

Exegetical Notes – 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

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(A personal note from the author: As I study my way through 1 and 2 Corinthians with you preparing these notes, I am aware that the Apostle Paul has a tumultuous relationship with some members of the Corinthian Church. Their relationship seems to be changing direction continually. When Paul says and does what they want to hear, all is well on the surface. But underneath, ALL IS NOT WELL. So, when he speaks to them as their “PASTOR,” their “SHEPHERD,” they find his words “HARSH” and they do not follow his guidance. In fact, some of them become openly hostile and critical of him, even arguing that he should not be counted among the Apostles. Paul’s relation with them is so tumultuous and changes direction so frequently that some scholars argue that the pages of 2 Corinthians are out of order. They argue that this chapter should be placed before chapter 7. However, I do not believe that is true. The Holy Spirit protects the text. So, even if those scholars are correct, this is the place where the Holy Spirit wants this chapter to be. Clearly, matters between Paul and the Corinthians are tumultuous because the problems between them are only resolved on the surface. The Corinthians, in general, have not learned to “forgive and forget” (see Matthew 18:15-17). These are the words of Jesus.

The unfortunate fact is that the Church has still not learned how to forgive and forget. It has been my pastoral experience that we are still as “Corinthian” today as were the Corinthians then. When our Pastors say what we want to hear, all is well ON THE SURFACE. But when they speak as “PASTOR” and correct us or lead in a direction we do not want to go, their words and manner are “HARSH” to us. We reject them and their leadership. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the exception in the Church, but rather the general rule. May God forgive us for failing to be forgiving to each other and especially our pastors.)

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Verses 1-4

By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

- Read 2 Corinthians 8 before reading this passage. There, we see that Paul was greatly encouraged by news he received from Titus concerning his relationship with the members of the Corinthian Church.
- But, there were still some in that church who were not reconciled to Paul. These people were saying that he was “timid” in person but writes “harsh” letters when he is away. Even though he is not in Corinth, he has heard what these people are saying about him.
- He warns these “trouble makers” to stop what they are doing so that when he comes he will not have to deal with them boldly.
- These people accuse Paul of “living by the standards of this world.” They are saying that he is “two faced.” He is inconsistent. One moment he is here and the next he is there. He is unreliable and untrustworthy. Clearly, he is the problem.
- He points out that though he lives in the world, he is not of the world. And that he will not fight with the weapons of the world as they do. He will not say things about them behind their back as they do. He will confront their objections face to face if they do not change their behavior.
- It is important to note that Paul expects to do battle. He anticipates a fight. He recognizes that these people are a “stronghold” of Satan within the Corinthian congregation and that if left unchallenged they will undermine the work of God there. He knows that weapons of God will destroy this stronghold.

Verses 5-6

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to

Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

- Clearly, Paul's intention is to destroy this stronghold. His arguments will demolish their position of power among the Corinthians. His goal is to help them bow in obedience to Christ, not to drive them away. However, their obedience cannot be gained if they insist on their present course of behavior. If they will not bow to God, they will never be obedient to God. They must stop doing what they are doing because God insists on it.

Verses 7-11

⁷ You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸ So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." ¹¹ 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.

- Again, Paul issues the warning. He says that those who are opposing him in Corinth are misjudging him because they are only looking at the surface of things. If they look deeper, they will see that he, like them, is a Christian. He belongs to Christ and calls Jesus, "BOSS." In his calling before God, he has been given authority from God, to build them up in Christ, and he will use that authority to honor God without shame. His goal is to build the Church and each individual Christian up in Christ. If they look on the situation more deeply they will see this. He hopes that they will do so so that he does not need deal with the opposition more aggressively when he is with them.

Verses 12-18

¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. ¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. ¹⁴ We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith

continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, ¹⁶ so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory. ¹⁷ But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

- Paul argues that he has been given apostolic and pastoral authority over the Corinthian church by God. He has not claimed it for himself. He is speaking within the limits of the authority he has been given by God. It is given to him by God.
- This is NOT so for those who are criticizing him. They are speaking only on their own authority. They are out of order.
- Paul's concern is that their behavior will limit the effective outreach of the Corinthian church and the Church in general. He wants to use the Corinthian church as a base for expansion. He wants to make disciples, not argue over internal issues. If this infighting continues, the witness of the church will be limited. That is what Satan wants, and why this opposition to Paul exists.
- Our boasting should be in what the Lord is doing. Submitting to those God has placed over us is not optional (see Hebrews 13:7 & 17).

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