

2 Corinthians 10-11 / Chapter Study

INTRO

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We are at war!

The lead story in nearly every news source right now is the Israel-Hamas Conflict in Gaza.

I went online this morning and read several reports as well as watched video of the battles.

The nations are lining up on different sides.

Some side with Hamas, others with Israel.

As graphic & real as that conflict in the Middle East is, right here, tonight in this room we are embroiled in battle.

WE are at war!

It's not a conflict of bombs & bullets. It's a spiritual battle.

But it is no less real, the fighting is no less intense, than what's taking place in Gaza.

The stakes are even greater because it's *eternal souls* that are at risk, not *physical bodies*.

This spiritual conflict is described in detail in Ephesians 6 where we read –

¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, . . .

Then Paul goes on to list other pieces of our *panoply*, our armor.

But I want to concentrate on just this one piece, the first he mentions – the belt of truth.

When we look at the Roman's armor, our eye is drawn to the more dramatic pieces; the breastplate, or helmet; the sword or spear.

The belt seems anti-climactic, but Paul mentions it *first* because it was in fact the most important part of the armor.

It's what held everything else together. The belt was the integrating force that made the rest of the armor effective in its task.

And that's why Paul sees the belt as a symbol of Truth – because truth is the

integrating principle of our lives.

It's the one essential ingredient that must be firmly in place if we're to survive & succeed in the spiritual war we live in the midst of.

For ages, military experts have realized the importance of intelligence in conducting war.

The key to victory is to know what your enemy is doing and keep him from knowing what you're doing.

To that end, generals spend considerable effort seeking to discover what the enemy is up to while hiding their own plans & maneuvers.

Subterfuge & deception are an essential part of warfare.

What's true of geopolitical war is true of spiritual warfare.

Satan understands the role of deception & uses it to maximum effect.

The opening salvo in the long war with humanity began on a lovely day in the Garden of Eden when he masked himself in the form of a serpent and fired a set of lies at Eve.

It worked so well, he's been using deceit as his primary weapon ever since.

We come to a point in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth where he turns a corner to deal with a new problem that had recently manifested there.

Titus, who'd just returned from Corinth, told Paul a new crop of false teachers had arrived & were sowing some bad mojo.

Though they were new to Corinth, the error they brought wasn't new to Paul.

We can sort out from what Paul says about them they were a group of guys called Judaizers.

These guys claimed they'd been sent from the mother church at Jerusalem as spokesmen for the original disciples, the followers of Jesus.

In fact, there was a group in the church at Jerusalem that held similar views to these guys, but they weren't sent out by anyone.

Still, they claimed to be super-apostles and in some cases even had fake credentials.

Among other things that were goofy, they told Gentiles they had to become Jews in order to be saved.

They had to obey all the law of Moses.

Of course this was completely contrary to the Gospel of Grace Paul preached.

These Judaizers followed Paul around, infiltrating the churches he planted after he left, spreading their lies & trying to gain their own following from among his converts.

As I mentioned Sunday, Galatians is an eloquent refutation of their heresy.

Well, Titus brought Paul the news the Judaizers had finally shown up in Corinth and were up to their old tricks.

They knew before they could gain a hearing for their own ideas, they needed to undermine Paul's authority.

They did this by making grandiose claims of their own importance while calling into question Paul's calling & credentials.

Since this is the exact same issue Paul had already dealt with in a previous attack on his credibility with the Corinthians, we would think they'd not give the Judaizers the time of day.

Sadly that wasn't the sitch.

The Corinthians were so in to degrees & credentials their heads were spun by the claims of the false teachers.

Also, as we saw when we were studying Acts, Corinth was known for its academies & schools of philosophy & rhetoric/speech-making.

There were dozens of schools with many hundreds of students who loved to do nothing more than sit around and listen to people wax eloquent.

The false teachers *were* eloquent – and this won them quite a following.

So Paul writes chs. 10-12 to deal specifically with these false teachers.

A. Apostolic Authority • 10:1-18

¹ Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ— who in presence *am* lowly among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you.

He starts right out with a clear contrast between himself & the false teachers.

Meekness & gentleness were no where on their horizon.

No, they were all in to “POWER!” The *despised* meekness, equating it as a lack of “the anointing.”

The name “Paul” means ‘little’. And from a few passages like this we get the impression he was small of stature.

Very early church tradition describes him as short yet sturdy.

We know his previous visit to Corinth had not gone well.

He'd travelled there to deal with a previous problem but had been rejected by the Corinthians, even though he'd planted the church there.

His follow up letter to that visit had been very hard, but it had resulted in the Corinthians repentance and the restoring of their relationship.

Paul makes reference to that here: His physical presence wasn't imposing.

He wasn't much to look at – but what difference should that make, really?

It's what he said that matter, not how he looked while he said it.

² But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

He makes a difference here between the Corinthians & the false teachers.

He lets them know that when he arrives, anyone who represents heresy is going to be dealt with severely.

Paul isn't going to negotiate or compromise with the false teachers & those who support them.

There's too much at stake. So he warns them; “Don't side with those I'm going to oppose.”

Paul won't resort to fleshly means of dealing with error – but he will oppose it in the Power of the Spirit of God.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and

being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Paul casts the entire coming conflict with the false teachers as a Battle of Truth & Error.

The Spiritual War believers are engaged in is primarily about ideas, thoughts. This is why the Living Word is so important – because it's the means by which the Lies of the enemy are unmasked & defeated.

Remember what Jesus said in John 8, "If you abide in my words, then you are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!"

In v. 4, Paul says God's Truth, His Word, is a mighty weapon that demolishes demonic strongholds.

It dismantles & throws down seemingly clever arguments along with anything that rises up in opposition to Him.

God's Word is the instrument by which our thoughts are aligned with & brought back into harmony with our Creator from whom we've strayed.

In v. 6, Paul looks out to the end of all things at the final judgment.

While the war rages on & on age after age – it will not go on forever.

One day our Captain will lead us to ultimate victory & the devil's rebellion will be finally put down.

What we need to remember is that, that day is not yet.

The war goes on and we're still in the heat of battle.

It's our duty to do our duty and keep pressing the border of battle deeper into enemy territory.

Ours isn't a *defensive* measure; it's offensive!

Look! – We pull down strongholds! We cast down arguments. We throw down all that rises up against God.

Jesus said the *gates of hell* will not be able to resist our ATTACK!

It's a mistake to think of the Church of Christ as a conservative institution set to defend conventional traditions.

All too often, contemporary political debates & social issues combine to throw the followers of Christ into the place of defending traditional ideas of morality.

There are times when taking such a stand is right & good.

But the danger is to begin thinking of the Church in a purely defensive mode, instead of actively going into the world to win the lost and persuade people of the Truth of the Gospel.

Let me use the campaign on Proposition 8 as an example.

We were for Prop 8 because we know God intends marriage to be between a man & woman for life.

But our whole position was cast as a *defense* of traditional marriage.

It was easy for the opponents of Prop 8 to mis-represent our position as a desire to deny rights to certain people and to attribute it to either hate or stupidity.

Mostly lost in the debate over Prop 8 were the few voices who saw the issue as an opportunity to declare God's Word on the issue of marriage, the family, & sexuality.

What *could have been* a great opportunity to declare God's Truth to an even wider audience was missed because the majority of those who supported Prop 8 were in a defensive posture.

The Church is not just one more conservative political organization.

It ought to be *progressive*, pushing the boundary of the Kingdom of God deeper & deeper into enemy territory by the Power of God's Spirit working through His Word!

7 Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?

He challenges them on HOW they were evaluating things.

Were they using purely carnal criteria or judging by what's true?

If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.

The translation is awkward. What Paul means is that by anyone's *proper* evaluation, he & his team are proven workers of God.

8 For even if I should boast somewhat more

That is, *in addition* to their evaluation of Paul's ministry -

about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—⁹ lest I seem to terrify you by letters.

The boldness of what he writes doesn't aim at harming them but rather to protect & build them up.

10 "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

This is what his critics said about him.

He'd heard it from them before – so he repeats it here so the Corinthians will know he knows what they're hearing from the false teachers.

11 Let such a person [who says this] consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.

There was no disparity between what Paul wrote & what he did.

12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

All of the posturing & positioning themselves as people of great importance & authority going on among the false teachers was just plain silly.

Paul would not get suckered into it.

The Corinthians, unfortunately, were primed for it by their fascination with externals.

Remember how divided & fractured they were in 1 Corinthians, claiming to be of Peter, Apollos, Paul, or Jesus?

They were like a bunch of immature kids all claiming their leader was better.

In fact, *immature* is precisely what Paul called them.

The arrival of the Judaizers threatened to start up a whole new round of this kind

of factionalism.

13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

Paul comes back to the proper criteria for assessing someone's calling – fruit!

While the false teachers were busy making grand claims of greatness & comparing themselves to guys like Paul – who by appearances, they were superior to –

Paul says – “Look at the *results* of our ministry! Why the very existence of the Church at Corinth proves my apostleship!”

14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but having hope, *that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere*, 16 to preach the gospel in the *regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.*

Paul does a masterful job of showing how wrong the false teachers were.

Paul went to Corinth years before & started the church there.

Then he moved on & started church in other places.

It was his plan to keep doing that & after his soon coming trip to Jerusalem, he intended to come back by this way, stop at Corinth for a short time, then continue on to new fields to plant new churches.

The false teachers *never* went where there was no church because the lies they taught could only bend the truth.

There had to be truth for them to bend! There's was a *parasitic* message that could only steal life, not impart it.

Paul points this out to the Corinthians!

While the false teachers claimed to be super apostles, they'd never once done an apostle's work or planting a church.

All they did was rip off someone else's.

17 But “*he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*” 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

And God's commendation of Paul's ministry was all over it!

Having just shown the silliness of self-recommendation, because Paul knows the Corinthians tend to be impressed by it, for their sakes, he's willing to engage in a little of it, and writes . . .

B. Apostolic Conduct • 11:1-15

11:1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

It isn't until ch. 12 that Paul does list off some of the marks of his apostleship.

First, he explains WHY he was willing to do that which he considered silly – it was out of concern for the Corinthians.

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed

you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. ³ But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴ For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

Since we covered these verses in depth last Sunday, I'll just summarize tonight.

As their spiritual father, Paul wanted the Corinthians to remain loyal & pure to Christ until the day HE came for them as His bride.

He saw false teachers as agents of the devil who had come to seduce them away from Christ.

⁵ For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

This is sarcasm. By 'most eminent apostles' he doesn't mean the original disciples.

This is what the false teachers called themselves – *super-apostles*. What audacity!

Paul's not intimidated or at all impressed with their claims because he knows it's bogus and knows he IS called by God.

⁶ Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.

Paul hadn't graduated from one of the many schools of rhetoric in Corinth, but that didn't make the power of his message any less, as the Corinthians well knew.

⁷ Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?

One of the points Paul's critics attacked was that he'd not charged for his teaching.

The Corinthians thought anything of real value had to cost something.

The motive of the false teachers was of course selfish; their bottom line wasn't promotion of the Kingdom of God as it was for Paul; it was promotion of self.

They were in it for the power & wealth it could gain them. So they *charged* for their message.

Since the Corinthians were used to that, they gladly anted up.

The false teachers said Paul's refusal to charge was a sign his message wasn't worth anything.

When they said this, the Corinthians were reminded how when Paul first arrived and preached, they'd tried to pay him and he'd refused.

It had bothered them a bit at the time because it made them feel better to pay; like they'd done something to merit hearing the message.

But Paul knew their motive was wrong and stood in the way of grace and had refused payment.

The false teachers dragged all this back up and used it as a point of attack.

⁸ I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.

Of course he hadn't literally robbed another church!

He means he'd taken support from other churches so that he could minister in

Corinth.

⁹ And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*.

Paul had never made his ministry in Corinth contingent on their support.

His support had come from the churches of Macedonia.

There was nothing inherently wrong with receiving financial support from the Corinthians.

But Paul knew their support would have come with strings attached, so he hadn't received any while there.

Financial support would have confused the Corinthians on the nature of Grace, so Paul removed it from the picture.

¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

The region Corinth was in.

¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! ¹² But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

While confronting the error of the false teachers is crucial, they are not going to distract Paul from being faithful to his primary task as an apostle, and that is to preach the gospel and plant churches.

¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

It's important we take to heart what Paul says here; False teachers aren't easy to spot.

They blend in.

The more dangerous they are, the more clever they are in masking their error.

When the devil appeared to Eve in the Garden he didn't come in some sinister appearance that clued her in to his intent.

He came in an appealing & attractive form.

It was only after the curse that the serpent was cast down and crawled on its belly, implying before that it stood upright.

Listen – the great appeal of the antichrist is that he will be an extremely appealing & attractive person.

This is ever the devil's way.

As I mentioned Sunday, Satan has 6000 years experience at spiritual warfare.

He's clever & crafty & is a supreme psychologist!

He's skilled at marketing & propaganda. He knows just how to pitch his product and make his appeal.

He knows which lies we're especially prone toward.

I don't believe he can read out minds but he can make a good guess at what we're thinking, specially when he's the one behind some suggested line of thought.

He knows it far more effective to remain hidden and to work through surrogates he's trained to deceive.

And that deception comes in lines of thought that connect to our inner desires. People fall for false teaching because they WANT it to be true.

C. Apostolic Suffering • 11:16-33

16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.

This connects back to v. 1. He repeats the admission that self-commendation is silly but he does it for the sake of those who are impressed by this kind of thing.

17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. 18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. 19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!

Paul's being sarcastic again. The Corinthians loved to brag about how superior they were to others.

Yet they put stock in stuff that just didn't matter.

Paul admits what he writes here was a deviation from his usual method and he found it distasteful.

But again, he does it for their sake.

20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. 21 To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

As we might expect, one of the distinguishing features of the false teachers was an over-bearing arrogance.

How else can we explain the claim of the title "super-apostles"?

This is something I've noticed about successful heretics – they're arrogant!

They adopt an attitude of superiority that's obnoxious.

It's reinforced by sycophantic followers who fawn over them, hanging on every word.

Really such followers are fawning over them not out of genuine awe but out of a desire to catch some of the crumbs of wealth & power that fall from them.

The arrogance of the Judaizers was demonstrated in their gross abuse of authority; to the point where they verbally and even physically abused people.

They were frauds. Paul's power & authority were legit & real. Yet he'd never, ever been abusive!

Nor had Christ!

Keep that in mind as you assess the ministry of teachers & pastors and people who claim to be the servants of God.

Now we get some *direct evidence* the false teachers at Corinth were Judaizers -

**22 Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more:
in labors more abundant,
in stripes above measure,
in prisons more frequently,
in deaths often.**

24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one.

**25 Three times I was beaten with rods;
once I was stoned;
three times I was shipwrecked;
a night and a day I have been in the deep;**

**26 in journeys often,
in perils of waters,
in perils of robbers,
in perils of *my own* countrymen,
in perils of the Gentiles,
in perils in the city,
in perils in the wilderness,
in perils in the sea,
in perils among false brethren;**

**27 in weariness and toil,
in sleeplessness often,
in hunger and thirst,
in fastings often,
in cold and nakedness—**

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

While the false teachers made grandiose claims to greatness, when Paul ends up getting to the boasting, instead of giving his *accomplishments*, he lists the things he'd *suffered* for the Gospel's sake.

So in the end, he DOESN'T succumb to the folly of bragging.

This list of the cost of ministry stood in stark contrast to the arrogant claims of the false teachers who suffered nothing for their deception.

Why, they would never allow that! They were in it for personal gain, not loss, not pain.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?

While the false teachers were all in to status & promotion, there was no depth Paul would not go to to win the lowest sinner to Christ.

In fact, he was angry with those who came in Christ's name but misrepresented Him.

30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

Ignominious. Humbling.

People of importance were both received by & sent out of a city with great fanfare.

If you had to sneak out by way of a basket, it was the height of shame.

Yet Paul had endured it a short time after his conversion precisely because he *was* called by God to be an apostle.

Where were the false teacher's testimonies of something similar of suffering and shame for bearing the name of Christ.

You see, as Paul wrote this, the Corinthians remembered what Jesus *Himself* had said; to stand with Him is to know the world hatred & opposition.

To follow Christ is to suffer at the hands of a Christ rejecting world.

In the light of Jesus' warning and Paul's example, the boasting of the false teachers was all the more ridiculous.