

## “I Exhort ...”

“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, who count of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full” (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

There is a distinct break between chapters 9 and 10. It is as though the apostle “takes a deep breath” and enters into an issue that is evidently very distasteful for him. Thus far in his letter he has expressed his anxiety for Titus’ welfare. So intense was this concern that when finally he made contact with him he is filled with both comfort and joy: Titus related to him the good news that the immoral brother in Corinth has been disciplined and that it’s desired result of “destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved” (1 Cor. 5:5) has been achieved. The brother has repented and the Corinthians were admonished to receive and forgive him. Other issues raised in the first letter have been addressed and corrected. Paul gives further instructions for the contribution of the Jerusalem saints, and now one thing remains before Paul personally goes to Corinth — he must address an issue which centered around him personally. The remaining chapters of the letter are spent dealing with this issue.

In the first portion of the book, Paul has used the pronoun “we” which ordinarily would be understood as a reference to both him and Timothy who joined with him in addressing the church (2 Cor. 1:1) although in some instances the pronoun “we” might be a reference solely to Paul. But in this chapter the pronoun “we” is left behind. “Now I Paul myself” is the way the apostle phrases it. Thus he separates Timothy from the malicious charges certain men in Corinth leveled against him and meets their charges “head on,” as if to say, “This is my battle, deal with me.” The charges false teachers brought against Paul, in their effort to discredit him, made him seem terrified in their midst, but very bold in his absence, or as one commentator put it, “As a barking dog at a safe distance.” They made these accusations so that their false doctrine might be more readily received by the weaker Corinthian brethren who could be swayed by their charges.

Paul intimates here that the “good courage” (boldness) he manifested from afar (an apparent accusation from his enemies that he was cowardly, that he didn’t have the courage to say when he was present the things he wrote) was not cowardice, and hints, which he would plainly say somewhat later (2 Cor. 13:2), that he could and would use a rod if necessary when he did arrive in Corinth.

The grievous error Paul's enemies made was their misjudging of Paul. They attributed to Paul the same attitudes and motives by which they acted. They were walking "according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:2). Had they attributed to Paul the spirit Christ had, they might have remembered that while Jesus was "meek and lowly" in spirit (Mt. 11:29), ("in the meekness and gentleness of Christ" was the way Paul put it here), Jesus exhibited an entirely different course when He cleansed the temple, driving out with a whip those who desecrated that sacred place (Jn. 2:15). So could Paul. He didn't walk after the flesh as these did in Corinth. They were about to feel the sting of their mistake.

Paul acknowledged that he did not "war according to the flesh," although he did walk in the flesh. He was flesh, but he warred on a higher, nobler plane than they, and although his weapons were not physical, they were "mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds." They had used slander and false accusations; they warred according to the flesh. Paul was above those kinds of tactics, but his weapons were mighty, and if need be, he could punish the disobedient just as he and Peter had done in previous years (Acts 5:1-10; 13:6-11).

In due time he would, by the spiritual weapons he had at his disposal, bring down every imagination, every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God. He would bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. He was ready to avenge all disobedience when their obedience would be made full — when the last person who could be moved to repentance and obedience was reached. He was ready to do those things, but not yet, for there were still some he hoped to touch.

Jim McDonald