Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Winning the Spiritual War, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:1-2
Code: 47-66

We have a great opportunity this morning, a marvelous privilege to begin the final section of 2 Corinthians. Open your Bible, if you will, to chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians. And I want to begin to share with you the opening six verses that are rich, insightful, strengthening, encouraging, ennobling words for every believer. Second Corinthians chapter 10, let me read you the first six verses.

"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! I ask then when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."

As Paul begins this final section of the epistle, the last four chapters, chapters 10 through 13, he begins by introducing a warfare motif. He is talking here about battle. And we have titled these six verses, "Winning the spiritual war...Winning the spiritual war." This is, by the way, a passage of Scripture oft quoted, many times we hear verses 3 and 4 quoted in reference to spiritual battles of one sort or another. And it is a very pertinent and very central passage to understanding how we are to approach spiritual conflict. You're going to find it to be one of the most rich and helpful of any that we have studied in this epistle, or for that matter anywhere else. I can only wish that we were able to do it in one Sunday, and it would be possible if I had about three hours, but I don't.

When Paul came to the end of his life, he said, "I have fought the good fight." He looked back over his life and realized that it was a war. It had been an incessant unrelenting battle. In fact, he also told Timothy in the very same epistle that he viewed himself as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, one who had suffered hardship in the battle and was fighting loyally to please the One who had enlisted him to be a soldier, his Lord. He battled all the way through his life from the beginning of his conversion to the very end, it was a war. He never battled for personal honor. He never battled for personal achievement or glory or fame or comfort. He always fought, however, for the truth, for the gospel, for the Lord. If he had to defend himself as he does in this letter, it was to preserve not himself. He was ready to die if necessary. But to preserve his opportunity to speak authoritatively the truth of God and be heard and believed.

Defending himself only so that he could continue to be the voice of God whom people would hear, and not for any personal gain. All through his ministry there were hostile opposers to this beloved Apostle and they came at him with slander, and false accusation and persecution and threats and jealousy and envy and murder plots. His apostolic authority was challenged. His personal integrity was challenged. His message was constantly challenged by those who hated and resisted the truth of the gospel.

And so he battled. In fact he said that he faced every day, earlier in this epistle, as if it were his last, realizing that one of the ever-increasing murder plots could come to fruition. He realized that any day could be his last. His life was simply on the line every day.

All of this because he was battling to protect the truth, battling to protect the gospel from assaults. And battling also to advance it, to conquer the satanic realm of error. He battled to preserve the honor and advance the glory of his commander in chief, the Lord Jesus Christ. He battled then for the honor of Christ, for the preservation of the Word of God. He battled for the security and strength of the church. He battled against demons. He battled against men. He battled against false teachers. He battled against philosophies and false religions, all the wolves threatening to devour the church. And the war basically consumed his life. His body was loaded with scars from the battle, whip marks, marks all over his back from the rods with which he was beaten, chain marks on his ankles and legs, stock marks elsewhere, the marks of stones that attempted to crush out his life. And all the rest of things that were as a result of shipwrecks and all the battles on all the fronts where he had to fight.

But all in all, in all the warfare that the Apostle endured, and all the riots from which he escaped with his life, nothing was more ongoing and unrelenting than the warfare waged for the preservation of the Corinthian church. Little did he know when he launched his ministry in Corinth over those first twenty months or so that he would have to engage in a battle that went on for years just to preserve the truth in that place.

Remember now, Paul had founded the church. In a period of about twenty months or so he had gone to Corinth and preached the gospel and led many to Christ and strengthened and built up the church. After that period, he left and word came to him that the church was engaged in sin and he wrote a letter to them. We don't have that letter, we don't know the specifics of what it said but no doubt it was a corrective. It was followed up by a second letter which we call 1 Corinthians. And he wrote that letter and listed and endeavored to correct a long, long list of iniquities that were characterizing that congregation. First Corinthians is a plethora of correctives to a church engaging in sins on many, many different levels.

After they received the 1 Corinthian letter, and no doubt it had some corrective effect upon them, word came to the Apostle Paul about another and even more serious problem than that, and that was

the arrival of false teachers who were assaulting Paul and assaulting the gospel. They wanted to teach damning heresy right out of hell. In order to accomplish that they had to destroy Paul's reputation because the people trusted and believed in him. And so they to be accepted had to start a smear campaign against Paul which they did. Undermining his authority, undermining his character, undermining his credibility, his integrity, they made the church into victims who were now ready to list...listen to people teaching damnable lies. The people lost trust in Paul. The false teachers reached a place of ascendancy. Word came to Paul about this and he had to react. He wrote to them a letter which is referred to in 2 Corinthians, a letter between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians which is called the Severe Letter, a very severe attack on them for following the apostates, the false teachers. He refers to it in chapter 2 and verse 4. It was a letter written with many tears. It was a letter written out of anguish of heart that they had betrayed him at a mutiny and a rebellion and turned against him and went after false teaching. That was tragic to him because it disconnected them from the truth of God coming through him. It disconnected them from the sanctifying effect of that church and from having any kind of powerful witness to the lost around them. And so he wrote the Severe Letter.

The Severe Letter was taken to them by Titus. Titus confronted this issue, gave them the Severe Letter and wonderfully the congregation in general repented of their mutiny and their rebellion. Responded and their relationship to Paul was restored. They reaffirmed Paul's authority. They reaffirmed their devotion, their love to him, their submission to him as the Apostle of Jesus Christ. The severe letter had its desired effect, along with Titus what Paul had hoped for was accomplished. And this is good news to Paul because frankly when the Severe Letter was being taken to them he was in depression and sorrow and anguish and pain which is chronicled, as you remember, particularly in chapter 7 of this letter. He was literally depressed until Titus came back and reported about their repentance.

They did repent and Paul's heart was turned from despair to joy. And he talks about that in chapter 7, as we saw earlier. He was thrilled that the battle for the moment had come a truce.

You say, "Then well why does he write 2 Corinthians?" He writes 2 Corinthians because he knows something that any good soldier, any good leader knows and that is that though a rebellion has been for the moment ended, the vestiges of it can be found in many places. He knew that the poisonous river against him had been pushed underground but it wasn't very deep. He knew that there was still some glowing embers from the fire of accusation against him and in some little places, in some corners they were ready to be fanned into flame at the first opportunity. He knew there were false teachers still there. Still hiding in the congregation were some rebels who were ready to again start up the revolution.

He also knew what anybody knows who has ever dealt with slander that it is extremely difficult to clear your name. Once it goes to the wind, it's almost impossible to get it all back. The lies had been propounded against him with great cleverness, with great subtlety, with great intensity and with great

effectiveness. They had been spread and far and wide through a conspiracy that could not be undone easily or quickly. There still were false teachers in the church. There still were those who believed them. They had just been pressed underground by the general repentance of the congregation. There were rebels then waiting for the first opportunity to assert themselves. In the meantime they would war some guerilla warfare behind the scenes, some terrorist activity, picking their spots here and there to repeat their lies in appropriate times and places.

The poison that was underground would no doubt seep to the surface occasionally and furthermore, this had gone far and wide and many people were asking the good folks at Corinth to explain all of this and they needed to be armed with as much information about the integrity and credibility and authority of Paul as possible, and thus does he pen 2 Corinthians.

Now in the final section he directs his words at those remaining rebels, that recalcitrant minority still entrenched there. That group that's poisoned under the surface, those trouble makers who for the moment are silent, those false teachers hiding in the wings, as it were, those...those people ready to assert themselves again at the appropriate moment, those remaining rebels. The minority apart from the majority who repented are the direct objects of what he says in chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13. It's very important, very important that he deal with that.

Earlier in the epistle he said he was so sad and so depressed and so broken hearted and so grieved about the whole situation there that though he wanted to come and visit he was not going to do it because he didn't want anymore sorrow than he already had. And the last time he went there they embarrassed him and shamed him to his face and a man stood up and accused him publicly and the church never even dealt with it, and that broke his heart all the more. So he didn't have the heart to come back until now.

Since Titus has come back and reported their repentance and restoration and they're now ready to affirm his authority, affirm his integrity and embrace him as the Apostle of Jesus Christ, he is going to come back. He's going to come back for a third time. But chapters 10 to 13 are a warning to those people still holding on to those rebellious attitudes that when he gets there if they're still like that, it's going to be all out war. When he comes back he's coming back with his guns blazing. He's coming back armed to the teeth. He's coming back with weapons of warfare that are divinely powerful to the pulling down of strongholds, as he says it here. He's coming back to punish all disobedience. He's coming back to destroy everything lifted up against the knowledge of God. This is a remarkable section.

The first section, chapters 1 to 7 focused on the restored relationship between him and the church. And in general, of course, there was a note of joy as the first seven chapters conclude because they have been restored in love and devotion to each other. So the first seven chapters are gracious, the tone of them is somewhat gentle. The words are conciliatory. There's a certain kind of sweetness

about those first seven chapters as he talks about the relationship that he has in general with the church members. How difficult their rebellion had been, how crushed and heart broken he was and how grateful that it had ended and love had been restored.

Then in the second section of the letter, chapters 8 and 9, having had a restored relationship, he can now take an offering. Simple principle, don't try to take an offering from your enemies. You won't get very much. You might have to duck what they give.

Paul having restored the relationship now feels that he can go back to exhorting the Corinthians to give money for a very important collection that he wants to give to the poor Christians at Jerusalem. Once the relationship has been restored, then he calls them to obedience to this very practical expression of love and unity.

Then comes the final section. And he says I'm coming now for the third time and I'm coming to deal sternly and strongly with any remaining hostility to the truth. He moves then from the calm and tender pleadings of chapters 1 through 9 geared to all the Corinthians to strong and stern and authoritative words in this final section. It is directed at the remaining hostility and how he will deal with those who host that hostility in their hearts. The issue with the church in general having been settled, he now goes after the pockets of enemy territory and it's a search and discover and destroy mission that he has in mind.

Now by the way, Titus will take this letter to them and it will be about two and a half months after they get this letter that he will come for his third visit. So he is giving them a couple of months to deal with this issue and for the people who are still disloyal to repent so that when he comes there they don't face this great soldier. He's coming to fight if fighting is necessary. And that is exactly how he opens the whole section, talking about warfare and weapons and fortresses and bringing them down. It is a warfare perspective. This is his battle plan. If he has to fight, he will fight. And, frankly, the Corinthians must decide that. He told them that in the first letter when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:21, "What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod? Or with a spirit of gentleness?" end quote. It's your choice. You determine my demeanor by what you do. And so, that is essentially the tone of these final chapters.

Now as we examine this first six verses, this morning and next Sunday, and I wish we could do it in one because it is so potent, particularly the second half of it, we see him presenting himself in his soldier uniform, in his soldier mentality, in his warrior garb. And he gives us four traits of a soldier, four traits of a warrior who will win the spiritual war, an effective soldier.

Trait number one, these are marvelous. He is compassionate...he is compassionate. Do I need to remind you that the best soldiers are compassionate? That the best soldiers only use deadly force when they are absolutely required to? That the best soldiers are tender and sympathetic and have a

heart for people and find no particular joy or satisfaction in destroying life in bloodshed, in carnage? They're not entertained by that. They're not satiated by that. That is a last resort. A great soldier may be a soldier of great power and of great boldness, but it is mitigated by his compassion and it is constrained by his compassion so that it is exercised only when there is no other option. And that is the spirit in which he introduces himself in verse 1. This is going to be some very direct language, some very powerful and forceful language, particularly as we get down into verses 3 through 6. And so in order to put that in the context of his right attitude, he starts by speaking of his own compassion.

"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who am meek when face to face with you, but old toward you when absent!"

Take the word "now" for a moment, it signifies a break in thought. It signifies a clean break in thought. It signifies a fresh line of writing a new subject. This sets off the final section. Some people needlessly have concluded that this means it was another letter added later on. There is no history to indicate that and there's nothing in the context to indicate that. You can change your subject if you want to writing the same letter, or the same book. That's not abnormal or uncommon. He finished talking about the offering, the offering was a very specific matter. He finished with a crescendo benediction, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." That was a fitting way to conclude that particular theme. And now he turns to the final subject.

He may have put down his pen and taken a walk or went to get a drink. He may have put down his pen and slept for the afternoon or the night. He may have put down his pen and taken a couple of days to do something else. But it is in the same letter to the same church in the same spirit that the rest of this epistle stands that he writes the closing section. "Now" signifies the introduction of the final section.

Then he says, "I, Paul, myself..." This is of great importance. It is of significant importance. What had been questioned was his authority. What had been questioned was his right to speak for God. What had been questioned was his message, his gospel, his apostleship. His credentials were under attack and dispute. His authority was under attack and dispute. His apostleship was under assault.

But now the people, the church in general, have reaffirmed that and they have reaffirmed that he is the apostle who speaks with integrity and authority and so having had that reaffirmation he does just that here and says, "I, Paul, myself urge you." He puts himself right in the place of authority. It is his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ with which he speaks. He doesn't have to get his authority somewhere else, he doesn't have to have some kind of papers or credentials given to him as the false apostles had said he did. He can stand and speak for himself as the Apostle of Jesus Christ, the founder of the Corinthian church, the spiritual father of all the believers that were there. He was the spokesman of God with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He asserts the authority that they now have affirmed is genuinely his.

He does not have to go beyond himself. He doesn't have to look somewhere else for the authority. And it's very important that he affirms that so that his words come with authority as his threats come with authority and so will his presence come with divine authority. He will confront the remaining rebels. He has the right to do that. He is the authoritative Apostle of Jesus Christ.

But first, before he comes wielding this apostolic authority he says this, "I, Paul, myself beg you," parakaleo, "I beg you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." I am begging you to end this rebellion. I am begging you to be reconciled. I am begging you for real peace. He has no desire to see blood spilled. He has no desire for an open conflict. He gets no satisfaction out of carnage. He is patiently compassionate. He has waited in patience. He is going to wait some more. He's going to send a letter, he's going to wait a few months more to give them opportunity to repent. Oh how like God that is. And isn't that what he says? "I beg you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

A great soldier is not vicious. He is not full of venom and vitriol and hate. He is not full of anger. He is not full of rage. A great soldier is not full of revenge. He is first and first of all a man of compassion. He is a man of meekness and gentleness.

By the way, the word "meekness" refers to the humble and gentle attitude which expresses itself in the patient endurance of offenses. It means you're free from anger, free from hatred, bitterness, desire for revenge when wrongly treated. It means humble and gentle in the midst of unfair treatment. And the word "gentleness" almost a synonym. First word is prautes, the second is epieikeia, it means...it means when applied to someone in authority it means leniency...leniency. It refers to a patient submission in the midst of mistreatment, in the midst of injustice, in the midst of disgrace without anger, without malice, without revenge. And even though you have the power to retaliate, you don't. That's what it means.

And no one more characterized that kind of attitude expressed in those two words than Christ, and he says it...The meekness and gentleness of Christ. No one was more powerful than Jesus Christ and yet no one had a better harness on that power. No one had that power under control better. That's oft used definition for prautes, power under control. No one was more powerful, no one had greater judgment capability than Jesus and yet no one had it under greater control. He took the almighty power of God to bring about a retaliation on sin and kept in check and instead exercised patience and endurance. Paul says I want to be like my Lord. I want to be as patient, as gentle, as meek, I want to hold my power in check, my authority in check. Even though you've mistreated me and maligned me and turned against me, I have no anger, no bitterness, no malice. Even though you have disgraced me and shamed my name and shamed the Lord and shamed the gospel, I want to be patient with you. That's the character of a great soldier.

He doesn't look at the first opportunity to blow someone away. He considers that as the last possible choice. Jesus Himself exhibits this. Turn to 1 Peter 2, this gentleness and meekness is nowhere better chronicled than by Peter who certainly knew his Lord. In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 19, says that...it finds favor with God, verse 19, "When a man bears up, or endures, under sorrows while suffering unjustly." God is pleased when you suffer unjustly and endure it. When you don't retaliate, when you're not angry and full of hate and rage and revenge, God is pleased when you endure it. Verse 20, "For what credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience?" There's no particular virtue in that. You should endure that with patience cause you deserve it. "But if when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure, this finds favor with God." That is a level of spiritual nobility, when you are misrepresented, persecuted, assaulted, slandered, reviled, all that stuff that was happening to Paul. When that happens to you and all you've done is what is right and you suffer quietly and patiently and you endure it, God is pleased.

And then verse 21, "For you have been called for this purpose." What does that mean? You might as well learn to deal with it because that's part of being a Christian. You must expect it. You live counter to the culture. You live as an alien in the world, everything in the system is hostile toward you. You can expect to be called in to unjust suffering. You can expect to be harassed and harangued and even persecuted for doing what is right. The society will do that to you in various forms and to various degrees. You have been called for this purpose. Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. After you've suffered a while the Lord's going to make you perfect. In this world you shall have tribulation. I mean, that goes with the territory.

So when you learn how to suffer patiently and endure it and have a right attitude toward those who persecute you, God is pleased. "Since," verse 21, "Christ also suffered for you, not only redemptively but to leave you an example for you to follow in His steps." He showed you how to endure unjust suffering. No one ever suffered as unjustly as Christ because verse 22 says, "He committed no sin and never had any deceit found in His mouth at all." We have sinned and deceit has come out of our mouths, though we still suffer unjustly, we're not perfect, He suffered unjustly and was perfect which makes His unjust suffering even worse. He sets the example.

What's the example? Verse 23, "While being reviled He didn't revile in return. While suffering He uttered no threats." What did He say on the cross? "Father...what?...kill them?" No, "Father...what?...forgive them." He uttered no threats, He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously and quietly bore our sins in His body on the cross. That's Jesus.

Paul says I come to you with the same meekness and gentleness of Christ. I come to you with forebearing patience. I come to you enduring all of this terrible, terrible slander against me. I come to you with leniency. I come to you without anger and without malice. I come you patiently.

He was not ignorant of the character of His Lord. And he wanted to be just like Him. He knew that the character of His Lord was the standard for all soldiers. Jesus had said in Matthew chapter 11, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." You want to learn to be humble, you want to learn to be gentle. You want to learn to be meek from Me. And then in the next chapter, Matthew 12 He says, does the prophet Isaiah and it's quoted here by Matthew, that when the Messiah comes, a battered reed, Matthew 12:20, a battered reed He will not break off and a smoldering wick He will not put out. He doesn't come to crush the already bruised. You see a reed that functioned with some purpose, but it's now become battered and useless for that purpose and somebody snaps it and throws it away. Maybe it was used for a flute, as often happened in ancient times. And then there was a wick that was too small and too charred to give off light, all it did was give smoldering smoke that irritated everybody and someone would pinch it out and throw it in the trash. And when the Messiah comes He won't take the bruised reed and break it, He'll restore it. He won't take the smoking wick and crush it, He'll give it back its light. That's what He'll do. He's tender and gracious and forgiving and merciful.

In John 8 He finds a woman brought to Him who was caught in the act of adultery and these men jerked her right out of that act of adultery and slammed her on the ground in front of Jesus and said, "We have taken this woman in the act of adultery, what do You think about that?" And Jesus looking at the woman and looking at them said, "Whichever of you is without sin, you cast the first stone." The conviction gripped their hearts and they all went away. And He looked at the woman and said, "No man condemns you, neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more." Forgiveness, magnanimous forgiveness to one who had blatantly disregarded the law of God and engaged in adultery, a sin punishable in the Old Testament by immediate execution.

He was ready to forgive. God is ready to forgive and you see the patience of God again and again and again and again throughout the Old Testament as He pleads with His people in their sins and patiently waits year after year after year, decade after decade, showing how ready He is to forgive. And when the sinners finally come and repent, He embraces them with all the love that a father showed to a prodigal son in the parable that Jesus told.

Even in Jesus most scathing malediction, most blistering diatribe against religious leaders, Matthew 23, it ends with, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not." And it ends with Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. A noble soldier, a great soldier, a soldier who will win the spiritual warfare is compassionate.

Now sadly, go back to the text of chapter 10 verse 1 and here's a most interesting point, sadly they saw his compassion as weakness. They put the spin on his compassion, his tenderness, his patience, his endurance, his kindness as weakness. And Paul refers to that when he says in verse 1, he identifies himself, "I, Paul, I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent," that is sheer sarcasm. He is simply repeating their accusation. This is sarcasm. That tells

you a little bit about the sternness of this section. You're never more stern than when you use sarcasm, biting irony. And that's what he does. They had said about Paul he is meek when face to face with you, but, boy, when he goes somewhere he's real bold.

Look down at verse 10, they said his letters are weighty and strong but his personal presence is unimpressive. You know what they were saying about him? They were saying when he's here he's gutless. He's a wimp. Face to face he's a coward, doesn't have any courage, he won't face the issue. He's tapeinos. That word usually is used in the New Testament, I think, everywhere but here as a virtue. But they used it in a derogatory sense, he's a wimp, he's a weakling when face to face with you.

And you know something? When face to face with them he was compassionate and he was tender and he had a healthy humility. Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:3, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." It was true, in his humanity he had no confidence. In his own physical ability no confidence. In his own philosophical capabilities, his own mental and intellectual abilities, his own wisdom he had no confidence. And they took that sound and spiritual humility, that lack of confidence in his own person and twisted it into a negative. And they accused him of being mealy mouth and cowardly and weak. They were like the...those false teachers were like the nation of Israel who expected the Messiah to come riding in on a white horse killing Romans. And when Jesus came into the city riding on the foal of a colt of an ass, it was more than they could conceive and eventually they executed Him because they expected the Messiah to come in kingly dignity and power. If Paul was this great authority from God, this great Apostle, what's he doing sort of shuffling around here with all this humility?

But he was patient and he was compassionate. And he was a pleader. And he made war only as a last resort. And they said about him, "He's bold toward you when absent." Boy, get him behind a pen a few miles away and he gets real fierce. He's like that squirrelly little frizzy-haired dog behind the gate that barks its head off and then when you open the gate runs ninety miles an hour in the other direction. He's fine if he's protected, if he's insulated. Get him a distance away and put a pen in his hand and he becomes fierce, bring him here and he's weak, he lacks courage.

They were misunderstanding his compassion when he was there. They were misunderstanding his boldness when he was away and they used this to accuse him. This is a very clever accusation, by the way, because no matter what you say it's very hard to answer. That's why this section takes so long and has such complexity to it. I mean, if he tries to defend his strength from a distance, that's a problem because they'll say...Oh yeah, look at that, that's what we expect. If he tries to defend his weakness while he was there they'll say...See, we were right, it was true. But how do you defend yourself? What's your answer to that? No matter what he says it could confirm their accusation. If they...if he says he's strong they'll say...Yeah, he has his times of strength. If he says that he's humble and compassionate, they can use that to confirm their assessment. So he has to deal with it

very carefully and he does in this section.

This section then welds strength to weakness. It mingles them. He talks about power in the midst of humility in this section. He talks about the power of God in frail humanity. He talks about being the tender warrior, about being the compassionate soldier. It's all very carefully dealt with throughout these four chapters and you'll see it again and again, the mix of strength and weakness, the mix of compassion and conflict is the stuff, listen, of a true hero. True heroism is never more fully exemplified than in the perfect mixture of strength and weakness and compassion and courage.

And that takes us to the second trait of this effective soldier. He is not only compassionate, he is courageous...he is courageous. Verse 2, "I ask that when I am present," this is what he's begging, he said back in verse 1, "I, Paul, myself urge you, beg you," now he returns to that same thought. "I beg that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous." What he says there is very interesting. He says my hope is that I don't have to be bold when I get there, but if I do I propose to be so. I just hope I don't have to be. He's not weak. When all attempts at compassion are exhausted, when all efforts at patience are eliminated, when the only thing left is to protect the truth from unrepentant, unrelenting rebels, he will fight to the death. When only confrontation preserves truth, when only confrontation secures the church, he will charge into the battle fiercely.

You want severity, you'll get it. He who on one occasion, according to Galatians chapter 2, withstood Peter to the face, Galatians 2 says. I withstood him to the face because he was to be condemned. Peter...Peter, the primary Apostle and Paul went nose to nose and condemned him to his face.

The record of this man's courage fills the book of Acts, starting with chapter 13. His courage against courts and councils and governors and kings and religious leaders and authorities and crowds and mobs is legendary. He is not weak. When all attempts at compassion are exhausted, he comes loaded with arms.

Verse 2, "I ask that when I am present in a few months when I get there I may not be bold." I'm asking you, folks, to repent. I'm asking you remaining rebels to repent and believe the gospel so that I don't have to be bold. The word "bold" literally courageous, tharreo, it's the word to be courageous. If you want to see my courage, I'll show it. Don't force me to display the confrontational courage I can demonstrate if I'm required to do so. He readily admits to having a warring attitude when called for. And he even starts to sort of crescendo with the idea. He says, "I can be bold with the confidence." The confidence, literally the word for conviction. I have convictions. I have very strong convictions. And here he is saying I have the courage of my convictions. And if need be, I propose to be courageous. "I propose," means to judge, reckon to think, to plan. I've planned, I've reckoned, I propose to be courageous if I need to be, to be bold and courageous about my convictions.

By the way, the second word there, the word translated "to be courageous," tolmao, literally means to be daring...to be daring. It's a very strong term. Tharreo, the earlier word, bold, is the more common word for courage. This is "to be daring." And what does it mean? To act without fear regardless of consequences. It's literally to abandon yourself without regard for personal safety, to disregard any personal safety or preservation.

He says, "Look, you want courage, I'll show you courage, I'll show you the courage of conviction that knows no fear." A synonym for that word "daring" is "fearless...fearless." He says I'm resolved that if it's called for I will act with whatever aggression is necessary. I will go to battle with whatever force is required fearlessly, daring to put my life on the line. You want courage, there is courage.

And here is the beautiful picture of a tender warrior, a man of immense compassion. But when a fight has to be fought, he's in the front line fighting it. That's how it works. You want to fight, he said to the Corinthians in the first letter, 1 Corinthians 4:19, let's have a fight. I'll come to you, if the Lord wills, and I'll find out not the words of those who are arrogant but their power, you bring them on. We'll find out whose got the power. If you want to fight, he'll give it to you.

In chapter 13 of 2 Corinthians and verse 10 he warns them that he's going to come to use severity if he has to. And he'll use the authority the Lord has given him. He'd rather use it for building up but he'll use if it he has to for smashing, for tearing down.

Now against whom will this daring bold fearless battle be waged? Back to verse 2. "Against some..." this is the recalcitrant minority, the remaining vestiges of the rebels who are still in the church, false teachers and those who silently went underground or their glowing embers were hidden off in a corner somewhere, the people who are still rebels in their heart and have not yet bowed the knee to the gospel and to the Apostle, "I will be courageous against some," and here he defines them, "who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh."

You know what their accusation, they were just the same things against Paul. He operates according to the flesh. That little phrase, very simple to anybody who reads the New Testament, to walk according to the flesh, to walk is simply a picture of daily conduct, who lives their daily life according to the flesh. The flesh is unredeemed humanness, it is synonymous with sinful desire, personal motivation for pride's sake, self-aggrandizement, all of that.

There again, those people still there who say Paul is a fake, he is a phony, he operates out of the flesh, he is purely motivated by self-interest. He is motivated by corrupt desires. He's got a dirty heart, a rotten heart. Down inside he wants money and he wants illicit, immoral behavior. Down inside he is a rotten individual. This takes us, by the way, right to the heart of the conspiracy against him. Here it is at its core.

They said he was a fake. They said he was corrupt inside, selfish, indulgent, self-serving, unauthorized, worldly motivated, sought only money. They said he was motivated to live for greed and lust and immorality. That's what they were saying about him...terrible things. And he calls them in verse 2, "The some who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh." Repeatedly in the early part of the epistle, in the first seven chapters, he defended himself against those attacks. In chapter 1 verse 12 he said, "My conscience is clear that we have lived in holiness and godly sincerity." In chapter 4 he says, "We don't have a hidden life of shame and we haven't operated in craftiness and adulterated the Word of God." In chapter 2 verse 17 he said, "We're not like others who have corrupted the Word of God." We haven't done that. In chapter 7 verse 2 he says, "We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one."

So he's already defended himself against it, but there is the core of the conspiracy right there. They accused him of being rotten inside. And he said those are the folks I'm going after when I get there. I don't want to come with guns blazing. I don't want to come armed for war. But if the rebels aren't gone or haven't repented when I arrive, it will be war. I am compassionate like God, like Christ, but there comes a point at which the enemy becomes impregnable and entrenched and it's time for battle.

Here is the Christian soldier. Compassionate, as compassionate as God and Christ and courageous when it's demanded. The noble soldier. Next week the next two. Now listen, folks, the third one, unbelievable. I'll give you a hint, he is not only compassionate and courageous, he is competent...competent. What makes him competent is the weapons of his warfare. We'll see what those are.

Father, thank You this morning again for the clarity with which Your Word speaks, for the joy of fellowship and the blessing of worship. O Lord, we would be these kinds of soldiers, we would have that wonderful gracious balance between compassion and courage. Help us to endure patiently sinners, to endure accusation, false accusation, hostility against us without anger, without bitterness, constantly...constantly pleading and begging and praying that our enemies who unjustly accuse us would repent and be saved. And then, Lord, when all patience is exhausted, help us to be willing to arm ourselves and with the courage of our convictions fearlessly step out into the spiritual battle for the dignity of Your great name, for the preservation of Your truth and for the safety and sanctification of Your church. To that end we pray, for our Savior's glory. Amen.

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