paul faced criticism for his bold letters contrasting with his meek presence, yet he emphasized the consistency of his character in words and deeds. He highlighted the importance of written and spoken communication, acknowledging the need for wisdom in choosing between the two. Paul subtly criticized his opponents for measuring themselves against inferior standards and boasting beyond their measure, while depending on the Corinthians to further the gospel.

Transcript

Paul once more turns his attention to defending himself against his antagonists in Corinth, whom he refers to as false apostles in the next chapter (11:13). It is apparent that they were not only boasting of their "credentials"---in order to boost their status in the eyes of the Corinthian believers---but they were also quite critical of Paul, for the same reason.

How frequently are criticism and pride related. People often put down others for the purpose of exalting themselves, especially when they want something that the object of their criticism possesses. Such was the case with Paul's antagonists. They wanted the allegiance of his disciples in Corinth. Paul consequently found himself in the very difficult position of trying to win back the Corinthians' allegiance---not for his sake, but for theirs---without stooping to the same tactics as his opponents.

One of their criticisms of Paul was that he was bold in his letters but meek when face-to-face (10:1). They said, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible" (10:10). Paul brushes off that attack, confidently asserting that his character---in words and deeds---was consistent. It is certainly true, however, that words written on a page are in some ways inherently inferior to face-to-face communication, with its facial and body expressions, its tone of voice, and its back-and-forth spontaneity. How many letters have been misunderstood that required a face-to-face meeting to mend? On the other hand, one who writes can give more thought to his words

before they are released to discharge their premeditated duty. Wisdom must dictate between written and spoken communication, and sometimes a combination of both is necessary to seal understanding between two parties.

Paul offered his own subtle criticism of his Corinthian opponents, who "measured themselves by themselves" (10:12). It is easy to feel good about yourself when you compare yourself with those who are substandard. Dirty pigs who compare themselves with pigs who are lying in the mud might be tempted to feel superior, but the fact is, they're still dirty pigs. In truth, the false teachers who had infiltrated Corinth were of no comparison to Paul, but that was not easy for him to say without sounding as if he were commending himself, something for which he condemned the false apostles.

Paul also gently pointed out that he, unlike the false apostles, had no need to "boast beyond his measure" (10:15). He was the apostolic pioneer in Corinth, and the false apostles had settled later in his territory, yet acting as if they had founder's rights (10:14-15).

Notice also that Paul was hoping, and depending, on the Corinthians to help him reach even further with the gospel (10:15-16). We are so apt to credit God's ministers for their accomplishments in building the kingdom, but their supporters are just as important in God's plan. "How will they preach unless they are sent?" Paul would later ask (Rom. 10:15). Those who support God's apostles will share in their reward in the end. Every apostle needs those who support his ministry.

I'm sure you noticed the "spiritual warfare" passage in today's reading. It is another one of Paul's metaphorical masterpieces that has been abused to promote some strange practices. Paul's weapons of warfare were "divinely powerful for destruction of fortresses" (10:4). Was he referring to demonic strongholds over cities that, if bound in Jesus' name, will then release people from spiritual darkness, precipitating a revival? No mention of that in this passage or its context! Rather, Paul was speaking of "destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and...taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (10:5). This is just a figurative way of describing the preaching of the gospel and the making of disciples. It is like a war, but a battle between truth and lies. Truth destroys speculations and takes lies captive.

Our greatest weapon is God's Word, because with it, we expose the lies that so many people believe. Then it rests on them, of course, to believe the truth or a lie. That is the essence of biblical spiritual warfare.

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