

Study 11: Chapter 10

Introduction

Paul now turns his attention back towards his “enemies”. He has been addressing (primarily) those who support him. Over the next few chapters he will again direct his thoughts towards those who were attempting to undermine him, although not exclusively so.

Body of the Study

Paul’s appeal

The nature of the battle

The outward appearance

Direct comparison to the “enemies”

The regions beyond

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are the practical applications of these things in our local congregations today? What can we learn, and how do we apply it?*
- *Paul uses the parallels here of a battle – spiritual warfare. How is this similar (or different) to the spiritual warfare that he describes in Ephesians, or Colossians?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 11 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 11: Chapter 10

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Paul's appeal

He begins with an appeal – an appeal to the character of Christ. Whilst Paul's approach might at times have seemed harsh, yet that was not really his intention. Christ's approach was always humble and gentle, and it was in this vain that Paul was approaching all of the brethren at Corinth.

Although it might seem easy to be bold when not actually there, it is much harder when dealing with the matters face to face. In fact, Paul had a reputation for such a dichotomous position “...For some say, *“His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.”*” (2:10:10 NIV).

We know a great deal about Paul's letters, as we have most of them preserved in scripture. We know very little about his personal attributes, and even less about his physical attributes. It would seem that Paul was not an imposing person to meet, or to hear speak – although he was somewhat effective in preaching.

However Paul would not shun taking a strong and bold stand if and when it was needed. His enemies – the Judaisers – had been destroying his work in many places. He has already pointed out that this was not a personal thing, but in undermining Paul they were working against God (chapter 4). That situation could not be allowed to continue, and if the Corinthians had not put the matter right before Paul arrived, then he would see to it – in the strongest possible terms – when he arrived “...*I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh...*” (2:10:2 NKJV)

The nature of the battle

He continues the theme of fleshliness, since the Judaisers had (apparently) accused him of just doing what he did for what he could get out of it. Paul acknowledges the nature of his life on earth “...*we walk in the flesh...*” (2:10:3). However that is not where the real battle is fought. It is by nature a spiritual battle.

The Roman Empire was a mighty and strong force. A force to be reckoned with. The armies would come and overthrow their enemies, pulling down the strongholds that had been raised in defence.

In just the same way, the mighty power of God would be brought against those who were putting up a defence against the gospel. The strongholds would be pulled down and the protagonists would be left with no where to hide. “...*for our weapons...are mighty in God for demolishing strongholds...*” (2:10:4)

He then elaborates on the nature of these strongholds. “...*throwing down arguments...bringing every thought into captivity...*” These things destroy “...*the knowledge of God...*” and can only be brought under control by “...*obedience to Christ...*” (2:10:5)

In the final wash, such disobedience will *be punished*, and brought to its true position “...*when your obedience of fulfilled...*” (2:10:6). The Corinthians would make such things right by dealing with the false teachers. And if they didn't, then Paul would deal with the matter himself when he came.

The outward appearance

We often judge people based on the outward appearance. It is the obvious thing to do, because that is what we see (we are talking about our *actions* here, and comparing them to our *motivations*, not our *physical* appearance). God looks on the inside. He looks at the heart. He understands what it is that drives us. The Judaisers had a preconceived idea of Paul's motivations and had pre-judged him. They had put two and two together and came up with "five".

If there is any doubt about the motivations of others, then we only need to consider our own motivations. As Christians, we seek the pure and high thoughts (Phil 4:8), and (try to) conform our lives to the way that He would have us to live. But here's the crunch – that is exactly the motivation that Paul has! "...just as he [those of you who consider yourself belonging to Christ] is Christ's, even so we are Christ's..." (2:10:7 NKJV).

However, one thing that the Judaisers were forgetting (and must have side tracked the Corinthians onto) was Paul's authority as an apostle. It had been given to them so that they might teach others. Having the authority is one thing, and how that authority is used is quite another. It was given by the Lord "...for edification and not for your destruction..." (2:10: 8) Paul could have used his authority destructively, but that would have amounted to an abuse of his power. This seems to be a direct contrast to the approach of the Judaisers, who were using all the authority they could muster (supposing that they really did have some, having come from the "real apostles" in Jerusalem), and using it to try to destroy Paul.

Paul was "...not ashamed..." of the authority that he had, and even if he had boasted about it, he had every right to do so. His letters might be read in a terrifying manner (2:10:9) but in bodily presence, he was of weak appearance. This comes to the heart of the matter – in fact a matter of Paul's heart. He was being judged on a matter of appearance (2:10:10).

However, when he came, he would do what he needed to do to put things in order "...Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present..." (2:10:11 NIV).

Direct comparison to the "enemies"

The Judaisers had been making self-commendation. They were each saying how important the others of them were, and were "...measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves..." (2:10:12 NKJV). Truly self-commendation is no recommendation, and Paul says of them that they "...are not wise..."

In contrast, Paul had been given authority by God. He had been appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:47; 22:21; Rom 11:13; 15:16; Gal 1:16; 2:7-9; Eph 3:8). His *sphere of appointment* was to take the gospel to them, and as such specifically included going to Corinth (2:10:13).

In carrying out his role, Paul did not in the least way exceed his authority or his call. But, why would Judaisers want to come to the furthestmost parts of the world to insist on making the Christians become Jews, and bind on them the Law of Moses? The natural response would be for them to ensure that the Jews were keeping the Law!

So, what we have is a complete reversal of the roles from what the Judaisers are proclaiming. Paul is fulfilling his God assigned role, but is being criticised for it, not based on knowledge but on appearance; whilst the Judaisers have no authority, are self acclaimed, and have totally impure motives!

The regions beyond

In Acts 1:8 we have a summary of the spread of the gospel which was taught "...in Jerusalem, in Judea, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth..." In fulfilling his commission of taking the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul's commission necessarily meant taking it to the furthestmost parts of the (then known) world.

He could not possibly stay in Jerusalem and hope to fulfil his ministry just by converting Gentiles there. He had to go out. As we read of the places that Paul went to, we can see the diligence that he had in delivering his accountabilities.

Delivering his accountabilities is one thing, but there is an upside – and that is to see the response as people obey the gospel. Paul shared great joy with the Corinthians in their obedience “...*that as your faith grows, we shall be greatly grow by you in our area of activity...*” (2:10:15)

It wasn't just spiritual growth that Paul had in mind here. Paul did not *build on another man's foundation, but went where the gospel of Christ was not so much as named* (Rom 15:19-20). He hoped that Corinth would become a springboard for outreach into other areas – *to the regions beyond Corinth*.

Paul drives home the point in the last verse – the real matter of approval is not self-approval – but the commendation that comes from the Lord. The rhetorical question pre-supposes the answer, that Paul has the evidence of that approval, and it is shown in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He not only demonstrated them himself, but also gave them to the Corinthians!