

2 Corinthians Ch10v1-18 - Standing Strong

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[0 : 00] If you could please turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 10, which is on page 1165 of your church Bibles.

! So 2 Corinthians chapter 10, and starting in verse 1. By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.

I, Paul, who am timid when face to face with you, but bold towards you when away. I beg you that when I come, I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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.

[1 : 20] And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience once your obedience is complete. 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.

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. I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters.

For some say his letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing. 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.

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. 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.

[2 : 37] 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. 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, 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. But let the one who boasts boast in the Lord, for it is not the one who commands himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commands.

Thank you.

Thank you. Well, good evening. Nice to see you. Hello. Good evening. That's good. Glad there's someone there.

[4 : 00] Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Father, thank you.

Thank you for your grace, your kindness, and your love. Thank you that you give to us all that we need to live the Christian life.

And help us now as we listen to your word, that you will speak to us afresh, and that you will strengthen us individually, and strengthen us together as your people.

For we need you. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Sorry, just a sec there.

It's Monday morning, and you arrive at work. Despite working through the weekend, you are the first one in the office.

[5 : 09] Such is your dedication, your commitment, and your concern. At coffee break, your boss calls you into the office. But you know that by his tone, things are not good.

No need to sit down. I've come to the conclusion that you're not up to the task. You're far too weak. You're very unimpressive.

You don't measure up. You're just too ordinary. What we need are people who are self-assured and self-sufficient. There's no place for you here.

How would you feel? Small? Inadequate? Embarrassed? Well, that's not unlike the situation the Apostle Paul finds himself in that we come to in chapter 10.

Having brought the gospel to Corinth, having seen a church being planted, having cared for them for many years, having loved them deeply, it seems that there is a push to get them out of the church.

[6 : 26] In chapters 1 to 7, there was pushback against his message. And then in these closing chapters, in chapters 10 to 13, it seems there is a pushback against the messenger, Paul himself.

You see, new leaders had come into town and they had been influencing the church. Don't bother with that Paul character.

He's on his way out. He's far too weak. Look at verse 1. I, Paul, who am timid.

He's all bark and no bite. And he doesn't seem to be very impressive. Look at verse 10. This is Paul writing about what these people say about him.

For some say his letters are weighty and forceful, but in person, he is unimpressive. And his speaking amounts to nothing.

[7 : 34] He's a terrible preacher. Or look at verse 15. Where they're saying he simply doesn't measure up. It seems to be that they were fighting amongst themselves as to all the different places they had been to share the gospel and the great work they'd done.

But Paul responds, verse 15, neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. They were simply saying his ministry influence wasn't up to scratch.

In fact, some don't even think that Paul is a Christian. Look at verse 7. You are judging by appearances.

If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, well, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.

Now, we mightn't face the same kind of level of pushback, but I think we all have experienced being criticised.

[8 : 39] Our Christian values and our opinions aren't always accepted, but rejected. It can be hard to live the Christian life in this world, especially when we go to work or mix with our friends.

We can feel weak. What could I ever do? We feel unimpressive. What do I have to offer?

We might feel we lack influence. What difference can I possibly make in my sphere of friends? In fact, even in our down days, we can feel, verse 7, that we don't even belong to Christ.

So what's our answer to this? What's your response? What can we say? Well, for the most part, we can say, it's actually true, isn't it?

We are weak. We are unimpressive. We are lacking influence. We don't always measure up as a Christian.

[9 : 53] You see, we are following the way of Christ. Look at how Paul responded to these accusations and criticisms.

Verse 1. By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you. How would you respond if you were faced with such criticism?

Would you get your back up and respond with anger and aggression? No, he says, we are Christ people. It's with humility and gentleness that we respond.

You see, we don't live as the world does. Look at verse 2. I beg you that when I come, I may not have to be as bold or as forceful as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. Yes, we live in the world, but our standards are not the standards of the world.

[11 : 09] We don't strive for self-sufficiency. We strive for humility. We don't aspire to be self-assured. We aspire to be gentle.

This is the way of Christ who said, you can see it there on the screen, what Jesus said, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls.

That's Jesus. What's he like? He's gentle and humble of heart. The prophet Isaiah spoke of Christ in this way.

He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. He's humble. A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

He's gentle. You see, this is the way of Christ. And when Christ came into the world, he faced opposition, he faced accusation, and he came in weakness.

[12 : 28] He wasn't very impressive. He lacked influence. He walked to the cross humbly and prayed, not my will, but your will be done.

He looked upon his enemies from the cross, gently praying, Father, forgive them. He died a death of shame and scorn, but yet it was through his death that we find forgiveness of all of our sin, a new life and eternal joy.

You see, we live in this world, but as Christians, we don't live by the standards of this world. We respond to every injustice with humility and every rejection with gentleness.

we follow the way of Christ amidst criticism and judgment. We go his way.

However, being humble and being gentle does not mean hopeless and helpless. You see, we have been given all that we need to stand strong in the face of all pushback that we may face.

[13 : 52] Three things from this text we're going to see that we have been given by God to enable us to stand strong every time we face pushback, every time we're criticized, every time we are judged wrongly.

We have been given divine power, gospel authority and the Lord's commendation. everything we need to be able to stand strong in the face of accusation and opposition.

So first, we have been given divine power to fight the enemies of Christ. Divine power.

Verse three. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. No, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. Now this isn't a physical battle.

[15 : 07] It isn't fought with suicide bombers and gun attacks. No, this is a spiritual battle fought with the word of God and the spirit of God.

It's a war that sets people free from strongholds. It releases those who are enslaved in unbelief to trust in Christ.

You see, this war isn't about us. It's about those who are opposed to Christ, those who are enemies of Christ. So how do you and I, as we face this new week, and we go to work or spending time with friends, how do we fight this spiritual battle?

Well, we must know where the battle is. Verse 4, pay attention and see where the battle is. Verse 4, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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.

[16 : 31] You see, the battle lies in the hearts and in the minds of people. People don't believe the gospel because they have believed the devil's lies.

Back in chapter 4, verse 5, you might remember it says, the God of this age, who's the God of this age? But Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

They're in his stronghold. They listen, verse 5, to the arguments of this age.

The argument that will say, no, you're God. It's your life. It's your body. It's your choice. You decide who you want to be, and you decide to be the person you want to be.

You live however you please, as long as you're happy, and it makes you glad. you live that way. It's the cult of self.

[17 : 39] And yet, surprisingly, we're the most lonely and insecure people possible. They've been entrapped. They've listened to the lies.

Look at the end of verse 5. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. every idea that we hear, every philosophy, every thought that sets itself up against Christ, we seek to win over so that they become obedient to the gospel.

That's where the battle is. It's in people's hearts and in their minds. So how do we change people's hearts and minds? Think of the people who we mix with, the people that we know, who are in that stronghold of unbelief.

How are we going to change their hearts and change their minds to think differently? How do we fight this war and convince people of the truth?

Well, we know where the battle is. It's in hearts and minds. We've got to know what our weapon is. Verse 4. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

[19 : 00] On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. Divine power to demolish arguments.

Divine power to take people captive for Christ. What is this divine power that we've been given?

Well, it's not by being clever and sophisticated.

It's not by being bullish and arrogant. It's by the humble gospel message with the spirit's gentle work.

Those are our weapons. The humble gospel message and the spirit's gentle work. As people hear the truth that Jesus Christ is God, as we proclaim the victory of Christ over sin by his death, as we declare Christ triumphant over death by his resurrection, as we humbly and gently speak of Christ, so hearts and minds are set free from the stronghold of unbelief.

Everyone here this evening who is a Christian has been won over by God's divine power at work in your life. If you're not yet a Christian, you are still in that stronghold of unbelief, believing the lies, the false arguments.

[20 : 39] Now, none of us have power to change anybody's heart or mind. Remember, we're weak, we're unimpressive, we don't measure up.

But, go back to chapter 4 with me a minute, chapter 4, verse 7. A similar argument was here, we're weak, we're unimpressive, we don't measure up, but, chapter 4, verse 7, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God, not from us.

Jars of clay, cracked pots, we're fragile, we're disposable, but within us we have this treasure from God, the treasure that is the simple, humble, gospel message, and the gentle work of God's spirit. That is God's all surpassing power in our lives so that as we speak his truth, lives are changed. We may be humble and gentle, but we're not hopeless and helpless. We've been given divine power to fight the enemies of Christ.

[22 : 14] Christ. So when you go to work tomorrow morning or wherever you are and whatever you do, go with confidence. God has given you divine power in the gospel message.

Second, what do we have second? We have gospel authority to strengthen the church of Christ. Gospel authority to strengthen the church of Christ. You see, being in this battle can be tough. In fact, as we face resistance to the gospel, it can shake our confidence.

And all of us here need to be strengthened. And the encouragement in this section is we have all the resources to encourage one another as we follow Christ.

Christ. But first, we must know where the struggle is. Look at verse 7. Back to chapter 10.

[23 : 19] Chapter 10, verse 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.

Let me ask you a heart-searching question. If you're a Christian, have you ever doubted that you belong to Christ?

Have you ever doubted that? I do. On most days, I feel my weakness. I struggle that I'm not very impressive.

I look at my so-called successes and I know I don't measure up. And then I have a look inside. And I look at my sin and my failure.

And I wonder if I'm a Christian at all. And I say this not because I'm unique, but because I think it's how we can all feel at times.

[24 : 30] But look what it says, verse 7. You're judging by appearances. The accusations and the criticisms against Paul were all external.

You see, a lack of results, or even of great successes, is not the measure of where you and I belong to Christ.

Whether we're struggling with sin, or we're faithful in obedience, that isn't the measure of whether we belong to Christ. You see, we can so easily fall into the trap of thinking as the world does.

No, we don't judge by appearances. The Christian life isn't based on my performance. Our ministry life isn't assessed by success.

We live by something better and greater. We know the struggle, we know where we're weak, and so we know where we go to, to the source, to be strengthened.

[25 : 38] We can be confident that we do belong to Christ, no matter what anybody might say, or however I might feel. Look at verse 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.

Paul is saying, look, we need to go back to the authority of the gospel. Paul had received a message, but it wasn't something that he had made up himself to make us feel good about ourselves.

As if we're going to counsellor Paul and told, sit down here on the therapy chair and let me tell you things that you'll feel better about yourself. No, he's saying, I've received gospel authority, authority from the Lord, and that authority was the assurance and the confidence of the gospel.

Look at verse 8. The gospel builds us up. It doesn't tear us down. A wrong understanding of the gospel will break us and destroy us.

Living by performance, trying to strive to meet expectations will crush you. Instead, he's saying, I want you to go back to the gospel that I told you about, where we hear the simple truths that through our faith in Christ, through our union in Christ, we are saved and secure forever.

[27 : 21] Christ is now our stronghold. He holds us fast and he will not let us go. Have a look with me to chapter 1, verse 21.

As we remind ourselves of the gospel truth that we need to hear time and time again when we struggle in our Christian life and feel we don't measure up and I don't belong to Christ, hear these words.

Chapter 1, verse 21. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.

He appointed us, set his seal of ownership on us and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

Let's go back to chapter 10. You see we live by the authority of the gospel. What matters is not how I feel about myself or what anybody else says about me or what the world thinks of me.

[28 : 33] What matters is what the gospel says, what Christ has done for me on my behalf. Therefore we can say, verse 7, if anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we too belong to Christ just as much as they do.

So if you're struggling today and you're wondering, am I a Christian? Struggling with sin? Struggling with criticism?

Hear the word of the gospel. It is what Christ has done for you that assures you and gives you confidence that you are his forever.

And so we gather and we point each other back to Christ. We remind one another of all that Jesus has done. We build each other up.

We don't tear each other down. We strengthen one another with the gospel as we go to battle together.

[29 : 45] We may be humble and gentle but we are not hopeless and helpless. We have gospel authority to strengthen the church. Third, and I'm going to summarize this quickly because I know time is going and I want to get to an application or two.

But third, we have God's commendation to continue the work of Christ. Now in verses 12 to 18 it seems that they were arguing amongst themselves of all the different places they'd been and all the effect and influence they had had and they compared themselves to Paul and thought well Paul isn't up to much and look at what we've done and look at the churches we've planted and look how many people have been baptized in our church and all these things were going on.

What does Paul say verse 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.

Verse 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved but the one whom the Lord commends.

You see if you're a Christian today it's the Lord who has given you approval. It's the Lord who saved you and equipped you.

[31 : 20] It's his commendation that we stand on and we go forth in confidence. And what's our calling? Well look at the middle of verse 15.

Our hope is that your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand so that we can preach the gospel in regions beyond you.

That was his simple way of life, his simple way of thinking, that God had commended him and approved him to go and preach the gospel.

You don't need anybody's permission. You don't need your boss's permission. You don't need your neighbour's permission. You don't need the government's authority to go and bring the word of God.

We keep our head down, we live our life simply and we continue on the work of Christ as we bring the gospel to others. We have God's commendation, we have gospel authority and we have divine power to do all that God has called us to do.

[32 : 36] Now let me just make two short comments as we come to a close. You know that we as a church are beginning the process of looking for a new pastor and you may be wondering, well what kind of person should we be looking for?

who could be pastor? Well I think we would be very good to pay attention to chapter 10 and ask ourselves the simple question, does this man come with humility and gentleness?

Verse 1. Is he gentle? Is he humble? Is he a raging bull who will stamp you down and crush you?

Or will he encourage you and support you? Humble and gentle. Will he come depending on himself, his cleverness, his sophistication?

Or will he come with divine power? Depending on the gentle gospel and the humble work of the spirit.

[33 : 51] Will he depend on divine power? Will he come with gospel authority? Giving people assurance and confidence that in all our struggles, in all our life, he will bring you back again and again to the simple gospel reminding you of what Christ has done.

Will he preach the gospel to you? God will and does he come with the Lord's commendation? Not living a life or a ministry of comparing himself with this church or that church or this person or that person and what they've done and what we should be doing.

But does he come approved by the Lord who keeps his head down and continues to preach the gospel to a community that we live in that are in a stronghold who have listened to lies and false arguments?

That is the kind of pastor you need. At the very least that is what you need. But it's not just about a pastor, it's about us as a church.

Are we humble and gentle? do we live by divine power? Are we resting in gospel authority? And are we living with the Lord's commendation?

[35 : 27] That is what makes a church, that is what makes a pastor, and that is what gives glory and honour to God. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Lord, thank you that you do not leave us alone to walk the Christian life or to continue in in our ministry individually and as a church.

But you have given us all the resources, your divine power, with gospel authority and the Lord's commendation.

We go in your strength and in your ability, for we know our weakness, we know our struggles, and therefore we depend upon you.

Father, would you please provide the right person to pastor this church, and will you continue to shape and mould us to be the kind of church you call us to be.

[36 : 44] In Jesus' name, Amen.