

“Connected in God’s Kingdom Battle”

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2 Corinthians 10:1-5

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Last week we studied 2 Corinthians 8 and how God’s people demonstrated their love for Jesus and one another by being willing to give what they have to relieve the distress of others. God’s grace produces the fruit of joy that overflows into a wealth of generosity. Jesus giving himself to us provides both the example and the motive for giving ourselves away to others. He calls us to a stewardship of our whole lives.

You may recall that a group of so-called “Super Apostles”, what Paul calls them in sarcasm, came into the church in Corinth attempting to disrupt Paul’s gospel preaching and message in the church. They cast doubt on whether Paul was indeed an Apostle because they charged that he was weak and impotent. He was not as flashy a showman as they wanted him to be; therefore, these super apostles doubted the gospel Paul preached. These leaders had a set of values borrowed from the world -big, flashy, showy, successful- and assumed those were the values of the kingdom of God, too.

In Chapter 10, Paul takes up pen to defend his ministry once more, but from a bit of an unexpected angle. Rather, they play their game of matching spectacular experience with spectacular experience. Paul suggests that God’s power at work among a people doesn’t quite look like a bombastic showman. Rather, it reflects the character of Jesus. The kingdom of God has a set of values that appear upside down to the values of this world.

What do we look for as divine power among us, and how do we walk in his ways?

10 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—²I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. ³For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ

How do you successfully siege a castle? In the middle ages, laying siege to a town was relatively simple, even if it had walls. But attacking a castle was much more difficult.

Castles had strongholds, or bulwarks or extra fortified areas that were virtually impregnable. Some used the magnificent war machine called the trebuchet, the cantilevered arm that slung pieces of rock or metal or whatever against a wall to try to demolish it.

But some castles even could withstand even the mighty trebuchet. The strongholds or the keeps were often like a nautilus, a series of ringed walls to keep the nobility safe inside. What weapons could demolish those?

You had to go under. Tunnels. Soldiers dug tunnels under the castle and directly beneath the stronghold, they would create a bit of an open space, a small cavern and pack it with flammable things. Wood, sap, tar, oil and the like then set it all on fire. As the fire grew hotter under the earth, the mortar grew weaker and the whole stronghold could be collapsed by subverting it from underneath.

Straight out assault at times did not work. Often it was the unexpected, unsung, humble and common, like starting a fire underground, that won the day. You had to go underneath.

In our text today, Paul uses warfare language. Make no mistake as followers of Christ, we are engaged in a deep conflict, in a war, really. But our war is not fought with the weapons of the flesh, because our war is not against the flesh. There is a conflict between darkness and light, between sin and righteousness, between the parasitic kingdom of the devil—of this world—and the kingdom of God. When we misidentify the conflict, we choose the wrong weapons with which to engage. The weapons of the flesh are completely ineffective in the spiritual war for God’s kingdom to come, the war for hearts, the war for our own heart!

In order to win hearts, we don't use the tools or machinery of the world, but rather go underneath with the unheralded tools of meekness and gentleness, humility and the gospel promises. We must go underneath with the tools of humility. If we misidentify the conflict, we will be seduced by the wrong tools, too.

1. The Weapons of the Flesh

We can get a glimpse of these weapons of the flesh by examining the charges the super-apostles levied against Paul. They charged him as being ineffective...according to their human evaluation.

He was little, timid, they call him in other places. He was not impressive to behold so to command the room like a larger man may. V 1 continues the sarcasm. In fact, the NIV puts "humble" and "bold" in quotation marks because Paul is borrowing their language. They charged: this guy Paul is bold when he writes letters, but look at him. He is unimpressive, unexceptional, he's mediocre. How humiliating. Just look at this man. He is not a powerful leader, just take another look. He's cowardly: bold while away, weak while here.

Later, they charge he changes his travel plan all the time; he's not dependable. Further, v. 10., he is not trained in rhetoric; he doesn't even charge the large speaking fees that professionals do. He is a tent-maker, for crying out loud. Why in the world would you listen to this humiliated, little man, who has no spiritual experiences like we do, is not powerful enough to command attention, can't draw and keep a crowd that grows, has inferior intellect and arguments, gets himself arrested, shipwrecked likely because he can't afford a ticket on a decent ship. Why would you possibly listen to this guy? Look at him, they charged.

In a way, the criticisms of Paul reveal the criteria these worldly leaders used to measure the success of building the kingdom. It is worthwhile if it produces external success, a flash of power and control, comfort, self-confidence, approval of others, dazzling attraction. Paul had none of that in his ministry; therefore, they counted him and his ministry worthless. I wonder if our criteria of evaluating Central and Central's leaders and Central's ministry in our community follow along similar lines.

On the one hand, Paul agrees with them. He is not impressive as they are. He does suffer and struggle; he is poor and weak. Yet it is divine power in the midst of his weakness that reveals God at work.

Paul says in v. 3 *we walk in the flesh, but not waging war according to the flesh*. You can't seek the kingdom of God by using the weapons, strategies and measurement of human standards. If I use the techniques and strategies of the flesh, I'll be working toward the kingdom of the flesh, whether in church, or family or business or friendships.

Let's put some feet on this truth. If I'm trying to build a kingdom via the approval of other people, then I will be tempted toward duplicity—tell one what she wants to hear and to another what he wants. But that has nothing to do with truth, does it? Whether in my family, at school, my business. If approval is the measure, then keeping it is paramount.

Or if I seek to establish power and comfort, then I'll do what it takes to gain and maintain power and comfort, even if I must hurt you in the meantime. We may find ourselves heartless and cruel, cold toward the suffering of someone else. My kingdom will have no time for anyone who is unable to return a favor, to offer a quid pro quo. That's not how the Kingdom of God looks either.

Or if feeling pride is my strategy or goal, then I will never admit to anything that makes me feel weak, never be honest about my failures and will lie to your face even about the product my business produces. All to maintain standing and pride.

Even in the way we pursue change in ourselves and others, we must evaluate our weapons. You can't work against a prideful self-interest by trying to pose as if everything about your life is perfect. You can't produce a community of grace by using the tools of humiliation, ridicule and shame, or even demandingness. The world won't change because we shame them into it.

Ultimately we cannot rely on the tools of, pride, of guilt and shame, of ridicule, or ungraciousness to seek spiritual change in people. We can't demand our way to others having changed hearts and lives. That goes for how we treat our

neighbors, our friends, our family, our kids. We can't lean on the pressure tactics of the world to produce gracious lives. The church can't lean on the power brokering of the world to see spiritual life and vitality, either.

Just as you can't stop the progress of a disease by putting on a finer suit, so also you can't stop the spread of the sickness of sin by dressing up on the outside. Instead, there must be another power at work, a divine power, to remake us from the inside out.

2. The Weapons of Divine Power

In the face of power, glitz and self-confidence of the Super Apostles, Paul suggests, [v. 1](#), that [meekness and gentleness of Christ](#) is the pathway of divine work in the world. We must go under. In other words, in God's kingdom sometimes the way up is down.

Meekness is not a personality trait; it is not a pushover personality. Neither is it weakness. Rather, when the Bible talks about meekness, it refers to that quality belonging to the Lord Jesus of being willing to be disadvantaged in order to give an advantage to someone else. Being meek is not a dearth of assertiveness; meek is the absence of self-assertion.¹ Meekness is assertiveness on behalf of someone else. Being meek as Christ is meek is that life of Christ expressed in us when we search for ways to use our strength not for ourselves, but to use our strength for someone else's benefit. Meek is to refuse to be selfish with my strength.

That will turn the world upside down, and it comes from Jesus. Jesus is the one who said I have come not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many. He willingly went meekly to the cross to give his life in exchange for ours, to serve us, to bless us, to save us. He is the one Who made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross—a humiliating death that he purposed to pursue our welfare at the cost of his life.

How does that connect, however, in Paul's mind in building God's kingdom? Meekness and gentleness while demolishing strong holds, [v. 5](#), and destroying argument and opinions? How does that work together?

Again, the solution must fit the problem. You can't use the world's tactics of power play to solve a problem of spiritual death and sin. You can't attack a stronghold straight away; you must come underneath, in humility, meekness and gentleness...not by the force of our power or personalities, but with gospel power at work. How so?

[V. 5 says we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.](#) But the situation is not exactly as it may sound to us. Paul is not painting a picture of people sitting around arguing about ideas to see who is the winner. This is not a battle of the wits. But what he literally says in [v. 5](#) is [Reasoning we destroy, even every arrogance \(high tower\) raised against the knowledge \(personal knowledge\) of God.](#) In other words, the fortress, or bulwark or stronghold that is destroyed is the heart of arrogance raised in opposition to the meek and gentle Christ.

He's talking about heart change that produces a different mind (taking captive of not just ideas, but a mind opposed to God). What Paul is saying is the gospel weapon of the humility of the cross undoes our proud and arrogant hearts. When we are forced to recognize that OUR pride and self-centeredness has been demolished by the free and boundless love of a Savior who has pursued us, while we were still in sin, then that reality shapes how we pursue other arrogant and God-opposed people with that same humility and meekness! He came after us in our sin, so we, therefore, in meekness like his step into the lives of others, into their distress and pain, into their tender and guilty spots to love as he loved us.

And the kingdom of God is built when we as God's people, the body of Christ, live like him—using our advantages, strength, power, blessing,..not to make us look or feel better in the eyes of the world, but instead to offer blessing to another caught in distress JUST LIKE WE WERE.

Merely better ideas won't tear down strongholds. Rather better ideas, better theology in the hearts of people who know their need for grace and are willing to live like it tears down strongholds.

¹ Dan Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: the Character of a Disciple* (Phillippsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), p. 20.

Pastor Mike pointed me this week to Christianity Today, Oct 20. Story of a woman who grew up in church and left it to live the life of a punk rock rebel in NY, suffered from life-long depression and eventually returned to her faith.

“But a few years ago, when a dangerously deep and rocky depressive spell had me in its grips, I teetered on the brink of suicide. Even with the cosmetic appointments of a full and happy life -husband, family, health, career- I felt desperate, alone, scarred, stained, and worthless. Through God’s prompting she decided to give church another go.

I cautiously returned to church, keeping my expectations low. Would it be anything like I remembered (decent snacks but occasionally boring)? Would it be a veiled call to conformity, like a zombie march crossed with a fish fry? Would it be a waste of time?

What it turned out to be was fabric softener for my soul—something rough and stubborn inside me was gentled... All my life, I had fought my way toward healing, in one form or another. But it turned out that what I needed was gentleness. To stop spurring myself with negative self-appraisal that bordered on abuse. To dial down the obsession with keeping up the appearance of functionality and, if need be, normalcy. To no longer grit my teeth and play the tough customer who could do or withstand anything. God helped me get off my own back and ease up on myself. Being restored by grace doesn’t feel like some cloud-walking bliss-fest or levitation into an upper stratosphere of piety. Instead, it feels like comfort, acceptance, and resilience. A place to retreat, to just sit, breathe, and be.”

As the church sometimes we believe that what wins the day is to respond to the outwardly rebellious with sufficiently clear, strong, and public denunciations of those people’s badness. But certainly, that is the opposite of what this woman needed from God AND from us, the church. She needed to be moved to repentance and faith through the weapon of divine power: the meekness and gentleness of Christ, which he FELT from his people

The weapon we have is to serve as a herald of gospel of Jesus, as Paul said in 4:5-6, for what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as servants for Jesus’s sake. For God who said, Let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As we serve as heralds of that Gospel, as we live as meek and gentle agents in the manner of that Gospel giving, the Spirit of God is at work doing his creative activity. That same work that brought light out of dark, is the same Spirit at work to bring life to dead hearts. He is the one who demolishes strongholds by making dead hearts, ours, alive. His power in us is what makes the castles set up against him in arrogance fall!

So why do we feel like the power to save our neighbor rests on our shoulders again? Why do we feel like the power to save our nation burdens our shoulders again, if we get it just right, elect the right person, pull the right lever of power...as if it depended on us using the weapons of the world. Why do we feel like if we shout the loudest then all will turn out for godliness?

Now of course as v. 5 calls, we take minds captive to obedience to Christ, but it isn’t simply by being more cleverly argumentative. Our arguments have power in part because our lives are the evidence of the power of the cross- his life in us enabling us to spend ourselves in service of others, to give our time, our experiences, our effort, our very lives away in humility! Not merely better ideas, but better ideas wed to the character of Jesus have power.

It is that old principle from the Gospels. Sometimes the way up IS down. That’s the kingdom of God, inverse values to our world of pride and power. To demolish the strongholds in arrogant opposition to the Lord, you have to go underneath: in humility and meekness...in selfless service. The way up is down. Which way are we going?