

“Every Pretension” (2 Corinthians 10)(8.9.20)

2 Corinthians 10 (NIV84) *Paul’s Defense of His Ministry*

10 By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and **every pretension** that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

⁷ You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. ⁸ For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” ¹¹ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.

¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. ¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. ¹⁴ We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, ¹⁶ so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory. ¹⁷ But, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Every Pretension”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus had His disciples. He personally chose each one of them. Judas, who would betray Him, was one of the twelve. Over and over again, even after three years of living with Jesus, the disciples needed correction. Although they were told repeatedly, they just couldn’t grasp that Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, was going to be crucified. When Jesus was arrested, they were afraid and scattered. Even right before his ascension to the right hand of the Father, they asked, “Lord, is now the time you are going to restore the kingdom of Israel?”

Ten days later, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in the Upper Room. Peter made a short powerful sermon proclaiming Jesus as the Christ; who had been crucified; but, was raised from the dead by God. The disciples were witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. People in the crowd were cut to the heart and cried out what shall we do? Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. AND you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Three thousand responded to that call and were added to the newly birthed Church. The church was started and the Holy Spirit was at work, so everything was in place. Not quite. Jesus confronted Saul on the Damascus Road, while Saul was about the business of persecuting the newly birthed church and the people of The Way. Saul was dramatically changed by his experience with Jesus and became the Apostle Paul, commissioned to bring the gospel to the Gentile world.

Today, we hold Paul in great reverence as a church planter and the major author of New Testament letters. You might imagine that if Paul planted all of today's churches, then they would be great. Well, we have all these letters from Paul because after he left, problems soon cropped up. Too many baby Christians never matured and others fell back into their old sinful ways.

There were also false teachers that came in and led people astray. Some of the teaching was simply in error, like adding a works religion to salvation by grace alone. Other false teachers wanted to promote themselves and exploit others. They used the gospel for personal gain instead of living cross carrying lives.

BODY:

Therefore, we should not be surprised at the struggles in our churches today. Because of human weakness, foolishness, and sinfulness, the Bride of Christ, the Church, has always been less than it should be. It is no different today. What should tip the scales in our favor is that not only do we have the Holy Spirit like the early Church, we have the completed Word of God. And still, we fall far short of what we ought to be and too often we bring shame and disgrace upon the name of our Jesus.

This second letter to the Church in Corinth, some scholars believe that there might have been a total of three letters, addresses their disobedience and false teachers. While it is meant for those within the church, it contrasts the way issues will be handled by Paul compared to worldly ways. In fact, a good portion of the problems have arisen because a worldly mindset has infiltrated their church.

Preacher and author Warren Wiersbe wrote:

"Paul was not simply fighting a little skirmish in Corinth; the attack of the enemy there was part of a large satanic campaign. The powers of hell are still trying to destroy the work of God (Matt. 16:18), and it is important that we not yield any ground to the enemy, not even one church!

Many believers today do not realize that the church is involved in warfare, and those who do understand the seriousness of the Christian battle do not always know how to fight the battle. They try to use human methods to defeat demonic forces, and these methods are doomed to fail. When Joshua and his army marched around Jericho for a week, the spectators thought they were mad. When the Jews trusted God and obeyed orders, they brought down the high walls and conquered the enemy."

Years ago, there was a confrontation at the basketball courts where I was playing. Apparently, two of the young men were arguing about a young woman. One of them had a faith based tattoo that included a cross and seemed to indicate that he was a Christian. I tried to quell his anger and be a peacemaker. He responded by quoting Exodus 15:3 (NIV84) The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. What he missed was that the Lord is perfect and holy, one who only wars in righteousness. This young man was responding as a sinful creature bound my pride and self-interest.

Isn't that what many of us do? We take bits and pieces of the Bible and apply them to our particular circumstances in order to justify our actions. Basically, we have weaponized our faith and then use it in a worldly manner. It is often selfish and self-consuming.

Paul holds up the meekness and gentleness of Jesus as the model for us to emulate. The false teachers and their followers were trying to discredit Paul. Hey, remember when he was here. He wasn't much to look at, not impressive at all. And, he was not very eloquent. He didn't have a forceful personality. But now, look at how bold Paul's letters are that he writes to us.

Paul responds here with a promise. My actions were and will be appropriate to the circumstances. If need be, when I come, I will be as bold as necessary. Every act of disobedience will be punished. We will come together and be unified again and then those false teachers will get what is coming to them.

Was Paul concerned about his reputation? Was Paul worried about his authority being challenged? Yes and no to both. It was **not** for himself that he was bothered. First, he was concerned about the Corinthian Church and the people. Second, he was concerned about the mission that Jesus gave him to spread the gospel.

When Paul's authority was questioned, then his teaching was questioned. This was the gospel, the good news of Jesus. It was the message that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It was the message that we have all been saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. It was the message that Jesus' death and resurrection conquered sin and death. Anything taken away from his teaching diminished the gospel. Anything added to his teaching diminished the gospel. In reality, it was no gospel at all.

While I was attending Highland Community Church, a man started coming to church and Bible studies. Immediately, he began volunteering to do work around the church. At first, it seemed like a blessing. During the Bible studies, a problem began to be evident. His was a "works" religion. He misunderstood James' admonishment that "faith without works is dead." He was putting the cart before the horse. Although the pastor clearly demonstrated his biblical errors, the man held fast to his position. A few of the more mature members tried to convince him to no avail.

And, he was not satisfied to disagree, but tried to persuade others. It continued to escalate until he had to be put out of the church. Even after that, he wrote letters to all the church members reiterating his belief that salvation was not by faith alone. He created problems in the next church he went to also. Although he was sincere, he was sadly misled.

In the Corinthian Church, these false teachers were having some success in leading people away from the truth. Paul makes it clear that they thought very highly of themselves. Unlike Paul who wanted to use his authority for the betterment of the church, these false teachers wanted to use the church for the betterment of their authority.

They were looking at things from a worldly perspective. They were comparing themselves to other men instead of God's holy standards. It is not wise to commend yourself by such comparisons. The only commendation that matters is the approval of the Lord.

Again this week, wealthy megachurch and prosperity preacher, Todd White was featured on churchleaders.com news. A couple of Sundays ago, he shared a theological breakthrough with his congregation. "When you come into the gospel because you've come for a better life, then you've come in for the wrong gospel," he told them.

He said that he had been rocked to his core and was repenting because he had not previously preached the whole gospel. Todd White has come to a new understanding of the seriousness of sin. White said, "There's no way for a person to realize their need for grace if they don't realize they've offended God." He continued, "I am so convicted I can't even tell you...I'm trembling inside...The American church has lost its [felt] need for repentance."

Last Sunday, he went on to address the issue in more detail. He wondered if other evangelical preachers who had publicly condemned him had bothered to pray for him. Yes, we certainly are called to pray for those that don't know the truth. We certainly are called to pray for those in leadership; and, pastors and teachers are held to a higher standard. At the same time we are called to pray against the powers and principalities of this world that oppose the kingdom of God.

Paul is absolutely right as paraphrased in The Message:

The world is unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.

A. W. Tozer wrote in one of his Daily Devotions: "Christianity at large and the Church, generally speaking, are afflicted with a dread, lingering illness that shows itself daily in the apathy and spiritual paralysis of its members.

How can it be otherwise when 20th-century Christians refuse to acknowledge the sharp moral antithesis that God Himself has set between the Church, as the Body of Christ, and this present world with its own human systems?

The differences between the churchly world and the followers of the Lamb are so basic that they can never be reconciled or negotiated. God has never promised His believing people that they would become a popular majority in this earthly scene.

I wonder how many believers would join me in a clear-cut manifesto to our times? I want it to be a declaration of our intentions to restore Christ to the place that is rightfully His in our personal lives, in our family situations and in the fellowship of the churches that bear His name.

Are we willing to demonstrate the standards of godliness and biblical holiness as a rebuke to this wicked and perverse generation?"

On Friday, I heard the news about Jerry Falwell Jr.'s indefinite leave of absence as President of Liberty University, a prominent Evangelical Christian school. He has been a somewhat controversial figure for some time now. Especially since he voiced his opinions about political elections, he has been a lightning rod for scrutiny.

Knowing this, and because of his prominence, you would think that he would show great discretion in his actions. Liberty University is very conservative, having a dress code and strict behavior guidelines. Falwell posted a picture on Instagram, though already deleted, that is not consistent with those standards. In my opinion, it was embarrassingly immature at best and a serious breach of judgement. It hurt the cause for Christ in several ways. The behavior was worldly and undermined the values he is supposed to represent. He failed the university staff. He failed the students. Jerry Falwell Jr. demonstrated a level of pride and self-absorption that is inconsistent with Christian leadership. Liberty University's purpose is to have its graduates glorify God and fulfill the Great Commission, which is to go into all the world and make disciples that follow Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Paul spoke here about Christian weapons that have divine power to demolish strongholds.

In preaching this text, Charles Spurgeon said, "'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal"; yet the spiritual weapons which can be wielded by the Christian minister, and indeed by every Christian man, are not to be despised, for while not fleshly, they are mighty through God. God is in them; God is with those who use them.

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the arrows of truth which pierce the consciences of men, the weapon of all prayer, the influence of the Holy Ghost—that divine power—such weapons as these are by God's power made mighty to the overthrow of spiritual principalities and powers. Truth and holiness are the appointed engines for the pulling down of the castles of evil."

The unfortunate truth is that there are strongholds of the Enemy that oppose God in the Church. The reason is that there are strongholds of the Enemy within men and women who are in the Church. To root out the strongholds of the Enemy in the Church, we must root out the strongholds of the Enemy in each and every one of us.

You and I must search our own hearts. What are we looking for? Beware of boasting - if your boasting brings you attention and glory, take it captive. Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. Beware of comparisons – do not compare yourself to others. You are a unique son or daughter of the living God. When you start to feel inferior or superior, take it captive. When you are tempted to add something to the gospel; when you are tempted to subtract something from the gospel, take it captive.

With Paul, "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." You will hear lofty opinions. You will hear sophisticated speculations. You will hear proud obstacles. You will hear vain imaginations. You will hear all sorts of human knowledge and arguments that oppose the knowledge of God. My friends, they are all nothing but pretense; nothing but pretense.

As believers in the Lord Jesus, He is to rule over us. We are willing subjects. Our obedience is certainly on display in our actions. But more than that, our obedience is to be in the very fiber of our being, in our purpose, in our motivations, in our nature. We are new creations in Christ. When we truly understand the hopelessness of our situation if it weren't for Jesus, then our gratitude will grow into a deep love of our Savior.

A faith less than that is a pretense.

On the day of judgment, may the Lord commend you.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.