

2 Corinthians 10:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

This sermon explores the nature of Paul's ministry, his defense against criticism, and the importance of meekness and gentleness in the life of a true servant of God.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:1, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Courage"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes Paul's meekness and gentleness in his entreaty to the Corinthians, contrasting his humility in person with his boldness in letters, addressing false apostles and defending his authority. Paul's weapons are not of the flesh but mighty before God, used to cast down strongholds and bring every thought into obedience to Christ. Chrysostom encourages the congregation to imitate Paul's courage and steadfastness in spiritual warfare, highlighting the power of Paul's teachings to refute adversaries and transform lives.

Transcript

Now I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who in your presence am lowly among you, but being absent am of good courage toward you: yea, I beseech you, that I may not when present show courage with the confidence, wherewith I count to be bold against some, which count of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

Having completed, in such sort as behooved his discourse of almsgiving, and having shown that he loves them more than he is loved, and having recounted the circumstances of his patience and trials, he now opportunely enters upon points involving more of reproof, making allusion to the false apostles, and concluding his discourse with more disagreeable matter, and with commendations of himself. For he makes this his business also throughout the Epistle. Which also perceiving, he hence oftentimes corrects himself, saying in so many words ; Do we begin again to commend ourselves? 2 Corinthians 3:1 and further on; We commend not ourselves again, but give you occasion to glory: 2 Corinthians 5:12 and afterwards; I have become a fool in glorying; you have compelled me. 2 Corinthians 12:11 And many such correctives does he use.

And one would not be wrong in styling this Epistle an eulogium of Paul; he makes such large mention both of his grace and his patience. For since there were some among them who thought great things of themselves, and set themselves above the Apostle, and accused him as a boaster, and as being nothing, and teaching no sound doctrine; (now this was in itself the most certain evidence of their own

corruptness;) see how he begins his rebuke of them; Now I Paul myself. Do you see what severity, what dignity, is here?

For what he would say is this, 'I beseech you do not compel me, nor leave me to use my power against those that hold us cheap, and think of us as carnal.' This is severer than those threats towards them uttered in the former Epistle; Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness? 1 Corinthians 4:21 and then again; Now some are puffed up as though I were not coming to you; but I will come, and will know, not the word of them that are puffed up, but the power. (ib. 18, 19.)

For in this place he shows both things, both his power, and his philosophy and forbearance; since he so beseeches them, and with such earnestness, that he may not be compelled to come to a display of the avenging power pertaining to him, and to smite and chastise them and exact the extreme penalty. For he implied this in saying, But I beseech you, that I may not when present show courage with the confidence, wherewith I count to be bold against some which count of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

For the present, however, let us speak of the commencement. Now I Paul myself. Great emphasis, great weight is here. So he says elsewhere, Behold I Paul say unto you; Galatians 5:2 and again, As Paul the aged; Philemon 9 and again in another place, Who has been a succorer of many, and of me. Romans 16:2 So also here, Now I Paul myself. This even is a great thing, that himself beseeches; but that other is greater which he added, saying, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

For with the wish of greatly shaming them, he puts forward that meekness and gentleness, making his entreaty in this way more forcible; as if he had said, 'Reverence the gentleness of Christ by which I beseech you.' And this he said, at the same time also showing that although they should lay ever so strong a necessity upon him, he himself is more inclined to this: it is from being meek, not from want of power, that he does not proceed against them: for Christ also did in like manner.

Who in your presence am lowly among you, but being absent am of good courage toward you. What, pray, is this? Surely he speaks in irony, using their speeches. For they said this, that 'when he is present indeed, he is worthy of no account, but poor and contemptible; but when absent, swells, and brags, and sets himself up against us, and threatens.' This at least he implies also afterwards, saying, for his letters, say they, are weighty, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account. 2 Corinthians 10:10 He either then speaks in irony, manifesting great severity and saying, 'I, the base, I, the mean, when present, (as they say,) and when absent, lofty:' or else meaning that even though he should utter great things, it is not out of pride, but out of his confidence in them.

But I beseech you, that I may not when present show courage with the confidence, wherewith I count to be bold against some which count of us as if we walked according to the flesh. Do you see how great his indignation, and how complete his refutation of those sayings of theirs? For he says, 'I beseech you, do not compel me to show that even present I am strong and have power.' For since they said that 'when absent, he is quite bold against us and exalts himself,' he uses their very words, 'I beseech therefore that they compel me not to use my power.' For this is the meaning of, the confidence. And he said not, 'wherewith I am prepared,' but 'wherewith I count.' 'For I have not yet resolved upon this; they however give me reason enough, but not even so do I wish it.' And yet he was doing this not to vindicate himself, but the Gospel. Now if where it was necessary to vindicate the Message, he is not harsh, but draws back and delays, and beseeches that there may be no such necessity; much more would he never have done any thing of the kind in his own vindication. 'Grant me then this favor,' he says, 'that you compel me not to

show, that even when present I am able to be bold against whomsoever it may be necessary; that is, to chastise and punish them.' Do you see how free he was from ambition, how he did nothing for display, since even where it was matter of necessity, he hesitates not to call the act, boldness. For I beseech you, he says, that I may not when present show courage with the confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some. For this especially is the part of a teacher, not to be hasty in taking vengeance, but to work a reformation, and ever to be reluctant and slow in his punishments. How, pray, does he describe those whom he threatens? Those that count of us as though we walked according to the flesh: for they accused him as a hypocrite, as wicked, as a boaster.

2 Corinthians 10:3

2. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

Here he goes on to alarm them also by the figure he uses, 'for,' says he, 'we are indeed encompassed with flesh; I own it, but we do not live by the flesh;' or rather, he said not even this, but for the present reserves it, for it belongs to the encomium on his life: but first discourses of the Preaching, and shows that it is not of man, nor needs aid from beneath. Wherefore he said not, 'we do not live according to the flesh,' but, we do not war according to the flesh, that is, 'we have undertaken a war and a combat; but we do not war with carnal weapons, nor by help of any human succors.'

2 Corinthians 10:4

For our weapons are not of the flesh.

For what sort of weapons are of the flesh? Wealth, glory, power, fluency, cleverness, circumventions, flatteries, hypocrisies, whatsoever else is similar to these. But ours are not of this sort: but of what kind are they?

Mighty before God.

And he said not, 'we are not carnal,' but, our weapons. For as I said, for the present he discourses of the Preaching, and refers the whole power to God. And he says not, 'spiritual,' although this was the fitting opposite to carnal, but mighty, in this implying the other also, and showing that their weapons are weak and powerless. And mark the absence of pride in him; for he said not, 'we are mighty,' but, our weapons are mighty before God. 'We did not make them such, but God Himself.' For because they were scourged, were persecuted, and suffered wrongs incurable without number, which things were proofs of weakness: to show the strength of God he says, but they are mighty before God. For this especially shows His strength, that by these things He gains the victory. So that even though we are encompassed with them, yet it is He that wars and works by them. Then he goes through a long eulogium upon them, saying,

To the casting down of strong holds. And lest when hearing of strong holds you should think of anything material, he says,

2 Corinthians 10:5

Casting down imaginations.

First giving emphasis by the figure, and then by this additional expression declaring the spiritual character of the warfare. For these strongholds besiege souls, not bodies. Whence they are stronger than the

others, and therefore also the weapons they require are mightier. But by strongholds he means the Grecian pride, and the strength of their sophisms and their syllogisms. But nevertheless, 'these weapons,' he says, 'confounded every thing that stood up against them; for they cast down imaginations,

'And every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God.' He persisted in the metaphor that he might make the emphasis greater. 'For though there should be strongholds,' he says, 'though fortifications, though any other thing soever, they yield and give way before these weapons.

And bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And yet the name, captivity, has an ill sound with it; for it is the destruction of liberty. Wherefore then has he used it? With a meaning of its own, in regard to another point. For the word captivity conveys two ideas, the loss of liberty, and the being so violently overpowered as not to rise up again. It is therefore in respect to this second meaning that he took it. As when he shall say I robbed other churches, 2 Corinthians 11:8 he does not intend the taking stealthily, but the stripping and taking their all, so also here in saying, bringing into captivity. For the fight was not equally maintained, but he conquered with great ease. Wherefore he did not say, 'we conquer and have the better,' only; but 'we even bring into captivity;' just as above, he did not say, 'we advance engines against the strongholds:' but, 'we cast them down, for great is the superiority of our weapons.' 'For we war not with words,' he says, but with deeds against words, not with fleshly wisdom, but with the spirit of meekness and of power. How was it likely then I should hunt after honor, and boast in words, and threaten by letters;' (as they accused him, saying, his letters are weighty,) 'when our might lay not in these things?' But having said, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, because the name of captivity was unpleasant, he presently afterwards put an end to the metaphor, saying, unto the obedience of Christ: from slavery unto liberty, from death unto life, from destruction to salvation. For we came not merely to strike down, but to bring over to the truth those who are opposed to us.

2 Corinthians 10:6

3. And being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be fulfilled.

Here he alarmed these also, not those alone: 'for,' says he, 'we were waiting for you, that when by our exhortations and threatenings we have reformed you, and purged and separated you from their fellowship; then, when those only are left who are incurably diseased, we may visit with punishment, after we see that you have really separated from them. For even now indeed ye obey, but not perfectly.' 'And yet if you had done it now,' says one, you would have wrought greater gain.' 'By no means, for if I had done it now, I should have involved you also in the punishment. Howbeit it behooved to punish them, indeed, but to spare you. Yet if I spared, I should have seemed to do it out of favor: now this I do not desire, but first to amend you, and then to proceed against them.' What can be tenderer than the heart of the Apostle? Who because he saw his own mixed up with aliens, desires indeed to inflict the blow, but forbears, and restrains his indignation until these shall have withdrawn, that he may smite these alone; yea rather, not these even. For he therefore threatens this, and says he is desirous to separate unto punishment them alone, that they also being amended by the fear may change, and he let loose his anger against no one. For just like a most excellent physician, and common father, and patron, and guardian, so did he all things, so cared he for all, removing impediments, checking the pestilent, running about every whither. For not by fighting did he so achieve the work, but advancing as if to a ready and an easy victory, he planted his trophies, undermining, casting down, overthrowing the strongholds of the devil, and the engines of the demons; and carried over their whole booty to the camp of Christ. Nor did he even take breath a little, bounding off from these to those, and from those again to others, like some very able general, raising

trophies every day, or rather every hour. For having entered into the battle with nothing but a little tunic , the tongue of Paul took the cities of his enemies with their men and bows and spears and darts and all.

For he spoke only; and, falling upon his enemies more fiercely than any fire, his words drove out the demons and brought over unto him the men that were possessed of them. For when he cast out that demon, the evil one, fifty thousand sorcerers coming together burnt their books of magic and revolted to the truth. See Acts 19:19 And like as in a war, when a tower has fallen or a tyrant been brought low, all his partizans cast away their arms and run unto the [opposing] general; so truly did it happen then also. For when the demon was cast out, they all having been besieged, and having cast away, yea rather having destroyed, their books, ran unto the feet of Paul. But he setting himself against the world as though against a single army, no where stayed his march, but did all things as if he were some man endued with wings : and now restored a lame, now raised a dead man, now blinded a third, (I mean the sorcerer,) nor even when shut up in a prison indulged in rest, but even there brought over to himself the jailor, effecting the goodly captivity we treat of.

4. Let us also imitate him after our power. And why do I say, after our power? For he that wills may come even near unto him, and behold his valor, and imitate his heroism. For still he is doing this work, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God. And although many heretics have attempted to cut him in pieces; yet still, even though dismembered, he displays a mighty strength. For both Marcion and Manichæus use him indeed, but after cutting him in pieces; but still even so they are refuted by the several members.

For even a hand only of this champion being found among them puts them utterly to the rout; and a foot only, left among others, pursues and prostrates them, in order that you may learn the superabundance of his power, and that, although shorn of his limbs even, he is able to destroy all his adversaries. 'This however,' says one, 'is an instance of perversion, that those who are battling with each other should all use him.' An instance of perversion certainly, but not in Paul, (God forbid,) but in them who use him.

For he was not parti-colored , but uniform and clear, but they perverted his words to their own notions. 'And wherefore,' says one, 'were they so spoken as to give handles to those that wished for them?' He did not give handles, but their frenzy used his words not rightly; since this whole world also is both wonderful and great, and a sure proof of the wisdom of God, and the heavens declare the glory of God, and day unto day utters speech, and night unto night declares knowledge; Psalm 19:1-2 but nevertheless, many have stumbled at it and in contrary directions to one another.

And some have admired it so much above its worth as to think it God; while others have been so insensible of its beauty as to assert it to be unworthy of God's creating hand , and to ascribe the greater share in it to a certain evil matter. And yet God provided for both points by making it beautiful and great that it might not be deemed alien from his wisdom; yet defective and not sufficient unto itself that it might not be suspected to be God. But nevertheless those who were blinded by their own reasonings fell away into contradictory notions, refuting one another, and becoming each the other's accuser, and vindicating the wisdom of God even by the very reasonings which led them astray.

And why do I speak of the sun and the heaven? The Jews saw so many marvels happen before their eyes, yet straightway worshipped a calf. Again they saw Christ casting out demons, yet called him one that had a demon. But this was no imputation against him that cast them out, but an accusation of their understanding who were so blinded. Condemn not then Paul on account of their judgment who have used

him amiss; but understand well the treasures in him, and develop his riches, so shall you make noble stand against all, fenced by his armor.

So shall you be able to stop the mouths both of Greeks and Jews. 'And how,' says one, 'seeing they believe him not?' By the things wrought through him, by the reformation effected in the world. For it was not of human power that so great things could be done, but the Might of the Crucified, breathing on him, made him such as he was, and showed him more powerful than orators and philosophers and tyrants and kings and all men. He was not only able to arm himself and to strike down his adversaries, but to make others also such as himself.

Therefore in order that we may become useful both to ourselves and to others, let us continually have him in our hands, using his writings for a meadow and garden of delight. For so shall we be able both to be delivered from vice and to choose virtue, and to obtain the promised good things, whereunto may we all attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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