

MEMORY VERSE: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."

2 Corinthians 10:4, NKJV

LESSON STUDY INTRO

This week's lesson studies Paul's counsel concerning false teachers and his apostolic authority.

1. Gentleness is not weakness (Sun)

- Some accused Paul of being a "big talker" without having the authority to enforce his counsel (2 Cor. 10:10, 11).
 - Paul explains that what appears to them as weakness or lack of authority is actually a demonstration of divine mercy (vs. 1-6).
 - "His words in 2 Corinthians 10:1 ironically refer to his opponents' accusation that he was a frightening bully when writing letters from a distance but a pitiful coward when dealing with people face-to-face (2 Cor. 10:10, 11). He responds that what seemed to be weakness should be seen as powerful meekness and Christlike gentleness." Qttly, Sun, par 1

[Christ's] mercy was not weakness, but a terrible power to punish sin because it is sin; yet a power to draw to it the love of humanity. 7ABC 470.2

- Furthermore, "Spiritual warfare... aims at edification, not destruction (2 Cor. 10:8)." Qttly, Sun, last par

2. Error makes more sense to the carnal heart (Mon-Wed)

- Paul closes his letter by addressing his concern with false teachers and the Corinthians' lack of spiritual discernment.
 - He expresses his fear that they have somehow been deceived into receiving "another Jesus" than the One he preached – and far too readily (2 Cor. 11:3, 4).
 - This they have done, at least in part, because they have come to view the false teachers as more "credible" or "qualified" than the apostle Paul. Paul's concern was not for his own reputation, but their salvation (v. 2).
 - He compares his ministry with that of the false teachers (vs. 22-27).
 - The lesson suggests that Paul's boasting is different from that of the false teachers because he "boasts in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10:17, NIV). However, in Paul's own words, he is speaking "as a fool" (2 Cor. 11:1, 16, 17, 21).

Paul then contrasts his ministry with that of the false teachers, pointing out how it is personal gain, not love, that has driven the false teachers (2 Cor. 11:19, 20; Gal. 4:17); while love, not personal gain, has driven him (2 Cor. 11:8-11, 28, 29; 12:14; see also 1 Cor. 4:15; Jn. 10:11-13).

- He then switches from speaking “as a fool” to boasting of his own weaknesses and exalting Christ, knowing that “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5-10).
- Finally, he warns of Satan’s ability to appear as an “angel of light,” and therefore the ability of false teachers to appear as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14, 15).
 - This is in a large part due to the unfortunate reality that to the carnal heart, error looks more like truth than truth does!

Those who battle for the truth, against its opposers, should realize that they are not meeting merely men, but that they are contending with Satan and his angels, who are determined that error and darkness shall retain the field and the truth be covered up with error. As error is most in accordance with the natural heart, it is taken for granted to be clear. Men who are at ease love error and darkness, and are unwilling to be reformed by the truth. They do not love to come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved. 1T 624.2

3. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Thu)

- In conclusion, Paul turns his attention to his upcoming “third” visit (2 Cor. 12:14). He warns, however, that he can come in one of two ways –
 - (1) as a blessing and encouragement (2 Cor. 12:14, 15); or
 - (2) as a reprover and corrector (v. 20; 2 Cor. 13:2).
 - In either case, however, Paul’s desire is their edification (vs. 19; 2 Cor. 13:7-9).
- In light of all this, he counsels them each to “examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5).
 - They, as well as we, must constantly realize that our strength is only in Christ; to those who are called, He is both the wisdom and power of God (vs. 3-4; 1 Cor. 1:24).

CONCLUSION

The Lord designs that our opinions shall be put to the test, that we may see the necessity of closely examining the living oracles to see whether or not we are in the faith. Many who claim to believe the truth have settled down at their ease, saying, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” CW 36.1 (Qtly, Fri, par 2)