

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 10

¹Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 10:1-18

In this chapter Apostle Paul discusses the Christian warfare and defends his apostolic ministry so as to set right the Corinthians' view on the ministry.

1. Spiritual warfare and Christian weapons

Paul's humble manner of pastoral ministry of "meekness and gentleness of Christ (v. 1)" was being misunderstood by some Corinthian Christians as being "base." Some people wrongly mistake humble people as persons of low class and consider them as deserving to be treated with low esteem. In pastoral relationships between a church congregation and its pastor, this human tendency "according to the flesh (v. 2)" can lead to lack of respect to the pastor and to loss of effectiveness of the pastoral efforts, which are for their edification and spiritual upbringing (v. 8).

In verses 3~6 Paul defines the weapons of Christian pastors as well as Christian believers as follows:

First, a true pastor follows the meekness and gentleness of Christ (v. 1) and does not deal with his congregation in the manner of this world (v. 3). They learn from the example of the Lord Jesus, who is gentle and lowly in heart (Matt 11:29). As he learns from the Lord, he shows the Lord's gentleness to his congregation in meekness, though his manner might be mistaken as "weak" or "base." In this world meekness and gentleness are not taken as weapons of warfare. But in God's ministry they are great weapons of warfare in fighting arrogance, falsehood and evil of this world. In his first epistle, Paul declared;

We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. [1 Cor. 1: 21-23]

Second, the weapons of the spiritual warfare are of God and not of men (v. 4). But, what is the warfare that Paul is referring to in verses 4 and 5? Paul elaborates considerably about the warfare and the Christian defense for the warfare in Ephesians 6:

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, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

The object of their warfare was not the Christians in the church nor individuals outside the church. Paul was acutely aware of the spiritual forces of evil which are waging war against God and His church. Satan and his hosts have been endeavoring to devour the church and destroy God's people through the ages since creation. In Revelation 12, Apostle John saw the dragon (Satan) as ready to devour the child (church) born of

the woman (Israel). Satan deceived Adam and Eve. Satan tricked Cain into killing his brother. Satan prompted Nimrod to rise against God by mobilizing the people and building a high tower. And his wife, Semiramis, made her husband a god named Baal and herself a goddess, Ashtoreth, thus creating one of the greatest idol worship traditions that are still strong today. The enemies of God are “*principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* [Eph. 6:12].” And these are all Satan’s hosts that war against God and His kingdom. To the Corinthian church, they appeared as “*imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God* (v. 5).” And the defensive weapons needed for this warfare are ‘the truth of God, breast plate of righteousness, gospel of peace and shield of faith [Eph. 6:14-15].’

The ultimate goal of false religions and ideologies is ‘disobedience’ to God, whereas the ultimate effect of the gospel is “to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (v. 5).” God is the Creator of the whole universe. Therefore, He deserves and demands our obedience, praise and thanksgiving. Every ideology that causes us to stay away from God through doubts, complaint, enmity and low esteem is from Satan. So-called ‘New Age thinking,’ ‘evolutionary science,’ ‘post-modernism,’ ‘liberal theology,’ ‘sexuality liberation’ and ‘pantheistic ecumenism’ are some examples of Satan’s devices in his warfare against God.

2. Defense of Christian Ministry

The most fundamental relationship between a Christian pastor and his congregation is that of a shepherd and his flock of sheep. In verses 7~17 Paul writes of the authority he received from the Lord (v. 8) as that for edification of the church, that is, feeding and nourishing the flock, not for their hurt or exploitation. In John 10, our Lord spoke in great detail about this relationship by proclaiming He is the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep:

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. [John 10:14-15]

He warned, however, that there are thieves and wolves who do not come by way of Jesus:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. [John 10:1]

He also foretold the disciples about those in the ministry who work for money only or for their exploitation:

But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. [John 10:12]

A true pastor has the heart of Christ, the true shepherd who gave His own life for the flock of God’s people. Since the owner of the flock gives full authority of tending the sheep to a shepherd, he does not need to brag or commend himself to the flock that he has this authority. Paul’s authority as a pastor over the church was sometimes questioned [v. 7]. Paul did not believe he needed to be boastful of his ministry or the fruits from his pastoral labor [v. 15], but only glory in the Lord [v. 17].

Every Christian pastor needs constant examination of his motives as to whether his work is based on the love of Christ and the love of God’s flock as Jesus commanded His disciples. And every Christian should obey the meek and gentle acts of pastoral care from such a true shepherd so as to grow to the full maturity of Christ.

Discussion topics:

- 1. Discuss your relationship with your pastor. How does your pastor manifest the true shepherd-likeness?*
- 2. Discuss how a congregation could be a source of encouragements to the pastor rather than hindrances.*