

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blahely

Lesson #39

COMMENTARY ON: 10:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

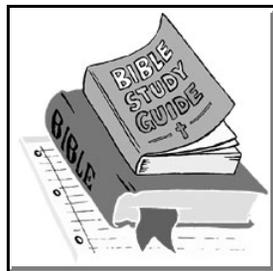
“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL WEAPONRY

In Christ Jesus, we have been summoned into a fierce conflict that involves ourselves, humanity, and wicked principalities and powers. We do battle against an array of hosts that rule the darkness of this world, and promote spiritual wickedness. There is even a relentless war going on within our own selves. It is imperative that we have weaponry that is appropriate for such a circumstance. Ineffective weapons cannot be employed to overthrow a strong and relentless enemy! Nor, indeed, can we simply withdraw from the battle as though there were no eternal consequences for doing so. If, in fact, we expect to dwell forever with the Lord, then we must engage in the fight, and do so “lawfully.” This lesson will provide a some insights into the Divine provisions that are given to us in Christ Jesus for the good fight of faith.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven”



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 39



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO BUILDING THE FAITH AND ENHANCING THE HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE WORKING OUT THEIR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: AMPLIFIED or AMP = Amplified Bible, (1965), ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakh (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TNK = JPS Tanakh (1985), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE= Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG=Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

AN EPISTLE WRITTEN TO A CHURCH THAT WAS MOVING AWAY FROM ITS CARNALITY, YET LACKED MUCH INSIGHT. HERE IS A STRONG APPEAL TO PERFECT HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL WEAPONRY

“^{10:1} Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: ² But I beseech you, 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 if we walked according to the flesh. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; ⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.” (2 Cor 10:1-6)

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain contextual priority to be seen in any expression or section of Scripture. By “contextual priority,” I mean a primary consideration within which all inspired utterances or writings are given. First, no statement of Scripture presumes that this world is the main world, or that man is the primary person. If an attempt is made to support any form of reasoning with those two pillars, it will not be possible to arrive at a proper conclusion, or form a correct concept.

The entire natural order has been

cursed – place under “*the bondage of corruption*” because of man’s transgression (Gen 3:17; 5:29; Rom 8:20-22). It is for this reason that it is written, “*And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away*” (1 Cor 7:31). Jesus affirmed, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*” (Mat 24:35). It is also written, “*the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*” (2 Pet 3:10). It is further revealed

that there is a “*world to come*,” and that it will “*remain*” after the present order of creation has passed away. Therefore we read, “*For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak*” (Heb 2:5). And again, “*And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*” (Heb 12:27).

Death has also passed upon all humanity, commensurate with the entrance of sin. “*Wherefore, as by one*

We have been called into a fierce spiritual conflict, and provided with the essential weaponry– by Given O. Blakely

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man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). Again it is written, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27). **Men are required to live with this in mind, knowing that following the removal of the present heavens and earth, they will stand before God to give an account of themselves.** Thus it is written, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). That unavoidable occasion

will be the time when everyone's eternal destiny will be both announced and commenced. Those found within the favor of God will hear the words, "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt 25:21,23). Those who are not found acceptable will hear the words, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt 7:23).

Anything that causes these realities to be thrust into the background of our thinking is a prelude to eternal ruin. If at any time a person makes this world, and the order belonging to it, his primary concern, he at once begins to think, act, and live foolishly and in total vanity. Thus is it written, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. **If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

If earthly relations, or one's own personal life in this world, are given the priority, so that they govern how we live, folly becomes our mother, and vanity will be the offspring of all our effort. Therefore Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

It is in view of these things that the people of God are consistently admonished to refuse to allow natural appetites, inclinations, and relationships to dominate them. Anything and everything that is "natural" must be made subordinate to the higher considerations of the world to come and the time when we will stand before the Lord of glory. Some of the admonitions include the following, which are representative of a staggering number of similar statements.

☛ "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2)

☛ "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5).

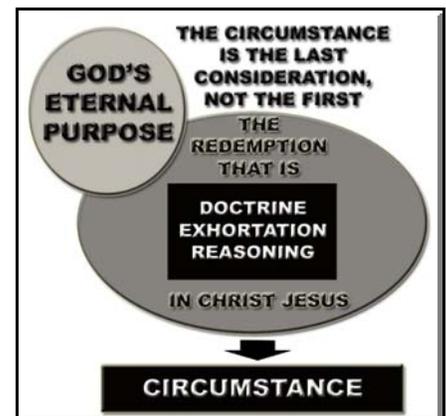
☛ "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

☛ "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

Graciously, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit Himself assists us in accomplishing this demanding requirement. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye **through the Spirit** do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). We are also taught that the grace of God will instruct in the various details of this requirement. "For **the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ**" (Titus 2:13).

In addition to this, there are certain advantages realized in Christ Jesus that cannot possibly be experienced apart from union with Him.

- ☛ We have peace with God (Rom 5:1).
- ☛ We have been reconciled to God (Rom 5:9).



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- ☛ We have been forgiven “*all trespasses*” (Col 2:13).
- ☛ We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One (1 John 2:1).
- ☛ The Lord Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25).
- ☛ The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, interceding for us with groanings that cannot be expressed by humanity (Rom 8:26-27).
- ☛ An enumerable company of angels have been dispatched to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 2:13-14).
- ☛ We have access to God, and to the throne of grace (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12).

Now, in view of these remarkable

realities in mind. If you were able to remove the concept and articulation of God’s eternal purpose from Scripture, the whole of it would at once disintegrate. There is no point to any word of Scripture apart from God’s “*eternal purpose*” – a purpose which He “*purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Eph 3:11).

That means that the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is the environment in which God is bringing His “*eternal purpose*” to fruition. All valid and productive teaching is within the context of that redemption, which is within the context of God’s “*eternal purpose*.”

At no point has God ever deviated from His “*purpose*,” or abandoned it in the interest of other more pressing priorities. **Nothing is important or pressing enough to upstage the purpose God is implementing in Christ Jesus.**

objectives that would justify any failure to do the will of the Lord? Within the revealed context of those realities, what possible condition or circumstance would warrant a person thinking primarily of himself, or neglecting the saints of God? **It ought to be apparent that no person can claim identity with God and yet conduct himself in a manner that is at variance with the purpose of God.** This is precisely why Paul is laboring to bring the church in Corinth into accord with the will of the Lord.

The truth of the matter is that the salvation of God makes no provision for a person to be at variance with the revealed will of God, Should a person set out to conduct his life without due regard the will of God, He will incur Divine displeasure. False teachers may attempt to convince us that a heart that is at variance with God only means some advantages may be forfeited, or that there will be a mere reduction in the rewards to be realized. But such impoverished teachers cannot ask Adam and Eve to confirm what they have said.

The devil himself, together with the host of fallen angels who followed him stand in stark contradiction of such nonsense. And what of firstborn Cain? Or firstborn Ishmael? Or firstborn Jacob? How do you suppose they would respond to such a teaching? What of the nation of Israel, king Saul, and Judas? How do you suppose they would react the notion that one’s conduct can only impact upon the measure of ones participation? How would the churches of Ephesus and Laodicea respond to that?

I have labored long to ensure that we are aware that Paul is dealing with a very critical matter – even though it may have the appearance of being incidental. Now, our present text will further confirm that this is the case. All of this is intended to provoke us to sober and serious considerations about our own lives and conduct – especially toward “*the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). We are not dealing with incidental matters. When thinking is flawed, it is always a serious matter – and that is what our text will address. It will confirm to us that God has provided His people with effective weapons that are designed to throw down unacceptable ways of thinking.

At no point has God ever deviated from His “purpose,” or abandoned it in the interest of other more pressing priorities. Nothing is important or pressing enough to upstage the purpose God is implementing in Christ Jesus.

advantages, what valid explanation can be adduced for involvement in sin. Is there really a satisfactory rationale for one who is in Christ committing sin? How can one who has known the Lord account before God for a return to the world? What can be said to the Lord about the loss of one’s “*first love*?” What about the person or church who becomes lukewarm, carnal, unwise, or disinterested? What of the professing believer who loses an interest in the Word of Lord, or ceases to prepare to give a strict account to the Lord on the day of judgment? Is there a single soul of sound mind in all of the world that could present a satisfactory answer to such things?

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE THINGS

There is a point to making these observations. **There is not a syllable of Scripture that is written without these**

Paul has spoken extensively to the Corinthians about their conduct because it was related to God’s purpose. They were a church, and God has purposed to present the church to His Son as His bride. During its preparation for this grand consummation, it is charged with being the exclusive custodian of the truth: “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15). The church is the means through which God is making known His “*manifold wisdom*” to principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph 3:10).

This is the body of people who have been called “*into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor 1:9). He has called them out of the world for His own name and employment (John 15:19; Acts 15:14).

Now, what is there about those

PAUL HIMSELF

^{10:1a} *Now I Paul myself . . .* ”

Other versions read, *“this is Paul now, personally speaking,”* ^{NJB} and *“I . . . in person.”* ^{WILLIAMS} The Corinthians had previously responded to Paul as though he was **not** a person, but was only a literary character. They did not take some of his teaching seriously, even going so far as to deny the resurrection of the

His apostles, *“He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me”* (Mat 10:40). Again He said, *“He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me”* (Luke 10:16).

How important is it that those sent forth by Christ are received? What of the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers that the Lord has placed in His church? **Are men really free to ignore them, reject them, or even provoke them and do harm to them?** If ever a person sent forth by the Lord must shake the dust from his feet and move on because of rejection, is it all just incidental? Jesus speaks to this matter, so there is no need for any ignorance on the subject. *“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city”* (Mat 10:14-15). Both Mark and Luke declare that Jesus said the shaking of the dust from their feet as a *“testimony against them”* who had rejected them, and, consequently HIM (Mk 6:11; Lk 9:5).

On one occasion, when Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel, the people contradicted and blasphemed them (Acts 13:45). The reaction of the people was taken quite seriously by Christ’s messengers. Paul and Barnabas replied, *“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of*

everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). A short while later it is written, *“But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium”* (Acts 13:51).

Was the matter forgotten at that point? Indeed not! Things were only placed in abeyance until the coming day of judgment when the saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:1-3). Then it will be set straight, and of that you may be sure.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH OUR TEXT?

On the surface, it may appear as though all of this has little or nothing to do with our text. However, let no one be hasty to draw such an erroneous conclusion. **In this passage Paul is going to plead with the Corinthians not to provoke him, or force him to be harsh with them.** He actually threatens them with fighting against them with the spiritual weaponry that has been provided in Christ Jesus. In fact, he will emphatically declare that he is going to do this if those who have conducted themselves toward him in an ill manner do not repent.

All of this is not owing to any pride in Paul, or a desire to exalt himself above others. He knows the true exalted One. Rather, he knows the truth that Jesus stated concerning how it will go with those who reject His messengers. Such a rejection will be taken personally by both the Father and the Son. It will be counted as a forthright rejection of God Himself and His only begotten Son. It is not Paul’s desire that such a confrontation take place. Therefore he exerts all of his ransomed powers to turn the Corinthians to a favorable position.



dead, one of his core teachings (1 Cor 15:12). They had addressed him as though finding fault with him would yield no consequences, and that they were at liberty to question his motives as well as his teaching. However, he was truthfully an *“ambassador of Christ”* (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20), being sent by Him with a marvelous message and unparalleled insight. How serious was it that this man be received? Jesus speaks directly to this matter. *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me”* (John 13:20). Again He said to

BESEECHING BY THE MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS OF CHRIST

^{1b} . . . beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ . . . ”

Paul now begins a fresh plea –

seeking in a godly manner to move the Corinthians into a walk that is consistent with their profession – and with their own former desires as well. Among other

things, this confirms the total unacceptability of a life that is at variance with a profession of godliness, or of association with Jesus Christ. There

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is such a thing as denying the Lord in ones works, even though He is professed with the mouth. As it is written, *“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate”* (Titus 1:16).

The prevalence of inconsistent lives within the professed church is staggering. Often there is little or no living evidence that people are *“of Christ,”* or that they know Him. **Although such a circumstance is quite acceptable to those who build religious institutions, it is not at all acceptable to God.** Of what possible worth can a religion be that allows one to wear the name *“Christian,”* yet requires no evidence that it is proper for the name to be worn? Is membership in an institution, and some form of tangible support of that institution, really sufficient? Is it really possible to be saved without possessing a love for the truth (2 Thess 2:10), a hatred for evil (Rom 12:9), a yielding of one’s body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2), and fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12)? Can it be that heaven will welcome those who did not deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Is an eternal inheritance reserved for those who did not *“look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (Tit 2:11-12)?

The answers to such queries are quite obvious. **It simply is not possible to defend the postulate that a life that remains at variance the truth will be received as though that was not the case.**

This is why Paul is reasoning in the following manner – because there were changes that **had** to take place among the Corinthians. These changes could not be made by an appeal to Law. Therefore Paul will make a higher appeal – one that is in consonance with the nature of the New Covenant.

BESEECH YOU

“ . . . beseech you . . . ” Other versions read, *“am pleading with you,”* NJKV *“urge you,”* NASB *“appeal to you,”* NIV *“entreat you,”* RSV *“make request to you,”* BBE and *“call upon you.”* YLT

Beseeching

The word *“beseech”* comes from a word meaning, *“to desire, to long for, to ask, beg, to make supplication,”* THAYER *“To ask urgently, seek, beg someone in relation to something,”* FRIEBERG *“implore,”* UBS and *“to ask for with urgency, with the*

nature – a *“new heart,”* a *“new spirit,”* and a *“new man”* (Ezek 36:26; Eph 4:24), **Now, the fundamental appeal is to the hearts of the people – and that is what *“beseeching”* does.** From one point of view, it is a holy attempt to awaken the



implication of presumed need,” LOUW-NIDA

In this case you have the desire of the apostle that has been formed by his understanding of Christ and the New Covenant. The focus of the desire is something that needs to be in the people. It is also something that cannot continue to be ignored. Failure in the area now addressed will bring certain disadvantages to the saints – disadvantages they cannot afford to have.

Beseeching is not weaker than demanding. It is of another order, and reaches deeper than a demand, or the imposition of duty. This is altogether too confusing to the flesh. If something is essential, flesh reasons that it ought to be demanded or imposed upon the people. This would be true if men are primarily motivated by their intellect, or moved basically by fear. It is also true if we are speaking about directing children, who have little or no understanding. However, when it comes to the body of Christ, we have a different situation. Everyone in that body had a legitimate beginning, being *“born again”* of the *“incorruptible”* seed of the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23). Consequently they all received a new

“new man,” who is being ignored by those who are not living acceptably. **The obvious urgency of this beseeching is owing to the fact that salvation makes no provision for continually ignoring the *“new man,”* or quenching the Spirit in deference to the flesh.** That is a practice that leads to certain death. It is written, *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom 8:12-13).

A Different Kind of Spirit

Further, a dictatorial spirit has no place in the work of the Lord. Jesus made this clear to His disciples on the night He was betrayed – shortly after He had instituted the Lord’s Supper. His words are quite arresting. *“And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve”* (Luke 22:25-26).

The term *“benefactor”* is a title of

honor among men. It is "conferred on such as have done their country service, and upon princes." THAYER Other meanings of the word are, "helper, often used as a title of honor for outstanding public leaders," FRIBERG "honorary title of men in high positions," UBS "a person who provides important help or assistance, often occurring as a title for princes or distinguished persons," LOUW-NIDA and "a title of honor of such persons as had done the state some service." LIDDELL-SCOTT

In the case of a "benefactor," he was regarded as the superior one, and the benefit of the state over which he presided was the most important benefit. The "benefactor" obtained his value in an institutional-centered society. His will was seen as the superior will for the state, and the continuance of that state was essential for his success.

He exercised "lordship" over the people. Interestingly, this is the only dialog in the Bible where the word "lordship" occurs, with only Mark and Luke recording it (Mk 10:42). This precise form of the word appears nowhere else in either English or Greek.

As used in Christ's words,

beneficent King, not a ruthless one. He appeals to the people, as compared with how He treats His enemies, taking them captive and chaining them to the chariot wheels of His magnificent glory.

The reign of the Lord Jesus was described by the prophet Isaiah, and it is quite different from the rule of earthly monarchs. "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa 40:10-11). The flock of Jesus is not one He beats purposing to bring them to their "desired haven" (Psa 107:30).

Paul is ministering to the Corinthians in strict comportment with the words of Jesus. He is not doing so because He has to, but because He wants to. Christ's manner of rule softens the heart, bringing one into accord with the heavenly agenda.

When the church is told to give

thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3). This is all in keeping with the spirit of Christ's words to His disciples on the eve of His betrayal. In the body of Christ, true leaders serve the Lord's interests, ministering to the saints in such way as to enable them to appropriate the things God has prepared for them. Any shepherd who leaves the sheep ignorant and emaciated has not served them. He has proved himself to be unfaithful to his Lord, for Jesus places no one in the church who does not bring spiritual and eternal advantages to the saints – not a single person!

In regards to our text, beseeching is the language of a holy servant. It is the way in which one who is serving Divine interests speaks. He is not seeking to impose his own will upon the people, but is rather laboring to bring the people into accord with the will of his Master.

Beseeching is also an appeal to reason. It assumes that those being besought are of age – people of understanding. It is quite true that those who are "children," or spiritually immature, are "under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father" (Gal 4:2). Even though the Corinthians had been conducting themselves like children, that was the result of neglect, not of ignorance – and there is a vast difference. The Corinthians had been "enriched by Him in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1 Cor 1:5). They "came behind in no gift" (1 Cor 1:7).

They had been "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). It was utterly wrong for hesitancy and carnality to be found among such a people. They had great teachers – and for an extended period. Like all other believers, they had been "called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). Now Paul speaks to them with these unwavering realities in mind. He will plead with them in such a manner as to confirm how foolish they had conducted themselves, and how nobly they could conduct themselves.

In the body of Christ, true leaders serve the Lord's interests, ministering to the saints in such way as to enable them to appropriate the things God has prepared for them. Any shepherd who leaves the sheep ignorant and emaciated has not served them. He has proved himself to be unfaithful to his Lord

"lordship" means to "lord it over" someone, or maintain forced control over them. It is a rule by coercion, where the will of the ruler is bound upon the people – supposedly for their advantage. Emphatically, Jesus says to the leading men in the church (1 Cor 12:28), "But ye shall NOT be so!" This is NOT the manner of the kingdom, nor is it the way the Lord Jesus presently exercises His rule. He does not impose His will upon the people – at least not in this world. His is not a rule of coercion – at least not over the sheep of His pasture. He is a

honor to their spiritual leaders, it is not because they are "benefactors," but because of nature of the labors for the Master – not the institution. Therefore believers are admonished, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess 5:12-13).

The leaders themselves are solemnly charged, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight

THE MEEKNESS OF CHRIST

“ . . . by the meekness . . . of Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “the quiet behavior,” ^{BBE} “modesty,” ^{DOUAY} “kindness,” ^{NLT} “self-forgetfulness,” ^{WEYMOUTH} and “humbleheartedness.” ^{MONTGOMERY}

The word “meekness” means “mildness,” ^{THAYER} “by implication in humbleness,” ^{STRONG’S} “a calm, serene temper of mind not easily ruffled or provoked to resentment.” ^{MCCLINTOK-STRONG}

There are several people in Scripture who were noted for their meekness. The following were known for their meekness and mildness. Abraham (Gen 13:1-18; 16:5-6), Moses (Num 12:3), David (2 Sam 16:10-12; ; Psa 131:2; Zech 12:8), and Paul (1 Cor 9:19). However, Paul does not appeal to the meekness of Abraham, Moses, or David. Nor, indeed, does he cite his own meekness, as he had done in his first epistle (1 Cor 9:19). There he was defending his apostleship. Here, however, he is calling the Corinthians into a deeper involvement with God. **He therefore appeals to the most notable example of meekness – the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.**

Jesus said of Himself, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt 11:29). That is, though He possesses all power in heaven and earth, He does not come to us in all of that fulness, thereby reducing its impact upon our present condition. God is a “consuming fire,” and were it not for the “meekness of Christ,” we would soon be destroyed by God rather than saved by Him. **There is a sense in which our salvation is owing to Christ’s “meekness” as well as our response to the Gospel.**

Christ’s “meekness” is chiefly seen in the **manner** in which He “humbled Himself” to save us. Laying aside the unfettered prerogatives of Deity, He took upon Himself the “form of a servant,” coming into the world to advantage men, even though it involved a seeming disadvantage to Himself (Phil 2:6-8).

Because he perceives and has experienced the powerful effects of Christ’s “meekness,” Paul now pleads with the Corinthians to consider what he has to say in view of Christ’s unparalleled “meekness.” When they

behold the selfless spirit of Jesus, and His willingness to advantage fallen humanity at great personal expense, they will be more disposed to conduct their lives in like manner. Meekness is the framework in which “good works” are accomplished.

THE GENTLENESS OF CHRIST

“ . . . by the . . . gentleness of Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “gentle behavior,” ^{BBE} “mildness,” ^{DOUAY} “clemency,” ^{NAB} “forbearance,” ^{NJB} “kindness,” ^{NLT} “softness,” ^{TNT} and “consideration.” ^{AMPLIFIED}

The word “gentleness” is closely related to “meekness,” yet is slightly

by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: and I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen” (Ex 33:19- 23).

The Gentleness of Jesus

Being God “manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), Jesus lived out this kind of “gentleness” among men. During His prodigious ministry, the disciples often grew very weary. Once He said to them, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no

When they behold the selfless spirit of Jesus, and His willingness to advantage fallen humanity at great personal expense, they will be more disposed to conduct their lives in like manner. Meekness is the framework in which “good works” are accomplished.

different. It means, “mildness, fairness (sweet reasonableness),” ^{THAYER} “gentle, kind, forbearing,” ^{FRIBERG} “kindness, forbearance, graciousness,” ^{UBS} “the quality of gracious forbearing,” ^{LOUW-NIDA} and “reasonableness, fairness, equity.” ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Whereas “meekness” implies a voluntary subduing of ones full power, and personal submission to the will of God, “gentleness” emphasizes the consideration of the people for whom the person was “meek.” It is a picture of power being devoted to saving rather than destroying.

The Gentleness of God to Moses

We see this kind of “gentleness” in God’s reaction to Moses’ request, “Show me Thy glory.” Behold the “gentleness” in the Lord’s reply. “And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place

leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31). How gentle He was!

His “gentleness” is seen in His considerate words to the disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Again, when He was agonizing in the garden prior to His betrayal, when finding the disciples asleep, it is said, “And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mat 26:41). How gentle He was!

Now Paul, in the same spirit of “gentleness,” and calling upon the Corinthians to behold that aspect of the Divine nature, reasons with them. **He is seeking to avoid having to be harsh with them.**

What We Are NOT to Think

When we consider the “gentleness” of Christ, we are not to

imagine that He was always docile, unusually kind, and tolerant of aberrant behavior. In a lengthy and most scathing rebuke, Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, *“they say and do not . . . they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders . . . all their works they do to be seen of*

Was Jesus any less “meek” and “gentle” because of these scathing words? I will assure you that none of those to whom Jesus addressed those words would say He was meek and gentle, or lowly of heart. Nor would those in a certain synagogue who looked for an occasion to charge Jesus with wrong

does not limit Himself to that option. The meekness and gentleness of Christ is particularly toward those who have life, but are coming short of what they could be. There is an element of longsuffering and forbearance in meekness and gentleness. It is seen in the words, *“A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory”* (Mat 12:20). There is, however, a terminal point to that kind of tenderness: *“Till He send forth judgment to victory.”*

The Lord does prefer mercy. He gives priority to showing mercy, but He does not limit Himself to that option. The meekness and gentleness of Christ is particularly toward those who have life, but are coming short of what they could be. There is an element of longsuffering and forbearance in meekness and gentleness.

There is an ultimate purpose that characterizes all of Christ’s work. It is *“judgment unto victory.”* That is, He works to bring God’s *“eternal purpose”* to fruition. **Those who have a desire to participate in that victory, even though they are sorely displeased with their own progress, will be graciously led by a meek and gentle Jesus.** However, as this very text will confirm, those who do not evidence such a desire will eventually experience the cessation of both meekness and gentleness.

men . . . they love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the market.” To the scribes and Pharisees themselves He said, *“ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men...ye devour widows houses, and for pretense make long prayer...ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold the child of hell than yourselves...ye blind guides...Ye fools and blind...ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law . . . ye strain at a gnat and swallow a camel...ithin ye are full of extortion and excess...ye are like unto whited sepulchers...within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity...ye are the children of them which killed the prophets...ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell”* (Matt 23:2-33).

doing consider Him to be meek and gentle. Of that occasion it is written that Jesus *“looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts”* (Mark 3:5).

Jesus is not meek and gentle toward the froward, or those who stubbornly persist in following their own will rather than His. That is why it is said of Deity, *“with the froward Thou wilt show thyself unsavory”* (2 Sam 22:27). And again, *“with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward”* (Psa 18:26). And again James writes, *“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment”* (James 2:13).

The Lord does prefer mercy. He gives priority to showing mercy, but He

There is an aspect of Jesus that is often overlooked in this day of flimsy and flexible theology. It is said of Him, *“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows”* (Heb 1:9). **His hatred for iniquity is as vehement as His love for righteousness is fervent.** It simply is not possible that Jesus would express hatred for any form of righteousness, or any kind of love for iniquity. **In this text, Paul is laboring to bring the Corinthians within the circumference of blessing.** Things are required of them if this is to happen.

BASE IN PRESENCE, BOLD IN ABSENCE

“^{1c} . . . who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you.”

Like many in our time, there were some in Corinth who could not conceive of Paul becoming agitated, and employing a spiritual arsenal against

those in the church. That misconception is what allowed them to criticize Paul, question his motives, and speak of him as though he was a helpless preacher and teacher, subject to the whims of men.

They were sorely wrong in their assessment. Like God Himself, godliness has two sides. **It has a certain response**

to righteousness, and quite another to unrighteousness. Jesus did not treat all men alike, as the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers could testify. On the one hand, he referred to His people as *“my sheep”* (John 10:27). He referred to the scribes and Pharisees as *“a generation of vipers,”* (Matt 23:33), and to Herod as *“that fox”* (Lk 13:32). To one

We have been called into a fierce spiritual conflict, and provided with the essential weaponry— by Given O. Blakely

group of people He said, “Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). To another He said, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matt 23:33).

And why do we read of these differing responses expressed by the Savior of the world? **It is because He is repulsed by iniquity and drawn to righteousness.** It is because the tenderhearted are precious in His sight (Psa 34:18), and the hardhearted are an abomination (Prov 17:15).

Now Paul will reveal two sides of his own nature. Those sides precisely parallel the nature of the Savior, for it is Christ living in him that is compelling this response (Gal 2:20).

APPEARING BASE WHEN PRESENT

“ . . . who in presence am base among . . . ” Other versions read, “who in presence am lowly,”^{NKJV} “who am meek when face to face with you,”^{NASB} “who am timid when face to face with you,”^{NIV} “who am humble when face to face with you,”^{NRSV} “who am poor in spirit when with you,”^{BBE} “as to appearance, am mean among you,”^{DARBY} “who am meek when face to face with you,”^{NAB} “the one who is so humble when facing you,”^{NJB} “when I am present among you am of no reputation,”^{TNT} “when among you have not an imposing presence,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “who [am] lowly enough [so they say] when among you face to face.”^{AMPLIFIED}

This is the assessment of Paul’s critics. He is apparently quoting what they have said of him. However, his critics have misjudged his appearance, thinking that his meek manner was a sign of weakness, human fear, and basic timidity. They appeared to have thought that Paul viewed himself as grossly inferior to them and their Grecian manners, as though he was intimidated by them.

Later in this chapter, Paul will allude to these very charges. “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful: **but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible**” (2 Cor 10:10). Their judgment represented Paul as cowering among men in an attempt to gain their favor. They saw

him as afraid to exercise the discipline that he demanded of them in his letters.

From the higher point of view, Paul had been gracious, exercising the gentleness and meekness of Christ in seeking to bring the Corinthians within the perimeter of Divine favor. Like his Master, he did not wish to break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. This kind of deportment did not match the Corinthian’s opinion of greatness. By not pushing himself among men, they thought he was comparing himself with them, when actually he was more conscious of the Lord who called him than of the Corinthians themselves.

Paul was not forward in the flesh. He was not seeking to promote himself or some private agenda. To the world this is a sign of weakness. To the Corinthians he was like the fair-haired David standing before the giant Goliath – his critics thinking themselves to be like Goliath. Paul had apparently moved among them with unusual gentleness, becoming “*all things to all men*” (1 Cor 9:22; 10:33). This was because he sought to “*by all means save some*,” not because he felt inferior to them. He had not fully asserted his apostolic power and authority, not striking his critics blind as he did Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8-

Paul had not demanded that the Corinthians support him, even though they had received the truth from him and been nurtured by him. He was worthy of receiving support from them, and it was right before God that they render such a benefit to him (1 Cor 9:2-15). The failure of the Corinthians to support Paul defied all manner of sound reasoning. Consider the following.

- ☛ He had the right to be so supported (1 Cor 9:3-4).
- ☛ It would have been right for him to forbear working and receive support from them (1 Cor 9:6).
- ☛ It defied even worldly reasoning to expect a soldier to go to war at his own cost, or a vineyard worker or shepherd to be deprived of the fruit of his labors (1 Cor 9:7).
- ☛ The Law supported the notion of the laborer being worthy of his hire (1 Cor 9:8-10).
- ☛ It was right for those who had received spiritual things from Paul to minister to him of the carnal things (1 Cor 9:11).
- ☛ The Corinthians had honored others

However, his critics have misjudged his appearance, thinking that his meek manner was a sign of weakness, human fear, and basic timidity. They appeared to have thought that Paul viewed himself as grossly inferior to them and their Grecian manners, as though he was intimidated by them.

11). He had not risen up in righteous indignation as he did in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. There he said, “*It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*” (Acts 13:46). The Corinthians took his gentle conduct among them as a sign of weakness.

with such support, why was it not appropriate for them to render honor to Paul as well (1 Cor 9:12).

- ☛ In the Temple service, those who ministered about holy things derived their living from the “*things of the Temple*,” even being given a portion of the sacrifices for their food (1 Cor 9:13).

• God had even “ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:14).

Yet, in a remarkable display of meekness and gentleness, and in a visible display of humility and a preference for the will of the Lord and the advantages of His people, Paul did not claim those rights. He confessed, “Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12). And again, “But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it

“many things,” and was “not shamed” of Paul’s “chain” (2 Tim 1:16-18). He had also received help from Phebe, and expressed gratefulness for it (Rom 16:2). When Lydia urged him to come into her home for a season, he did not refuse (Acts 16:14).

But when it came to the Corinthians, Paul thought it best to forgo these rights. There he ministered “without charge” choosing not to “abuse,” or make “full use” of his “right in the Gospel”^{NASB} (1 Cor 9:18). **By looking at this gracious attitude of Paul as a sign of**

letters were “weighty and powerful,” or “weighty and forceful”^{NIV} (2 Cor 10:10). One thing you have to say about brother Paul, he did not write storybooks for children, or elementary primers for the unlearned. Peter said of Paul’s writings, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; **in which are some things hard to be understood,** which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:15-16). To this day men haggle about Paul’s writings on election (Rom 9:11; 11:5-7,28; 1 Thess 1:4), predestination (Rom 8:29,30; Eph 1:5, 11), faith (Rom 3:22,27,28); , justification (Rom 3:24,28; 4:2,25; 5:1; Gal 2:16-17; 3:24), the imputation of righteousness (Rom 4:6,11, 22-24), and the raging warfare within the believer (Rom 7:15-25).

His demands by writing, the Corinthians reasoned, were more weighty than when he was face-to-face with them. How directly he spoke to them when he wrote: “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor 3:3), and “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor 11:20). How demanding he was: “But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:13), and “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).

The Corinthians had to admit that Paul’s writings were very impressive, and that they stirred up all manner of thought among them. **They could not conceive of him being this way if he was actually in their presence.** They knew they could not write like Paul, but felt sure they could successfully contend with him face to face. How wrong they were! Their belligerent attitude was stirring up the lion in him, for, as it is written, “The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov 28:1).

By looking at this gracious attitude of Paul as a sign of weakness, the Corinthians made their hearts and minds more evident. It confirmed the correctness of Paul’s attitude among them.

should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void” (1 Cor 9:15).

Some in Corinth took all of this to mean Paul was base, weak, and intimidated by the seeming greatness of the Corinthians themselves. How utterly wrong they were!

The Present Church Scene

Many of us have been submitted to extensive displays of abuse in the matter of responding appropriately to a man of God. The eight principles that Paul adduced in the ninth chapter of First Corinthians are regularly ignored by countless congregations. The fact that men have meekly endured such violations is not intended to be a precedent for the kind of treatment faithful ministers often receive.

Paul did not totally shun support. He commended the Philippians for coming to his aid in times of duress (Phil 4:16). He expressed thankfulness for Onesiphorus, who “ministered” to him in

weakness, the Corinthians made their hearts and minds more evident. It confirmed the correctness of Paul’s attitude among them.

WHEN ABSENT

“ . . . you, but being absent am bold toward you.” Other versions read, “but bold toward you when absent,”^{NASB} “but ‘bold’ when away,”^{NIV} “but being absent am of good courage toward you,”^{ASV} “without fear when I am away from you,”^{BBE} “brave toward you when absent,”^{NAB} “but full of boldness at a distance,”^{NJB} “bold in my letters,”^{NLT} “Paul’s letters are are bold enough when he is away,”^{LIVING} “when absent am fearlessly outspoken in dealing with you,”^{WEYMOUTH} “forceful toward you when I am away,”^{ISV} and “but bold (fearless and outspoken) to you when [I am] absent from you!”^{AMPLIFIED}

Whatever the Corinthians thought about Paul in person, certainly did not apply to the letters that he wrote. Modern day preachers and teachers are too silent when they are “absent.” The Corinthians had to admit that Paul’s

SEEKING TO AVOID BEING BOLD WHEN PRESENT

^{2a} **But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence . . .** Other versions read, “that when I come I may not have to be bold,”^{NIV} “that when I am present I need not show boldness,”^{NRSV} “so that when I am with you I may not have to make use

of gentleness.” Here, he pleads with them not to make it necessary for him come with harshness, rebuke, correction, and righteous indignation. That is not his reference, for such an approach, though necessary, creates no moral change. It can only bring recalcitrant

I must admit that in the wishy-washy religious culture of our time, such a thought is not at all common. Some are persuaded that it is wrong to ever be harsh – but that is because of their ignorance of the Word of God. **There are occasions that call for a strong and even offensive word.** When Peter faced a man named Simon who actually sought to purchase the power to confer the Holy Spirit, he responded, “*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*” (Acts 8:20-23). Lest you think this was an avowed enemy of the faith, it is earlier said of Simon, “*Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done*” (Acts 8:13). Peter, however, did not see him as a bruised reed, but as an insolent man who had a bad heart. The manner of his speaking to Simon confirmed that to be the case, for that is how such people are to be addressed – members of the church or not.

The point to be seen here is that it is proper to admonish the children of God to avoid having to be dealt with harshly. Should any person persist in an ungodly manner, true servants of God have no alternative but to deal with the individual with the “rod of correction.”

of the authority,”^{BBE} “that present I may not be bold with the confidence,”^{DARBY} “I may not have to show boldness with such confidence,”^{ESV} “I hope I won’t need to show you when I come how harsh and rough I can be,”^{LIVING} “Please don’t force me to be blunt with you when I come there,”^{IE} “do not make me show my boldness,”^{MONTGOMERY} and “begging you to make it unnecessary for me to be outspoken and stern in your presence.”^{PHILLIPS}

Here is a most remarkable display of a Christ-like spirit. Paul has such authority as could not only duly impress the Corinthians, but be the means of thorough discomfort among them. In his first letter he indicated his honest preference for meekness and gentleness among them. “*What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?*” (1 Cor 4:21). The Amplified Bible reads, “*Now which do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of correction, or with love and in a spirit*

people within the circle of grace – and that will cause considerable inner pain and sorrow.

If David will not repent on his own, God will send a Nathan to him, who will speak frankly and candidly, and with embarrassing details (2 Sam 12:1-14). If king Jehosaphat forgets God and forms an alliance with the wicked in order to gain some imagined military advantage, God will send Jehu the prophet to speak forthrightly with him: “*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD*” (2 Chron 19:2). **The Lord can, indeed, be harsh, and move His servants to be that way also!** But that is not his preference, and Paul is reasoning so the Divine preference can be realized at Corinth.

Paul is urging the Corinthians to avoid him having to be severe with them.

The point to be seen here is that it is proper to admonish the children of God to avoid having to be dealt with harshly. Should any person persist in an ungodly manner, true servants of God have no alternative but to deal with the individual with the “rod of correction.” That is the Lord’s manner, and we should hesitate to acknowledge it.

I WILL BE BOLD TOWARD SOME

^{2b} . . . **wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.**”

You might have thought that with all of the words of commendation Paul addressed to the Corinthians, all of the problems there had been resolved. “*For*

behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what

indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Cor 7:11). However, as we will see, there were some “marshy places” (Ezek 47:11) in Corinth that had not yet been healed.

BOLD AGAINST SOME

“... wherewith I think to be bold against some . . .” Other versions read, “by which I intend to be bold against some,”^{NKJV} “with which I propose to be courageous against some,”^{NASB} “bold as I expect to be toward some people,”^{NIV} “I need to show boldness by daring to oppose some,”^{NRSV} “confidence as I count on showing against some,”^{RSV} “as I count on showing against some,”^{ESV} “I intend to act boldly against some,”^{NAB} “the same self-assurance as I reckon to use when I am challenging those,”^{NJB} “I am quite sure I’ll have to challenge those,”^{IE} “I think to take a daring stand against some people,”^{WILLIAMS} “boldness as I intend to show those few,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “I shall have to do some plain speaking to those of you.”^{PHILLIPS}

This is a most arresting consideration: “bold against,” “courageous against,”^{NASB} “daring to oppose,”^{NRSV} “challenging those,”^{NJB} and “stand against.”^{WILLIAMS} **These are not people in the government like Herod, or blasphemers in the synagogues, or scoffers in Athens. These are people in the church – people Paul says he will oppose, challenge, and act boldly against.** I can tell you that he would be the target of criticism in our day. His language is too strong for the scholarly sophists of our time. His motives would be judged to be ignoble and unbecoming of a teacher who was meek and gentle. **But who is wrong? The transgressor of the one who opposes him?** Which person is in error? The one who stands against the truth or the one who rebukes him for it? Will men rise to justify those who aggressively stood against the one Christ sent? Some in Corinth felt they could oppose Paul with impunity. However, in meekness he pleads with them not to do this. He does not want to come against them. Yet, he knows there are some in Corinth who are so obstinate that he will have to do this – and he will certainly do so.

A Principle to Be Seen

Whether it was Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, or the Apostles, **they were always aggressive against religious flesh.** Those who are walking in the Spirit have a low toleration of those who walk in the flesh, yet dare to claim any form of meaningful identity with the Lord. A brief sampling of how holy men dealt with religious flesh will suffice to buttress this point.

- **MOSES.** “For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?” (Deut 31:27)
- **JEREMIAH.** “I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when

calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not” (Matt 11:16-20)

- **PETER.** “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart

These are not people in the government like Herod, or blasphemers in the synagogues, or scoffers in Athens. These are people in the church – people Paul says he will oppose, challenge, and act boldly against. I can tell you that he would be the target of criticism in our day. His language is too strong for the scholarly sophists of our time.

shall it once be?” (Jer 13:27)

- **JOHN THE BAPTIST.** “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (Matt 3:7-9)
- **JESUS.** “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and

may be forgiven thee. (Acts For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:23)

- **PAUL.** “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor 3:3)
- **STEPHEN.** “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye

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do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53).

In each of these cases, the people being addressed claimed identity with God through the covenant that was operative. From Moses through Jesus, they were professing Jews who maintained a religious appearance. After

aggressively fight against the man of God, yet have no genuine spiritual qualities, willingly entertaining erroneous views, and making no advancement in the faith, a quite difference response is in order. Paul will confirm this by the words that follow.

WHICH THINK OF US AS IF WE WALKED ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

“. . . which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.” Other versions read, “*who think we live by the standards of the world,*”^{NIV} “*who think we are acting according to human standards,*”^{NRSV} “*who suspect us of acting in worldly fashion,*”^{RSV} “*to whom we seem*

him an understanding of the Divine mystery regarding God’s purpose – a mystery that had been hidden from previous generations (Eph 3:1-7).

- He had been given such an “*abundance*” of revelations that God had given him a “*thorn in the flesh,*” lest he be exalted “*above due measure*” (2 Cor 12:1-7).
- God had separated Paul from his mother’s womb, and called him by His grace, to reveal His Son in Paul, that he might preach Him among the heathen (Gal 1:15-16).
- He had labored “*more abundantly*” than all of the other apostles – not due to his own strength and ability, but according to the grace of God (1 Cor 1:15-16).
- He was not “*disobedient*” to his call, but faithfully carried out his apostolic commission (Acts 26:16-20), even enduring unspeakable hardship and suffering (2 Cor 11:23-28)..

Spiritual Babylon has taught men to be tolerant, forbearing, and even charitable, toward religious “flesh.” Within the framework of organized religion, people are even expected to submit to the lifeless leaders of impotent religious institutions.

Jesus they were professing Christians. None of these people had openly denied God, or advocated a society without religion. Yet they had characteristics that contradicted how the people of God were to appear. **Therefore they were not addressed as though they were sincere, devoted, or holy.**

Spiritual Babylon has taught men to be tolerant, forbearing, and even charitable, toward religious “*flesh.*” **Within the framework of organized religion, people are even expected to submit to the lifeless leaders of impotent religious institutions.** Babylon has so structured its organization as to give the ascendancy to “*the flesh*” and “*the natural man.*”

However, holy men will not submit to religious flesh. They will be gentle and forbearing where there are genuine evidences of spiritual life, for they know the purpose of God is to awaken that life, fanning it into prominence. However, where the only comely trait of people is that they do not

to be walking after the flesh,”^{BBE} “*who reckon that we are guided by human motives,*”^{NLT} “*repute us as though we walked carnally,*”^{TNT} “*who seem to think my deeds and words are merely those of an ordinary man,*”^{LIVING} “*who think we live like people in this world,*”^{IE} “*who reckon that we are guided by worldly principles,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*think that I am acting from the lowest human motives,*”^{WILLIAMS} “*who think I am walking on the lower level of the flesh,*”^{MONTGOMERY} “*who suspect us of acting according to the flesh [on the low level of worldly motives and as if invested with only human powers],*”^{AMPLIFIED} and “*who will persist in reckoning that our activities are on the purely human level.*”^{PHILLIPS}

Even though Paul was a most unique man, standing head and shoulders among his peers, there were some in Corinth who considered him nothing more than a mere man. They thought this even though the following things were true of him.

- Through revelation, Christ had given

Now, how do you respond to a person like this? **Are men given the luxury of forming their own private opinion of the person who is sent forth by God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ?** When God provides a minister through whom people may believe, and even flourish (1 Cor 3:5), are men free to speak against him, impugn his motives, and think ill of him? Some in Corinth thought so, and therefore had entertained certain views of Paul that were at total variance with who he really was. They thought of him “*as if he walked according to the flesh,*” or “*on the low level of worldly motives and as if invested with only human powers*”^{AMPLIFIED} In other words, they thought Paul, like themselves, thought, spoke, and lived as though this was the primary world, and he was the primary person. They were wrong!

Defining the Flesh

Men must take care that when they are speaking of fundamental things, they use fundamental words. There are certain words upon which are suspended whole bodies of teaching, concepts, and keys to understanding. “*Sound doctrine*” employs these words to make our grasp of the truth more firm. For example, if

you were to attempt to understand the Scriptures with a distorted view of “faith,” “grace,” and “world,” your efforts would be in vain. And what of plowing in Scripture while being ignorant of the meaning of “Christ,” “covenant,” and “salvation?” These are terms that cannot be changed at the whims of men, for then they lose their meaning.

Sound Words

Solemnly, Paul reminds Timothy to “hold fast **the form of sound words**” (2 Tim 1:13). In this case, the words themselves are a “form” – a sort of container in which the truth of God is carried. A “sound word” is one that delivers a proper concept, or brings with it a correct view. To a spiritually disciplined mind, the word “faith” summons all kinds of precious considerations into the mind. It brings with it thoughts of God, Christ, salvation, grace, appropriation, and perception. One is brought to consider men like Abraham, and teachings concerning justification. This is precisely why holy men speak, imparting their message, “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”^{NASB} (1 Cor 2:13).

One of the great dangers that has come with the introduction of a multiplicity of Bible translations is that of a distortion of holy vocabulary. Key terms are not being carried over, and thus the body of teaching associated with them is gradually being lost. I understand that many are totally unable to see this. However, I thought it necessary to sound this trumpet of warning, knowing that the thoughtful will take occasion to examine the subject with a mind to pleasing God in their conclusion.

Defining “the flesh”

The expression “the flesh” is one of these key terms – a verbalism that brings with it key perceptions of things pertaining to life and godliness. **Here is a word that must be understood apart from the laws of language.**

Lexically, the word means “the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood”^{THAYER}. The word is used

this way in Scripture: “All **flesh** is not the same **flesh**: but there is one kind of **flesh** of men, another **flesh** of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds” (1 Cor 15:39). And again, “But **flesh** with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat” (Gen 9:4).

- The word “flesh” is also used to denote the physical body itself: “Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my **flesh** shall rest in hope” (Acts 2:26).
- “Flesh” is also used to describe the whole of humanity. “And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all **flesh** had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen 6:12). And again, “And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all **flesh** shall see it together: for the mouth of

- “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to **the flesh**, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after **the flesh**, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:12-13).
- “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for **the flesh**, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14).
- “Now the works of **the flesh** are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21).

One of the great dangers that has come with the introduction of a multiplicity of Bible translations is that of a distortion of holy vocabulary. Key terms are not being carried over, and thus the body of teaching associated with them is gradually being lost.

the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 40:5).

However, since Jesus has come, and “life and immortality” has been “brought to light,” the term “flesh” has become associated with higher and more lofty views. Think of the way in which it is used in apostolic doctrine.

- “For when we were in **the flesh**, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom 7:5).
- “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after **the flesh**, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).
- “So then they that are in **the flesh** cannot please God” (Rom 8:8).

- “And they that are Christ’s have crucified **the flesh** with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).
- “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of **our flesh**, fulfilling the desires of **the flesh** and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3).

It is obvious that “the flesh” involves more than the physical human constitution. Now that life has been brought to light, it is associated with the intangible “motions of sin,” “lusts,” “affections,” “desires,” and “the mind.” Paul went so far as to say, “For I know that in me (that is, in **my flesh**), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18).

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Concerning *“the flesh,”* Jesus said, *“It is the spirit that quickeneth: **the flesh profiteth nothing:** the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). In matters relating to Christ and His salvation, *“the flesh”* brings no true benefit – only disadvantages. **Now we are to look at “the flesh” as that part of us in which there is no intrinsic good, and which brings to us absolutely no genuine profit.**

Jesus also said, *“That which is **born of the flesh is flesh;** and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6). That is, nothing spiritual can come from the *“flesh”* – even when it is cultured to the optimum degree possible. What, then,

plays no redemptive role in the Divine economy. In fact, for a person to either see or enter the Kingdom of God, a new birth is necessary – a birth that has nothing whatsoever to do with Adam (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet 1:23). The individual who is *“born again”* is referred to as a *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17). Those in Christ are declared to be *“His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:10). Unlike Adam, or *“the flesh,”* this new creation is *“created in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph 4:24). **It is this creation, and this creation alone, that is accepted by God.** Therefore it is said of the people of God, *“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of*

understanding to the individual.

What Is Paul Saying?

Paul is saying that there were some in Corinth who could see nothing more in him than a fellow man. **They made no association between his person and what he was doing with the God of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God.** Although he had been given unparalleled insight into the *“eternal purpose”* of God, and His *“great salvation.”* these critics could not see it. So far as they were concerned he was just another teacher whom they felt free to doubt, and even speak against. In their view he had no more access to truth than they themselves had, even though they had believed through his ministry.

If they had a dispute with Paul, they treated him like any other man with an idea – something like the Athenians, who listened to Paul, then *“mocked”* when they heard him speak of *“the resurrection of the dead”* (Acts 17:32).

These critics, whom Paul simply identified as *“some,”* viewed his life as one of mere human discipline, seeing nothing in him that was from God, or that required their attention. To them, his primary association was with Adam, or, as some would have it, *“the human race.”* As far as they were concerned, he was nothing more than a man. They could not associate him with a *“new creation,”* or his message with something that was being delivered to him from Jesus. As we will see, this was a very grave error on their part.

The Prominence of Flesh In the Modern Church

Even though *“the flesh”* is said to have been *“crucified”* by those who are in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:24), its presence is glaringly obvious in the modern church. Although it has been summarily ruled **out** by God, it has been ruled **in** by the popular church. It has impacted the way they think, dress, sing, and meet together. The stinch of the world is upon its programs, plans, and the exceedingly few things that it purposes to do. It thinks nothing of hiring the world’s wise men to counsel them in the practical matters of their existence. It speaks more of this world and its various relationships than of the *“things of the Spirit.”* The

Now, “flesh” stands for every part of the individual that is not “born of God.” Everything that is not “in Christ Jesus.” Everything that is tainted by sin, is deteriorating, and that is consigned to mortality. When I hear the expression “the flesh,” I am to make the proper spiritual associations.

is *“the flesh?”*

This is the part of man that can be traced back to Adam – the first human *“flesh,”* from whom all other human *“flesh”* came. The only man who is an exception to this is the Lord Jesus. He was *“begotten of God,”* not of man. He was a different kind of man, being separate from Adam. Therefore He is referred to as *“the last Adam”* and *“the second Man”* (1 Cor 15:45,47). **All other men, strictly speaking, came from Adam.** Thus it is written that God *“hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation”* (Acts 17:26).

This part of a redeemed man – *the flesh, which is traced back to Adam* – is totally unacceptable to God. **As a progenitor and valid head of the race of man, Adam has been written off. He**

God” (John 1:13).

Now, *“flesh”* stands for every part of the individual that is not *“born of God.”* Everything that is not *“in Christ Jesus.”* Everything that is tainted by sin, is deteriorating, and that is consigned to mortality. **When I hear the expression “the flesh,” I am to make the proper spiritual associations.**

In the place of *“the flesh”* (Rom 7:5; 8:8), other versions read, *“the sinful nature,”*^{NIV} *“natural inclinations,”*^{NJB} *“our old nature,”*^{NLT} *“our human nature,”*^{IE} *“our earthly natures,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“our lower nature,”*^{WILLIAMS} *“unspiritual,”*^{MONTGOMERY} and *“mere physical lives.”*^{PHILLIPS} These are **not** translations, but interpretations. Doctrinally, there is an element of truth in them. However, the comprehension of doctrine, as particularly expressed in First Corinthians 2:13, requires the employment of *“sound words.”* It is the intelligent expression of the words themselves that is used by the Spirit to minister to the heart and bring

modern church often assigns more value to dealing with those who are of the world, than with its associations with the people of God.

If this is a proper assessment, then it confirms the carnality of such a church. As it is written, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5). This is what people who are walking in the flesh do – they “set their minds on the things of the flesh.”^{NKJV} Such people are a living contradiction to the Spirit’s statement concerning those who are in Christ Jesus: **“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”**

(Rom 8:9). **The clear implication is that the Holy Spirit is disassociated from the person who is living according to the flesh.**

Let no one imagine this to be a unique circumstance, or a condition of no consequence! It is written, “So then they that are in the flesh **cannot please God**” (Rom 8:8). And again, “For if ye live after the flesh, **ye shall die**; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). I hardly see how it is possible for any condition to be more serious than this.

Those who are “after the Spirit” are living in accordance and harmony with the Holy Spirit, being willingly led by Him in the mortification of the “deeds

of the body” (Rom 8:13). Their “affection” is set “on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2). In stark contrast to those who live “after the flesh,” the children of God conduct their lives as “strangers and pilgrims” in the earth, abstaining “from fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11).

There were some in Corinth who did not think of Paul in this manner. To them he was really nothing more than a Saul of Tarsus who had changed some of his habits. Even though he did, in fact, speak the truth, they felt they were under no obligation to listen to it, much less obey it. Behold now the somber tones with which Paul speaks to such people. **He will, in fact, declare war on them, and in no uncertain tones.**

WARRING AFTER ANOTHER ORDER

“³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.”

Paul will not deny his humanness, or relation to Adam. He will, however, deny the **prevalence** of that portion of his person. He neither conducts his life or his spiritual warfare in the energy of “the flesh.” He is aligned with the God of heaven, in fellowship with Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit of God. He will not oppose his enemies in the lowlands of flesh and blood.

THOUGH WE WALK IN THE FLESH

“For though we walk in the flesh . . .” Other versions read, “For though we live in the world,”^{NIV} “Indeed, we love as human beings,”^{NRSV} “For though we may be living in the flesh,”^{BBE} “For although we are human,”^{NJB} “It is true that I am an ordinary, weak human being,”^{LIVING} “For, though we are still living in the world,”^{WEYMOUTH} “For though I do still live the life of a physical human creature,”^{WILLIAMS} and “The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives.”^{PHILLIPS}

In the sense of this text, those in Christ who remain in the world have no choice but to “walk in the flesh.” This is the only place in any major version of Scripture that uses the expression: “walk

in the flesh.” Romans 8:4 uses the expression “who walk not **after** the flesh,”^{KJV} or “who do not walk **according** to the flesh.”^{NKJV} Romans 8:8-9 refers to being “in the flesh,” as distinguished from

There is a seen part of the children of God that is perishing, as distinguished from an inward part that is experiencing constant renewal. As it is written, “but though our outward man

This is having the “treasure” of the “knowledge of the glory of God” in an “earthen vessel,” as affirmed in Second Corinthians 4:7. This is the condition in which the saints of God remain incognito, their true identity being hidden by the veil of their “mortal flesh”

being “in the Spirit.” The idea is that of being “controlled”^{NIV} by “the flesh,” and not as “the flesh” as used in our text.

Here, when Paul says “we walk in the flesh,” he means that life is being lived unto God while dwelling in a mortal frame. This is having the “treasure” of the “knowledge of the glory of God” in an “earthen vessel,” as affirmed in Second Corinthians 4:7. **This is the condition in which the saints of God remain incognito, their true identity being hidden by the veil of their “mortal flesh”** (2 Cor 4:11).

perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). It is this part – the “outward man,” or the “earthen vessel,” that leads some to imagine they can oppose the saints without suffering any consequences. According to appearance, the saved seem to be no different from anyone else. This does not take into consideration what they **do**, but how they **appear**. However, you may rest assured that those who have been reconciled to God (Col 1:20-21), washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11), are not the same as other men! Those in

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The modern church has grown accustomed to being friends of the world, even though such a circumstance constitutes one to be “the enemy of God” (James 4:4). It thinks nothing of training its leaders to deal with human deficiencies with the tools of psychiatry and sociology. It too often imagines that it can overcome strong ideas with mere oratory, scholarship, or archeological arguments.

whom the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell (1 John 4:15; Col 1:27; Rom 8:11) are not to be considered in the same category as those in whom They do not dwell. **There is infinitely more to the people of God that what men see!** Paul will now affirm that the war in which he is engaged is not fought after the manner of men.

WE DO NOT WAR AFTER THE FLESH

“ . . . we do not war after the flesh.” Other versions read, “We do not war according to the flesh,”^{NKJV} “we do not wage war as the world does,”^{NIV} “we do not wage war according to human standards,”^{NRSV} “we are not carrying on a worldly war,”^{RSV} “we are not fighting after the way of the flesh,”^{BBE} “we do not battle according to the flesh,”^{NAB} “It is not by human methods that we do battle,”^{NJB} “we don’t wage war with human plans and methods,”^{NLT} “But I don’t use human plans and methods to win my battles,”^{LIVING} “we don’t fight like people in this world,”^{IE} “it is no worldly warfare that we are waging,”^{WEYMOUTH}

and “we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons.”^{AMPLIFIED}

There is an enormous amount of contemporary religious activity that does not extend beyond the perimeter of nature – “the flesh.” Religious resources are too often borrowed from the world, so that the world actually gains from professed Christianity. This is precisely the situation that is described with regard to “Babylon the Great,” that Satanic fabrication of the church. The response of the world to her appointed fall is expressed in these words. “And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep,

and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men” (Rev 18:13).

The modern church has grown accustomed to being friends of the world, even though such a circumstance constitutes one to be “the enemy of God” (James 4:4). It thinks nothing of training its leaders to deal with human deficiencies with the tools of psychiatry and sociology. It too often imagines that it can overcome strong ideas with mere oratory, scholarship, or archeological arguments. It all looks wise enough to some, but what is the origin of such notions? This kind of thinking does not represent “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), “the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27), or “the mind of the Lord” (Rom 11:34). Come now, those who have a penchant for using worldly weapons, **will not all of the battles you supposedly fought with such weaponry go up in smoke when the world passes away?** Does God really honor a battle that is fought with weapons He did not supply?

Now, while addressing “some” within the church, Paul announces the kind of battle he will wage **against them**, if the situation demands it. He will not engage in this battle of thoughts as a man, but as a child of God. He will not employ tactics that men use, but will be armed with a Divinely-supplied arsenal. He will not engage them with scholastic weaponry. He will not come to do battle with a carnal mind, excellency of speech, or the wisdom of this present evil world. He will not employ approaches developed by mere men, but will access the Divinely supplied arsenal.

OUR WEAPONS ARE NOT CARNAL

“^{4a} For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal . . .”

You cannot fight the battles of the Lord as a mere man, and yet employ the weaponry supplied by God. **In order to use His weapons, you must fight as a child of God, a citizen of heaven, and a person who is not the friend of this world.** The weapons of the Lord do not fit the hand of flesh. This is how Paul will

fight, and it is how we must fight as well.

OUR WEAPONS

“For the weapons . . .” Other versions read, “the arms,”^{BBE} and “the very weapons.”^{PHILLIPS}

“Weapons” are arms used in warfare. They are intended to be used in waging a battle **initiative**. In Ephesians, we are urged to “put on the whole armor

of God.” This “armor” is largely used for defensive purposes, and is designed to enable us to “stand against the wiles of the devil.” The “armor” consisted of a belt that held the armor together (“truth”), a breastplate that protected the vital organs (“righteousness”), protection for the feet (the “Gospel of peace”), a shield to ward off the fiery darts of the wicked one (“faith”), and protection for the head, or the mind (“salvation”). The

only offensive weapons were a sword (the “Word of God”), and “*all prayer and supplication*” (Eph 6:10-18). This is the “*whole armor of God.*”

In this text, however, we are speaking of another aspect of the Divine arsenal. **Here we are not speaking of standing firm against a relentless assault, but of launching an initiative against adversarial influences.** These are offensive weapons, not defensive armor! You may be sure, they will be employed only while the faithful soldier is wearing “*the armor of God.*”

By saying “*the weapons*” (the definite article “*the*” is used – τὰ ἄρματα), the Spirit is telling us that there are specific weapons, designed for the battle in which we are engaged. No other weapons can possibly be effective. **God will not empower weapons that He has not provided, and Satan will not yield to weapons that have been created by men.**

Do not forget that Paul is speaking of how he will confront those who have remained his enemies, even though he had begged them not to provoke him to use the powerful spiritual weapons that are at his disposal. We are catching a small glimpse of the ferocity of the battle into which faith brings us. Here, the fight is taken to members of the church in Christ – a most sobering consideration.

OUR WARFARE

“... of our warfare . . .” Other versions read, “*we fight with,*”^{NIV} “*with which we are fighting,*”^{BBE} “*our battle,*”^{NAB} “*with which we do battle,*”^{NJB} “*our war,*”^{TNT} and “*our fight.*”^{IE}

While the book of Ephesians refers to “*the whole armor of God,*” our text speaks of “*the weapons of our warfare.*” There have been battles fought in the heavenly realms. Daniel was made privy to one of these conflicts that lasted more than three weeks (Dan 10:12-13,20). John was shown a pictorial representation of a battle between Michael and his angels, and the devil and his angels (Rev 12:7-9).

Now, since Jesus has been exalted, having “*spoiled principalities and powers*” (Col 2:15), and even

destroying the devil in His death (Heb 2:14), the scene of battle has shifted to the earth. Having been soundly defeated in the heavenly realms, Satan has now focused upon those who “*keep the commandments of God,*” retaining them in their heart, and “*have the testimony of Jesus*” (Rev 12:17). Now, it is the saints themselves who wrestle “*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Eph 6:12).

The “*warfare*” referred to in our text involves the “*wrestling*” of reference. It is referred to as “*the good fight of*

There is also the matter of “*victory*” or “*triumph.*” God is said to give us “*the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor 15:57). He is also said to “*always cause us to triumph in Christ*” (2 Cor 2:14). There are those who are described as getting “*the victory*” over all of God’s enemies, who were their opponents (Rev 15:2). Both “*victory*” and “*triumph*” presume a battle – a “*warfare.*” **What meaning can victory of triumph have where there is no conflict, no battle, no warfare?**

I do not believe enough has been made of this aspect of the life of faith – “*our warfare.*” Somehow, in all of the

Those who are blissfully unaware of the nature of this world can more easily adopt its manners and wisdom. When we see people who place a value and preference upon the customs of this world, we are seeing those who are ignorant of the enmity of this world, and of its passing nature.

faith” (1 Tim 6:12). It is imperative that the saints know how to wage this battle, not fighting “*uncertainly*” like a shadow boxer who “*beats the air*” (1 Cor 9:26). This warfare is ours. It does not belong to angels, although they are aligned with us in the conflict. But it is not their fight, it is ours. The weapons do not belong to them, but to us. They are tailored for men, not angels!

Much is made in Scripture of the saints overcoming. The word “*overcome*” postulates a warfare, resistance, and the necessity of engaging in spiritual initiative. We are to “*overcome evil with good*” (Rom 12:21). There is such a thing as overcoming “*the wicked one,*” who is the devil Himself (1 John 2:13-14). There are also false prophets to be “*overcome*” (1 John 4:1-4). If ever we are going to make it safely to glory, we must “*overcome the world*” (1 John 5:4-5). Exceeding great and precious promises are made to those who “*overcome*” (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:17). They are the means of overcoming.

fanciful presentations of “*the Christian life,*” the aspects of an adversary, a war, opposing principalities, and those who willingly oppose us, has been understated, to say the least. Making practical observations in this matter must done with the greatest caution, lest the people be led back to Mount Sinai. Notwithstanding, it must also be done with a lively sense of the reality of the conflict between “*this present evil world*” and “*the world to come*” (Gal 1:4; Lk 18:30). One of these worlds is temporal, and the other is eternal. One has been cursed, and one has been blessed. One is the locus of the devil, and the other where the exalted Christ is enthroned. We have been delivered from one, and made citizens of the other.

Those who are blissfully unaware of the nature of this world can more easily adopt its manners and wisdom. When we see people who place a value and preference upon the customs of this world, we are seeing those who are ignorant of the enmity of this world, and

of its passing nature. When the world sets the tone for the church's music, for example, the church has become impervious to the "warfare" into which it has been called. When the world's concept of training and education is adopted by the professed church, it has imported poison into its culture, thereby introducing its demise. If the present heavens and earth are, in fact, going to pass away, together with its "lusts" (2 Pet 3:10-12; 1 John 2:17), **then borrowing from its manners gives corruption an upper hand.** When the people of God build their assemblies, and house them in structures, according to the customs of the world, they have become blind, and are sleeping with the

"For the weapons . . . are not carnal . . ." Other versions read, *"are not of the flesh,"*^{NASB} *"are not the weapons of the world,"*^{NIV} *"are not merely human,"*^{NRSV} *"are not worldly,"*^{RSV} *"are not those of human nature,"*^{NJB} *"are not carnal things,"*^{TNT} *"are not fleshly,"*^{YLT} *"not those made by men,"*^{LIVING} *"which come from this world,"*^{IE} *"are not mere human ones,"*^{WILLIAMS} *"are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood],"*^{AMPLIFIED} and *"are not those of human warfare."*^{PHILLIPS}

Paul has already affirmed that some thought he *"walked according to the flesh,"* or according to the temporal order and the nature of Adam's lineage. Confidently, he has declared that he does

possessed by the child of God. Because the word "carnal" is not employed in the common vernacular of our day, it is not found in many versions of Scripture. Instead, the following expressions are used: *"not of the flesh,"*^{NASB} *"not of the world,"*^{NIV} *"not merely human,"*^{NRSV} *"not worldly,"*^{RSV} *"not fleshly,"*^{DARBY} *"not those of the human nature,"*^{NJB} *"not those made by men,"*^{LIVING} *"not . . . from this world,"*^{IE} *"not human weapons,"*^{WEYMOUTH} and *"not physical [weapons of flesh and blood]."*^{AMPLIFIED}

Most of these are good commentaries, but not good translations. The Greek word employed in this text (σαρκικὰ— sar-kee-ka) is literally translated "having the nature of flesh,"^{THAYER} "pertaining to what is human or characteristic of human nature,"^{LOUW-NIDA} and "fleshly, sensual."^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} Lexically, it has the subordinate meaning of "under the control of the animal appetites."^{THAYER} Etymologically, there is nothing in the word – nothing at all – that suggests world or worldly, although doctrinally what is "carnal" is associated with this world.

Technically, the word "carnal" has to do with man. **Things that are "carnal" have their genesis with man. They focus upon man. They have to do with purely human desires and ambitions.** When this word is used, it is intended to evoke the proper associations within us. The word "carnally" was used under the Law to denote intimacy between a man and woman (Lev 18:20; 19:20; 5:13). Later versions use more crude language.

The King James versions uses this word eleven times (Rom 7:14; 8:7; 15:27; 1 Cor 3:1,3,4; 9:11; 2 Cor 10:4; Heb 7:16; 9:10). The American Standard Version (1901) uses the word seven times (Rom 7:14; 15:27; 1 Cor 3:1,3; 9:11; Heb 7:16; 9:10). The New King James Version (1982) uses the word "carnal" seven times (Rom 7:14; 8:7; 1 Cor 3:1,3,4; 2 Cor 10:4). It is not used a single time by the New American Standard Bible (1977), New International Version (1984), or New Revised Standard Version (1989). It is used once by the Revised Standard Version – 1952 (Rom 7:14).

The point is that with the passage of time, this word has been largely eliminated from the Christian vocabulary

There is no way for any person or assembly to gain the victory in the "warfare" into which we have been called, if "friendship with the world" is in any way entertained.

enemy.

There is no way for any person or assembly to gain the victory in the "warfare" into which we have been called, if "friendship with the world" is in any way entertained. Take this section of Second Corinthians as a case in point. Some in Corinth had so conducted themselves that Paul was going to have to use spiritual weaponry against them. Is there any person of sound mind who imagines those people could possibly gain the ultimate upper hand in such a battle? And, if they could, what would that say of the weapons that have been supplied to the people of God?

Let us give our undivided attention to the way in which Paul now writes. It will become apparent that he is very knowledgeable of the weapons God has supplied, and is very confident that they are superior to any against whom they are employed.

OUR WEAPONS ARE NOT CARNAL

not *"war after the flesh."* If he speaks in the Areopagus of Athens, facing those who have a contrary mindset, he will not speak as a Grecian. He will not employ the philosophy of Socrates, or the logic of Plato. He will not drape his speech with Grecian culture, attempt to dissuade his opponents by viewing things from their perspective. He will not speak in a "seeker-friendly" manner. He will rather employ a heavenly manner of reasoning, and take to himself spiritual weaponry to do battle against the erroneous thinking of the *"philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics"* (Acts 17:18-31).

The "weapons" of our warfare, Paul affirms, *"are not carnal."* They are **not** fashioned to be wielded by *"the first man Adam"* (1 Cor 15:45), or any generation that has come from him! They are **"not carnal!"** – having to do with things that are limited to this world.

The word "carnal" means *"of the flesh,"* or of the natural order. It is a word that is like a container filled with concepts and perceptions that must be

–even though it is etymologically precise.

A great deal of pivotal teaching surrounds the word “carnal,” so that hearing or reading the word should at once summon certain things to our mind.

- ☛ **Natural moral and spiritual corruption.** “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am **carnal**, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14).
- ☛ **Being in a state of spiritual death.** “For to be **carnally** minded is death; but to be **spiritually** minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6).
- ☛ **A state of enmity against God.** “Because the **carnal** mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).
- ☛ **Ministering things pertaining to life in this world.** “It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in **carnal** things” (Rom 15:27). “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your **carnal** things?” (1 Cor 9:11).
- ☛ **The opposite of being spiritual, and being spiritually infantile.** “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto **carnal**, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1).
- ☛ **Possessing the uncomely human traits of envy, strife, and division.** “For ye are yet **carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not **carnal**, and walk as men?” (1 Cor 3:3).
- ☛ **Being sectarian and divisive.** “For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not **carnal**?” (1 Cor 3:4).
- ☛ **A trait that is not found in our spiritual weaponry.** “For the weapons of our warfare are not **carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2

Cor 10:4).

- ☛ **The commandments under the Law of Moses, which pertained only to procedures and routines.** “Who is made, not after the law of a **carnal** commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16). “Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and **carnal** ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10).

Using these doctrinal statements, we can draw several conclusions concerning the weapons of our warfare NOT being “carnal.”

- ☛ They are not associated with rules, procedures, and disciplines than can be employed without the heart and spiritual understanding.

Thus the weapons of our warfare are totally separate from anything and everything than can be traced back to Adam – the “**first man**.” They have nothing whatsoever to do with the “doctrines and commandments of men” (Mk 7:7), the “will of man” (John 1:15), the “wisdom of men” (1 Cor 2:5), the “sleight of men” (Eph 4:14), the “tradition of men” (Col 2:8), the “doctrines of men” (Col 2:22), or the “word of man” (1 Thess 2:13). The employment of things so

Thus the weapons of our warfare are totally separate from anything and everything than can be traced back to Adam – the “first man.” They have nothing whatsoever to do with the “doctrines and commandments of men,” the “will of man,” the “wisdom of men,” the “sleight of men,” the “tradition of men,” the “doctrines of men,” or the “word of man.”

- ☛ They have nothing to do with the unregenerate, or natural, state.
- ☛ They have nothing to do with death, never declining or losing their potency.
- ☛ They are in no way contrary to God, but are fully in harmony with His nature, objectives, and salvation.
- ☛ They have nothing to do with the things associated with our bodies.
- ☛ There is nothing juvenile, simplistic, or rudimentary about them.
- ☛ They do not gender envy, strife, or division among the saints, but promote unity among those who are living by faith.

characterized have no power in the “good fight of faith.” There is no spiritual foe that can be conquered by them. Satan will not yield to them. The spiritual foes against which we wrestle will successfully stand against any “carnal” weapon. The cause of Christ cannot be advanced by such weaponry. No soul can be saved by them. No doubter can be convinced by them. No missionary program can be implemented through them. No church can be built with them. No soul can be stabilized with them. No erroneous philosophy can be exposed by them. No false theory can be thrown down by them.

Judge for yourself whether or not you want to employ “carnal” weapons against staggering spiritual forces and

arguments that have, outside of Christ, enslaved the entirety of our race. It ought

to be apparent that the weapons we employ **cannot** be “*carnal*.” They cannot

be from the realm against which we are waging war.

OUR WEAPONS ARE MIGHTY THROUGH GOD

^{4b} . . . **but mighty through God** . . . ”

Paul will now contrast the true nature of his spiritual weaponry with weapons that are “*carnal*.” This is not a characteristic that the weapons **ought** to have, but one which they **do** possess.

MIGHTY

“ . . . **but mighty** . . . ” Other versions read, “*but . . . powerful*,” ^{NASB} “*they have . . . power*,” ^{NIV} “*but are strong*,” ^{BBE} “*enormously powerful*,” ^{NAB} and “*they have the power*.” ^{NJB}

kind of thing, they aver, is not intended for our day.

However, if this blasphemous doctrine is true, we must take Jehudi’s penknife, and cut this section of Scripture from our Bibles. This affirms that spiritual weaponry is above the order of man. It is transcendent to nature. **How can such weapons be employed by the redeemed if, according to the will of God, the supernatural aspect of religion has been brought to a grinding halt?** The very position betrays

for “*our warfare*” – the “*good fight of faith*” – so that those who are not actually engaged in the battle have no access to these weapons. Further, if those who **are** engaged in the fight dare to use other weapons, their defeat is unavoidable.

THROUGH GOD

“ . . . **through God** . . . ” Other versions read, “*mighty in God*,” ^{NKJV} “*divinely powerful*,” ^{NASB} “*they have divine power*,” ^{NIV} “*before God*,” ^{ASV} “*according to God*,” ^{DARBY} “*enormously powerful*,” ^{NAB} “*power in God’s cause*,” ^{NJB} and “*come from God*.” ^{IE}

The weapons of our warfare cannot be employed by ungodly people. They cannot be used in an unholy enterprise.

Weapons that are “*mighty through God*” are weapons that the Lord Himself empowers. **He employs these weapons to accomplish His purposes.** Wherever there is an enemy – one who opposes the servant of the Lord – **these weapons are designed to be used against such persons.**

Here is an aspect of religion that has been largely lost in our generation. Spiritual Babylon has introduced and brought into prominence a “*form of godliness*” that “*denies the power thereof*,” or “*deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it*.” ^{AMPLIFIED} **Convenient to this rejection of Divine power, special doctrines have been created that explain the absence of spiritual potency.** Some affirm that the extraordinary aspect of spiritual life was intended to exist only at the inception of “*Christianity*” – to sort of kick-start things until they could run on their own. Thus, we are really not to expect any Divine intervention, or any working that is itself transcendent to nature. That

a heart that is corrupt, and thinking that is flawed to the core.

The word “*mighty*” means, “*able, powerful, strong . . . preeminently mighty*,” ^{THAYER} “*be able, capable . . . being in a position to do something*,” ^{FRIBERG} “*capable of*,” ^{UBS} and “*deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it*.” ^{LOUW-NIDA} Here is something that is thoroughly adequate for the purpose for which it was given. **It is completely superior to all that is aligned against it.** There is no deficiency in it, so that if it is used properly by the proper person, it will surely do what it is intended to do.

The weapons of our warfare cannot be employed by ungodly people. They cannot be used in an unholy enterprise. They are reserved exclusively

There **are** weapons that God will **not** use. Men may be seemingly skillful in the use of such weapons. They may have great human ability in the areas of polemics, debate, arguments, motivation, and the likes. But in order to use such weaponry, they have to descend into the arena of flesh and blood, and God will not assist them in their efforts. **God will not empower anything that has its origin in man.**

By saying our weapons are “*mighty through God*,” Paul means **they are effective – they accomplish what needs to be done.** He is not speaking theoretically or philosophically. These weapons will fully achieve **everything** they are designed to do, and fail in none of their Divine appointments.

PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

“ ^{4c} . . . **to the pulling down of** | **strong holds**.” Other versions read, “*for* | *pulling down strongholds*,” ^{NKJV} “*for the*

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destruction of fortresses,” ^{NASB} “*to demolish strongholds,*” ^{NIV} “*to destroy strongholds,*” ^{RSV} “*for the destruction of high places,*” ^{BBE} “*the overthrow of strongholds,*” ^{DARBY} “*knock down the devil’s strongholds,*” ^{LIVING} “*break down strong forts,*” ^{IE} “*for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds,*” ^{AMPLIFIED} and “*for the destruction of the enemy’s strongholds.*” ^{PHILLIPS}

These are what the weapons, and the Divine power that is joined to them, are designed to do. They are destructive in nature. These weapons are not padded with the gentility of love. They are not swathed with gentleness, or soaked with mercy. They are not designed to convert, but to pull down, destroy, demolish, overthrow, knock down, and break down. They are not directed toward men themselves, but toward what men have embraced, and what dominates them.

STRONGHOLDS

A “stronghold” is a fortress, a fortified area that appears invincible. Within the “stronghold,” or “fortress,” there are things to which those outside of the fortress have no access.

Here, the “strongholds” are like the walls of Jericho which appeared to be invincible. They were high, thick, and broad, so that no one had any access to the inhabitants within them as long as the gates were shut. **However, as you well know, Israel had some weaponry that was not after the human order.** This weaponry was activated by a shout of faith and the blasting of the priest’s trumpets, so that the walls “fell down flat” (Josh 6:20), just as God said they would (Josh 6:5). Is there anyone who imagines that the piercing sound of the trumpets and the greatness of the shout of the people brought those walls down? Their weaponry, even though it consisted of a shout and a blast, was “mighty through God.” He used the “weak” things of the world to confound the “mighty” (1 Cor 1:27).

Here, I take “strongholds” to refer to bastions of erroneous thought. This refers a vast network of flawed thoughts gathered together within the framework of erroneous suppositions. The “strongholds” are the hypotheses that allow for the particular views that are

being held.

For example, if I imagine that God saves people independently of their own involvement, that “stronghold” appears to justify believing that, once I am in Christ, I cannot “fall away,” “deny the faith,” or at last be a “castaway.” Again, if I accept the postulate that there is “no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:12-13), or that the “world to come” is not the primary world (Heb 2:5), that

leaders.

- That credentials recognized by the world are essential to a successful work for the Lord.
- That the church is primarily intended to be a worldly influence.

These, and other, postulates are daubed with untempered mortar. They are representative of the conclusions of

In Corinth, there were spiritual “strongholds” that allowed some professed believers to demean Paul. Paul is affirming the weapons he possesses are fully capable of decimating those strongholds, causing great shame and regret to come upon those who dared to oppose him. Paul is further pleading with them to avoid the need for him using this weaponry.

“stronghold” will make it easy to settle down in this world, and become friends with it.

If, as in the case of our text, the premise is that all believers are alike, and none of them have received any more than the others, that “stronghold” will permit the criticism of the apostle Paul, or the refusal to believe what he has taught, or a view of him that presents him as weak and unable to resist the pressure of his peers. Such views, however, are foolish to the extreme, and are subject to sure destruction.

Today, there are “strongholds” of thought extant within the church that must be “pulled down.” I will name a few of them.

- The most important work of the church is to reach the lost.
- God’s love is unconditional.
- The family is the fundamental social unit.
- Life in this world is the primary life.
- The youth are the future church.
- The “deep things of God” are too difficult for people who are not

men, not the affirmations of God.

The “weapons of our warfare are mighty through God” to the utter desolation of these walls of thought – walls that hold men within the circumference of the lie, leaving them with the notion that they are safe. In other words, God is committed to desolate these “strongholds.” That is why He has given His people weapons that are used to accomplish that purpose.

Allow me to cite a single example of the destruction of a great mental fortress. When Saul of Tarsus was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1), he was held within a fortress of erroneous thought. Accepting the premise that Jesus Himself was an imposter, Saul confessed, “I thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). All of this was done thinking he was being “zealous toward God” (Acts 22:3). How could this man be rescued from such a mighty fortress? Jesus appeared him while he was en route to persecute the saints. With one stroke of His sword, He brought that “stronghold” down, and Paul was freed from its confinement. Immediately he inquired what Jesus wanted him to do, and abruptly ceased any and all

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opposition to His people.

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CASTING DOWN IMAGINATIONS

“^{5a} Casting down imaginations...”

Other versions, “casting down arguments,” ^{NKJV} “We are destroying speculations,” ^{NASB} “We demolish arguments,” ^{NIV} “putting an end to reasons,” ^{BBE} “overthrowing reasonings,” ^{DARBY} “destroying counsels,” ^{DOUAY} “It is ideas that we demolish,” ^{NJB} “break down every proud argument,” ^{LIVING} “We break down false logic,” ^{IE} “For we overthrow arrogant reckonings,” ^{WEYMOUTH} [Inasmuch as we] refute arguments and

pillar of thought. In order for the devil to bring anyone within the sphere of his working, he must draw them into thinking wrongly. The way they reason must be faulty, as when Eve looked upon the tree bearing forbidden fruit and reasoned that, “the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Paul now affirms that the weapons he will employ, owing to their empowerment by God, will “cast

religion. Some people, in the praise of God, excluded the use of musical instruments. They reasoned they were not commanded, and there was, in Scripture no specific instance of their employment in a gathering of saints. Therefore, they had to be wrong.

In our text, some reasoned that because Paul was not “pushy” and demanding in presence, that he was therefore timid, backward, and could easily be opposed and disproved. Paul tells them they are not correct in such foolish reasons, and pleads with them to change that manner of thought.

In this text, “imagination” are erroneous ways of thinking or reasoning, whereas a “stronghold” is a primary pillar of thought. In order for the devil to bring anyone within the sphere of his working, he must draw them into thinking wrongly.

There is a certain irony about finding fundamentally wrong thinking within the church. This is the body of people who have been liberated by the truth (John 8:32). They have access to “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), the tutelage of Christ (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20), and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). If they lack wisdom, they are simply admonished to “ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). **If there is anyone in all of the world who should NOT reason incorrectly, it is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

theories and reasonings,” ^{AMPLIFIED} and “bring down every deceptive fantasy.” ^{PHILLIPS}

down,” “demolish,” ^{NIV} and “destroy” every erroneous argument and false speculation.

Remember, Paul is writing to the church, not the government – to the body of Christ, not the philosophers of Athens. The “imagination” that are to be cast down are not his own, but of those who had aligned themselves against him – and they were in the church!

That such erroneous ways of thinking can be found within the church is tragic – yet it is a very real condition. Take, for example, the form of reasoning that assumes we are justified by works – the works of the Law – a thought that is forbidden by the Holy Spirit (Gal 2:16; 3:10). That manner of reasoning leads one to diminish Christ’s work. It leads to a sure lack of assurance, and encourages a state of glaring hypocrisy.

The word “imagination” is defined as “a reckoning, computation, a reasoning, a judgment, decision,” ^{THAYER} “the activity of one’s reasoning powers, thoughts, calculations, reflections, misleading arguments,” ^{FRIBERG} “false argument or reasoning,” ^{UBS} “to think about something in a detailed and logical manner . . . to reason about,” ^{LOUW-NIDA} “an argument or conclusion.” ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Some, with whom I have walked, reasoned that nothing could be offered to God that He did not command. Thus, they considered anything that was not specifically required by God, or did not have an apostolic precedent, constituted an error. This was a manner of reasoning that permeated nearly all of their

And yet, notwithstanding these circumstances, the body of Christ has been inundated with all manner of wrong reasoning. The World Christian Database lists 9,000 denominations within the professed Christian community. The World Christian Encyclopedia lists a staggering “33,830 Christian denominations.” ^{World Christian Encyclopedia, 2001 Edition, 1,700 pages, Oxford University Press} Even though the church is the initial outworking of God’s purpose, which is to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph 1:10), it is now seen to be in a fractured and splintered

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Among other things, this means the weaponry to which our text refers has NOT been used by the professing church – at least not to any measurable degree. It is only because “imagination” were not “cast down,” that they were allowed to become so prominent within the professed church.

condition. Even though every single person who had ever been saved has been added to “one body,” under “one Lord,” possessed of “one faith,” indwelt by “one Spirit,” animated by “one hope,” participating in “one baptism,” and inhabited by “one God” (Eph 4:4-6), yet there are unimaginable “divisions” within it – a condition that is expressly forbidden (1 Cor 1:10).

These divisions reflect different ways of thinking – differing forms of reason. If it were not for inharmonious ways of thinking, divisions could not exist within the church. Precisely what does their presence tell us? **Among other things, this means the weaponry to which our text refers has NOT been used by the professing church – at least not to any measurable degree.** It is only because “imagination” were not “cast down,” that they were allowed to become so prominent within the professed church. **Thoughtful people ponder how many other Divine resources have been grossly neglected, even though people chose to continue a professed identity with Christ.**

An Example of Casting Down Imaginations

A single example of casting down “imagination” will suffice to confirm the potency of “the weapons of our warfare.” As mentioned before, fornication had surfaced within the church in Corinth. Paul forthrightly told the brethren to purge their assembly of the man involved (1 Cor 5). However, in the sixth chapter of First Corinthians he came to grips with the “imagination” that led the Corinthian offender to commit fornication, and the church itself to allow it. **Using the weapons of spiritual warfare, he cast down this imagination, which had snared some in Corinth.**

Paul adduces a number of reasons that show the utter foolishness of committing fornication.

- Those who do so will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10).
- Those in Christ had been “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” – conditions that are at total variance with fornication (6:11).

- The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord (6:13).
- God is going to raise our bodies by the same power He employed to raise up Jesus (6:14).
- Our bodies are the members of Christ (6:15a).
- It is totally unreasonable to take the members of Christ and give them to a harlot (6:15b).
- A person who is joined to a harlot is one flesh with her (6:16).
- The person joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (6:17).
- We are to flee from fornication (6:18a).
- The person who commits fornication sins against his own body (6:18b).
- Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (6:19a).
- We are not our own (6:19b).
- We have been bought with a price (6:20a).
- We are to glorify God in our body (6:20b).

For any person with but a spark of faith, or sensitivity to and awareness of the living God, these affirmations cast down the imagination that one can commit fornication with impunity. This is a marvelous example of the employment of powerful spiritual weaponry.

CASTING DOWN HIGH THINGS

“^{5b} . . . and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God . . .”

Paul has entered the arena of spiritual warfare – a warfare that is involved in keeping the faith. This is a battle in which Satan seeks to “overthrow” the faith of God’s elect, **for if they ever cease to have faith, their**

participation in salvation abruptly halts. We have seen that there are bastions, or fortresses of thought that must be pulled down. There are also “imagination,” or ways of thinking that threaten our faith, and must therefore be violently thrown down to the ground. Now there is mention of another foe that is as formidable as the other ones.

EVERY HIGH THING

“ . . . and every high thing . . .”
 Other versions read, “every lofty thing,”
NASB “every pretension,” NIV “every proud
 obstacle,” NRSV “every height,” DOUAY “lofty
 opinion,” ESV “every presumptuous
 notion,” NJB “every proud argument,” NLT
 “Anything which raises up,” IE “every
 stronghold that towers high,” WEYMOUTH
 “every barrier,” WILLIAMS “every crag that

We have been called into a fierce spiritual conflict, and provided with the essential weaponry— by Given O. Blakely

lifts itself,” MONTGOMERY and “*every imposing defence.*” PHILLIPS

A “*high thing*” is something that is generated by human pride – particularly a human opinion. This is particularly man’s view of spiritual things. It is “*high*,” or “lofty and profound in the eyes of men, **not** in the eyes of the Lord.

THAT EXALTEH ITSELF

“ . . . *that exalteth itself* . . . ”

Other versions read, “*raised up against,*” NASB and “*lifted up.*” YLT “*that is raised,*” WILLIAMS “*that sets itself up,*” AMPLIFIED and “*that men erect.*” PHILLIPS

This is a thought that is so lofty that it imposes and promotes itself, pulling at the strings of the heart. It has an extraordinary appeal to the flesh, but is something that is aligned against the child of God, bringing only damage, limitation, and misconception. **Our spiritual weaponry is designed to cast down these pretentious thoughts, driven by human pride and fueled by delusion.** Once again, these take the form of thoughts, ideas, and intellectual perceptions.

A “*high thing that exalts itself*” is **not** a network of misconceptions that forms a doctrine “*of men.*” It is not a aberrant way of thinking, like allowing for fornication or schism within the body of Christ. **This is the vaunting of a human opinion that directly impacts upon the way God and His salvation are seen.** It is an expression that draws attention to itself, and is soon quoted just as though it was in the Bible.

AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“ . . . *against the knowledge of God* . . . ” Other versions read, “*obstacle to the knowledge of God,*” RSV “*that keeps people from knowing God,*” NLT “*to keep men from finding Him,*” LIVING “*against what we know is true about God,*” IB “*in defiance of the knowledge of God,*” WEYMOUTH “*against the genuine knowledge of God,*” WILLIAMS and “*against the true knowledge of God,*” PHILLIPS

“*The knowledge of God*” is a key pillar in spiritual life. This is the personal experience of God that proceeds

from faith, involves transformation, and consummates in being conformed to the image of the Son of God.

In Hosea’s day, God upbraided the people because there was no “**knowledge of God in the land**” (Hos 4:1). The people were fundamentally ignorant of God Himself – His Person and His ways. This condition existed even though God clearly said that He desired “**the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,**” which were an integral part of the Old Covenant (Hos 6:6).

When Paul addressed the Corinthians in his First Epistle, he upbraided them because some among them did not have the knowledge of God: “*Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame*” (1 Cor 15:34). They were not “*acquainted*” with the Lord, and consequently were not at peace with Him (Job 22:21).

Paul prayed for the church, that God would give it “*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him*”

with Him, is the appointed means through which grace and peace are multiplied to us. “*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Pet 1:2). It is further true that everything essential to life and godliness come through this means. “*According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue*” (2 Pet 1:3). **This is also the means through which we escape from the contaminations of this present evil world.** “*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning*” (2 Pet 2:20).

Add to this the fact that the knowledge of God is one of the pillars of the New Covenant. It is something that everyone in Christ possesses to some degree. Thus it is said of the New Covenant which Jesus is presently

If religious people do not know the Lord, or have a distorted view of Him, it is because obstacles have been raised up against such knowledge – “high things” that have exalted themselves, supplanting what God has revealed of Himself.

(Eph 1:17). That knowledge is essential to comprehending “*the hope of His calling,*” “*the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*” and “*the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe*” (Eph 1:18-19).

The “*knowledge of God*” is an area in which spiritual increase, or growth, is to be realized. “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:10).

The “*knowledge of God,*” or **personal acquaintance and involvement**

administering, “*And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest*” (Heb 8:11; Jer 31:34).

A “*high thing that exalts itself*” is a thought that distorts one’s view of God. It causes the individual to have misconceptions of God, which are lethal to the soul. **The kernel of heathendom, of the Gentile world, is encapsulated in these arresting words, “the Gentiles which know not God**” (1 Thess 4:5). Add to this the fact that those who do not know God will, in the end, be condemned. “*And to you who are troubled rest with*

us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire **taking vengeance on them that know not God**, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:7-8).

If religious people do not know the Lord, or have a distorted view of Him, it is because obstacles have been raised up against such knowledge – “*high things*” that have exalted themselves,

provided and empowered spiritual weapons, they have gained prominence in the thinking of professed Christians.

- **God’s love is unconditional.** The expression “*unconditional love*” has become popular within the church, even though it contradicts express statements of Jesus Himself (John 14:21,23; 16:27)..
- **God can handle you being angry with**

from God. Apparently unaware that Satan **cannot** upstage God or operate without His approval, people boldly say that calamities and catastrophes have nothing whatsoever to do with God – even though He has spoken on this subject (Jer 14:15; 2 Sam 24:15; Isa 28:2; 29:6; Nah 1:3; Isa 45:7). How do those who espouse such folly account for the flood of Noah’s day?

- **The main objective of the church is to win souls.** This is a sacred cow in the modern church – like the golden calf that Israel worshiped. Even though God has clearly stated the purpose of the church, these theological merchants have marketed their own view (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 3:15-20; 4:11-16).

The fact that these views, and a host of similar ones, have exercised such an influence in the modern church is owing to its failure to use the weaponry that has been supplied in Christ Jesus. Church leaders have taught us to fight like men, and war after the flesh.

- **The age of miracles has ceased.** Although this is never clearly stated in the Word of God, some have taken upon themselves to say that is what First Corinthians 13:8-12 really means. This view is taken even though the concept of “*an age of miracles*” is never affirmed in Scripture. From the beginning of time, miracles have always been rare and intermittent. The only exception to this was the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. The proponents of this view ignore the fact that prayers are made for the church to be aware of the “*exceeding greatness of the power*” that is toward those “*who believe*” (Eph 1:19), and that God “*is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us*” (Eph 3:20).

supplanting what God has revealed of Himself.

I am appalled at the miserable level of the knowledge of God in the churches and among religious leaders. One can scarcely find a person who has a

proper view of God Himself – how He saves people, what He loves, what He hates, what He prefers, etc. **A religious climate has been cultured in American churches that allows for a person to remain fundamentally ignorant of God.** That is precisely why people remain ignorant of God for years, and even decades, having very few clear and lucid thoughts about the Lord or of His great salvation. I cannot begin to tell you what foolish opinions and perceptions of God that I have heard taught and expressed in class settings.

Perhaps it would be best to state some of these “*high things*” that have “*exalted*” themselves “*against the knowledge of God.*” Because these have not been “*cast down*” with Divinely

Him. This has been popularized since the church has been overrun with counselors. Even though Jonah was asked by God, “*Doest thou well to be angry*” (Jonah 4:4,9), this saying affirms human anger with God has no effect upon Him.

- **God loves everyone the same. Jesus loved Judas just as much as He did Paul.** Foolishly, this is affirmed even though there are people who have been especially noted as being loved by God – a condition that could not exist if God loved everyone the same (Deut 7:8; 2 Sam 12:24; 1 Kgs 10:9; Hos 11:1).
- **God never makes anyone sick.** This is often affirmed just as though it was in the Bible. We do, however, have a record of people whom God Himself made sick (Lev 14:34; 1 Sam 25:38; 2 Sam 12:15; 2 Kgs 5:27; 2 Chron 13:20; 2 Chron 21:14; 1 Cor 11:30).
- **Storms and calamities do not come**

The fact that these views, and a host of similar ones, have exercised such an influence in the modern church is owing to its failure to use the weaponry that has been supplied in Christ Jesus. Church leaders have taught us to fight like men, and war after the flesh. As a result, the professing church has become weak and insipid, and its enemies are running roughshod over it.

Paul tells some in Corinth that he will not allow this to happen. The foolish views that they have been entertaining will be thrown down when he arrives. Their only hope is to repent of their inexcusable folly.

CAPTURING THOUGHTS FOR A PURPOSE

“^{5c} . . . and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

The weapons of our warfare are not only “mighty through God” to the throwing down of bastions of thought, erroneous manners of reasoning, and lofty thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, they can also capture thoughts, taking them captive.

CAPTIVATING EVERY THOUGHT

“ . . . and bringing into captivity every thought . . . ” Other versions read, “bringing every thought into captivity,” NKJV “taking every thought captive,” NASB “we take every thought captive,” NIV “causing aberrant thought to come under,” BBE “leading captive every thought,” DARBY “bring into captivity every understanding,” DOUAY “we conquer their rebellious ideas,” NLT “bring into captivity every all understanding,” TNT “I can capture rebels and bring them back to God,” LIVING “we carry off every thought as if into slavery,” WEYMOUTH and “we lead every thought and purpose away captive.” AMPLIFIED

This is a very picturesque way of describing the giving of the whole mind to Christ – “every thought.” This is involved in loving the Lord “with all the mind” (Matt 22:37). It is also the opposite of thoughts capturing men – like being given “over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom 1:28). Think of the various kinds of thought that can captivate a soul, so that Satan works in them at will – i.e., murder, fornication, adultery, sodomy, theft, stealing, etc. Once Paul himself was enslaved by a thought from which he at last found freedom: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). But that thought was thrown down, and Paul’s thinking capacity became wholly devoted to the very One whom he once opposed.

In this text, Paul was threatening to use these weapons against certain in Corinth. Those whose thoughts had

veered from the truth, and who were bold to criticize Christ’s “ambassador” had access to the weapons. They had access to the arsenal that could have been used to get their known thinking straightened out. Therefore, Paul will undertake to himself capture their thoughts, using the very weaponry they had neglected. Now their minds would be changed because of another.

TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

“ . . . to the obedience of Christ.” Other versions read, “to make it obedient to Christ,” NIV “to obey Christ,” NRSV “to come under the authority of Christ,” BBE

It is within the framework of thinking that understanding is ministered to the heart from above. David put this experience into words. “My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue.”

“in obedience to Christ,” NAB “to change them into men whose heart’s desire is obedience to Christ,” LIVING “into subjection to Christ,” WEYMOUTH and “until it acknowledges the authority of Christ.” PHILLIPS

Ordinarily men do not associate “obedience” with thinking. Ponder the Pauline exhortation concerning our thoughts: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

It is within the framework of thinking that understanding is ministered to the heart from above. David put this experience into words. “My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue” (Psa 39:3).

Jeremiah had a similar experience as his thoughts were captivated for the Lord. “Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I could not stay” (Jer 20:9). There is classic example of capturing thoughts and making them obedient. At first he had the thought of speaking no more of the Lord because of the opposition he was facing. But then, in deference to musing upon God’s word, his thinking was captured, and the notion of speaking no more in the name of the Lord

was overthrown.

But in this text, that is the precise point that is being made – thoughts being in obedience to Christ. One of the premier examples of this took place when Jesus met the two on the road to Emmaus. When He first met them, they had been taken captive by wholly erroneous thoughts. Behold how they were thinking.

- They were formerly convinced that Jesus was the One who “should have redeemed Israel.” Now they concluded they were wrong in that persuasion (Lk 24:21).
- Even though marvelous things had taken place during the last three days, they concluded that nothing really had happened: “and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done” (Luke 24:21).

- They admitted that “*certain women*” had told them they went to the tomb of Jesus, found it empty, and that “*they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive*” (Luke 24:23).
- They even acknowledged that certain of their number had checked the tomb, and that it was indeed empty,

giving a summation of Moses and the Prophets: “*Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*” (Luke 24:25-26). With holy precision He started with “*Moses and all the Prophets,*” expounding to them “*in all the Scriptures then things concerning Himself*” (Lk 24:27). Before

“*err.*” Here is what James says. “*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him: Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins*” (James 5:19-20). The believer had captured the thoughts that were dominating another person.

The need for using the Divine arsenal is underscored when we remember that the mother of all unfaithfulness, sloth, procrastination, etc., is aberrant thought – thinking that is not subjected to Christ.

John also spoke of this matter, affirming that there are instances where God grants life to someone who has sinned, doing so because of one of the brethren. “*If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it*” (1 John 5:16). **The individual who had sinned a sin that would not result in his death was thus rescued – brought to a right way of thinking through the prayers of someone else.**

“*even as the women had said*” (Lk 24:24).

- Yet, even though the evidence suggested Jesus had risen from the dead, these two reported that those who investigated the tomb did not see Jesus Himself: “*but Him they saw not*” (Lk 24:24b).

the evening was over, they said to one another, “*Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?*” (Luke 24:32). What had happened? **Jesus had taken their thoughts captive, wresting them from a controlling position, and liberating the two to think properly.** Now they were obedient in their thinking.

It appears to me that this weaponry could be used much more than is common. We live in a day when thinking – religious thinking – is remarkably skewed in the wrong direction most of the time. **The need for using the Divine arsenal is underscored when we remember that the mother of all unfaithfulness, sloth, procrastination, etc., is aberrant thought – thinking that is not subjected to Christ.** How sorely we stand in need of a strong spiritual militia who is aware of the weaponry that has been given for our use, and knows how to effectively it.

Those are some difficult thoughts to overthrow. Notwithstanding, Jesus went to work to do precisely that – to capture the completely erroneous thoughts that were dominating them.

Is such a thing still possible? Indeed it is, and the Scriptures speak about it. James speaks of converting a sinner “*from the error of his way*” – overthrowing his thinking, **for it is always thinking that leads a person to**

He reasoned with them, first

READY TO REVENGE ALL DISOBEDIENCE

“^{6a} **And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience . . .**”

Here we are introduced to an aspect of God’s dealings with men that is most sobering. There are not a lot of details on this subject, but there is enough said about it so we can consider it with great profit.

HAVING IN A READINESS

“*And having in a readiness . . .*”

Other versions read, “*and being ready,*” ^{NKJV} “*and we are ready,*” ^{NASB} “*And we will be ready,*” ^{NIV} “*we are prepared to,*” ^{NJB} “*And we will,*” ^{NLT} “*while we hold ourselves in readiness,*” ^{WEYMOUTH} “*I am fully prepared,*” ^{MONTGOMERY} and “*we shall not shrink from.*” ^{PHILLIPS}

To have something “*in readiness,*” is to be ready to use it whenever its use is justified and profitable. **When such an occasion arises, Paul will not recoil from**

taking the action that is now describes. He lived his life in such a manner as was always in synch with the Divine agenda, for there is no other way to be “*in a [state of] readiness.*”

In my judgment, it is a grievous sin to live in such a way as finds you unprepared to do what needs to be done. Much, if not all, tardy spiritual responses are owing to the lack of being in a state of readiness. This condition exists because

We have been called into a fierce spiritual conflict, and provided with the essential weaponry– by Given O. Blakely

of a failure to live by faith (Gal 3:11), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25), seek the things that are above (Col 3:1), and abstain from fleshly lusts *“that war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11). None of these necessities are neglected inadvertently.

There is such a thing as having a *“readiness of mind”* to receive the Word of God (Acts 17:11), having a *“readiness to will”* (2 Cor 8:11), being *“ready”* to do *“every good work”* (Tit 3:1), and being *“ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you”* (1 Pet 3:15). Such a condition is not found in the dilatory, slothful, and indolent.

REVENGE ALL DISOBEDIENCE

“ . . . to revenge all disobedience . . . ” Other versions read, *“punish all disobedience,”* ^{NKJV} *“punish every act of disobedience,”* ^{NIV} *“give punishment to whatever is against His authority,”* ^{BBE} *“the vengeance against all disobedience,”* ^{GENEVA} *“punish those who remained disobedient,”* ^{NLT} *“I will use these weapons on every rebel who remains,”* ^{LIVING} *“to punish anyone who has broken law,”* ^{IE} *“to punish every [insubordinate for his] disobedience,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“dealing with those who refuse to obey.”* ^{PHILLIPS}

This is a most arresting word. Remember, Paul is pleading with the Corinthians not to put him in a position where this must be done – revenging all disobedience. We assume this means any continued disobedience, even though the text does not precisely say so. There is a certain ambiguity in the text that will not allow us to handle it with great ease.

There are some instances of revenging disobedience, and they are sufficient to awaken a sensitive heart. Peter presided over the death of Ananias and Sapphira because they lied to God (Acts 5:1-10). Their disobedience was avenged before a sobering audience. In fact, following that judgment *“great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things . . . And of the rest durst no man join himself to*

question either its probability or propriety. Paul had conducted himself very amiably toward the Corinthians. For those, however, who clung to their disobedience, those days were over.

I understand that, for some, this kind of response is very difficult to digest. However, that is only because of the anesthetizing effects of contemporary religion. **The truth of the matter that**

I understand that, for some, this kind of response is very difficult to digest. However, that is only because of the anesthetizing effects of contemporary religion. The truth of the matter that heaven never has a condescending or indifferent attitude toward disobedience.

them: but the people magnified them” (Acts 5:11-13). On another occasion, indignant with the insolence of Elymas who sought to turn a certain deputy from the faith, Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, *“And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand”* (Acts 13:10-11).

Is this the kind of revenging Paul would administer to *“some”* in Corinth? Candidly, I do not know, but I do not

heaven never has a condescending or indifferent attitude toward disobedience. You may remember that Jesus caused a grievous desolation to descend upon Jerusalem because of its failure to recognize its Divine visitation (Luke 19:44). When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A. D., it was such a horrifying event that it staggered even the historians who wrote about it.

At some point the church must get to the matter of obedience – of doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. It must take seriously any and every instance of disobedience, urging the return to a sound mind, and rendering some meaningful judgment where men remain disobedient. This will require the employment of our weapons of warfare.

WHEN OBEDIENCE IS FULFILLED

“ ^{6b} . . . when your obedience is fulfilled.” Other versions read, *“whenever your obedience is complete,”* ^{NASB} *“once your obedience is complete,”* ^{NIV} *“when your obedience shall be made full,”* ^{ASV} *“after you have made it clear that you are completely under His control,”* ^{BBE} *“once you have given your complete obedience,”* ^{NJB} *“after the rest of you have become loyal and obedient,”* ^{NLT} *“after I have first used them on you yourselves, and you surrender to Christ,”* ^{LIVING} *“after*

you have completely obeyed,” ^{IE} *“as soon as ever you as a Church have fully shown your obedience,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} *“when once your submission has been put beyond question,”* ^{MONTGOMERY} *“when your own submission and obedience [as a church] are fully secured and complete,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“once we are sure of your obedience.”* ^{PHILLIPS}

I find it exceedingly difficult to conceive of the average church having even the slightest tolerance for these

words. Rare, indeed, is the person who can even think in terms of *“fulfilled,”* or *“complete,”* obedience.

An obedience that is *“fulfilled”* is one that is complete in every particular, carried through to the end, so that nothing that must be done is left undone. The obedience to which Paul refers pertains to the subjects addressed in his first letter, as well as the issues mentioned in this letter. A review of the

areas in which their obedience was to be perfected is noteworthy.

- ☛ The problem of division (1:10-17).
- ☛ Doubting Paul's Apostleship (2:1-16; 4:1-21; 9:1-27).
- ☛ The presence of carnality (1 Cor 3:1-4).
- ☛ The presence of a fornicator in the church (5:1-13).
- ☛ Suing one another in the civil courts (6:1-8).
- ☛ Misconceptions concerning marriage (7:1-17).
- ☛ Inconsideration of weaker brethren (8:1-13).
- ☛ Inconsistent manners of life (10:1-33).
- ☛ Intolerable behavior in the assembly (11:1-19).
- ☛ Abuse of the Lord's table (11:10-34).
- ☛ Corrupt views of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).
- ☛ Denying the resurrection (15:1-58).
- ☛ Failure to gather a collection they had committed to provide for the

poor saints in Jerusalem (16:1-5).

Paul expected the Corinthians to correct these areas of deficiency. Newness of life demands such a correction. **The New**

Thy light shall we see light" (Psa 36:9). **That is, when God is seen correctly, everything assumes the proper perspective.** That is precisely why Jesus said, *"If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light*

All of these issues had been produced by incorrect thinking, and incorrect thinking is always the result of being at a distance from the Lord. It is not possible to willingly be in the presence of the Lord, and yet remain wrong in our thinking.

Covenant provides an environment and benefits that make such corrections doable. It is dangerous beyond description for any person to live in a spiritual state that is known to be wrong. As James well said, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

All of these issues had been produced by incorrect thinking, and incorrect thinking is always the result of being at a distance from the Lord. It is not possible to willingly be in the presence of the Lord, and yet remain wrong in our thinking. As it is written, *"For with Thee is the fountain of life: in*

of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (John 11:9-10).

Therefore, Paul has shed Divine light on the circumstances that needed to be addressed in Corinth. With candor he has informed them what he seeks – their complete and unwavering obedience. Now he awaits their reaction, fully prepared to deal with any disobedience that remains, having an earnest preference to be gentle. His aim is to recover them from the snare of the devil, perfect them in the faith, and ready them to stand before the Lord without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

CONCLUSION

Admittedly, this entire text stands in sharp contrast to the kind of thinking that dominates the modern church. One can only imagine the kind of response that would be experienced if someone threatened to use spiritual weaponry against any members of the church. Yet, that is exactly what is declared in this text.

This passage also highlights the seriousness of opposing anyone sent to us by God. Jesus would not allow for such rejection when He sent out the twelve: *"And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, **It shall***

be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Mat 10:14-15). Neither did He allow for a rejection of the seventy when He sent them forth: *"But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. **But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city"*** (Luke 10:10-12).

In itemizing the "whole armor of God," only two offensive weapons were

mentioned: *"the sword of the Spirit"* and *"all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"* (Eph 7:17-18). I am not sure that this is intended to be a thoroughly detailed list. In the use of the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, there is also the employment of godly reasoning. A point is made of this aspect of spiritual battle in the book of Acts.

☛ *"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days **reasoned** with them out of the scriptures"* (Acts 17:2).

☛ *"And he **reasoned** in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks"* (Acts 18:4).

• “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and **reasoned with the Jews**” (Acts 18:19).

• “And as he **reasoned** of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

In all of the above cases, there were effects. In Acts 17, “some of them (Jews) believed,” together with a “great multitude” of “devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few” (17:4). In Acts 18, Paul “persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (18:4). Later in Acts 18, when Paul reasoned in a Synagogue in Ephesus, the people profited so much from it that they “asked him to stay a longer time” (18:20). In Acts 24, when Paul reasoned with Felix concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, it caused the ruler to “tremble,” and he requested that Paul; leave until he had “a more convenient season” (24:25).

In each of these cases, the effectiveness of “the weapons of our warfare” is seen. Even in the case of Felix, where he sent Paul away, his response shows that Paul had demolished the foundation of his thought, moving him to become frightened, and shake as a feeble leaf in the wind.

OUR DAY

It seems to me that our day is marked by a woeful deficiency in the employment of spiritual weaponry. There

are too many faulty religious systems of thought – “strongholds” – that have **not** been “pulled down.” There are an abundance of modes of religious thoughts – “imagination” – that have **not** been “cast down.” There are also a plentitude of erroneous sayings and aphorisms – “high things” that exalt themselves “against the knowledge of God,” and yet have **not** been “cast down.”

The jargon of the philosopher and

assume a militant stance instead of huddling in the valley like the Israelites when Goliath shouted out his challenges. The “whole armor of God” is to be “put on” (Eph 6:10). The “good fight of faith” is to be fought (1 Tim 6:12). We are to “wrestle against” principalities and powers, engaging them in warfare. There are “vain talkers and deceivers,” subverting “whole houses,” whose “mouths must be stopped” (Tit 1:11). There are “gainsayers” to be “convinced”

The jargon of the philosopher and the theology of the sectarian has blown into the church with hurricane force, toppling the faith of many, and firmly anchoring people to “this present evil world.” Yet, instead of the church producing warriors to engage these inimical forces it is producing entertainers, monotone singers, and a few boring lecturers.

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It is time for the church to

by “sound doctrine” and effective exhortation (Tit 1:9). There are “heretics,” factious ^{NASB} and divisive ^{NIV} men, who must be admonished and, if they do not heed the admonition, rejected (Tit 3:10). This is certainly a day for the wise and effective use of “the weapons of our warfare.” If God has given them to us, then it seems to me that we are obliged to use them, and to do with the utmost confidence and dexterity.

Remember out brethren in Pakistan. Presently brother Muqaddam and his associates are ministering to 318 families in the mountains. Deaths occur daily due to lack of food and the extreme cold that is moving in. We have assisted them in procuring shelteting tents and various non-perishable foods.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 11/25/2005. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The fortieth lesson will cover verses seven through thirteen of the tenth chapter: **"ASSESSMENT VERSUS REALITY."** There are two ways to look at things: according to appearance, and according to reality. The latter view is really the only acceptable one. It requires faith, insight, and the fellowship of Jesus, into which we have been called. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>