

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 CORINTHIANS 10-11

Philip Pillsbury was a Yale graduate, a football player, and a tenor in the glee club. Born into a famous family, Pillsbury ended up Chairman of the Pillsbury Food Co.

But on the factory floor, no other executive was as respected as Philip Pillsbury. He started out as a simple miller - a laborer like everyone else in the plant.

And *his three missing fingertips were proof.*

Whenever an employee shook the boss' hand, it was a reminder that he was not above doing the same work he was asking them to do. Philip Pillsbury understood what it was like in the trenches. His workers loved him.

In a sense, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians are a handshake with Paul, *in which he shows-off his missing fingertips.* There were false teachers who had come to Corinth after Paul had left town. They were criticizing and questioning his stature as an apostle.

And Paul has been patient. In the first 9 chapters, he's explained his ministry - his *methods* and *motives*.

But now in Chapter 10, Paul takes the gloves off. He grows more aggressive and takes on his accusers.

Paul's call was legit! How dare these charlatans belittle God's work! Paul holds up his fingers - his scars and sacrifice - to prove the genuineness of his ministry!

In one way, the critics were correct - Paul wasn't physically impressive...he didn't have an overwhelming persona...he

wasn't Greece's greatest orator - yet God demonstrated His strength through Paul's weakness.

Paul's missing fingertips, so to speak, were God's opportunity to show Himself strong on Paul's behalf.

Chapter 10 begins, "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."

One of the errors the Corinthian Christians had made was to mistake "*meekness*" for *weakness*. Numbers 12:3 referred to Moses as "the meekest man in all the earth," and yet the mighty Moses was far from weak.

The Greek word translated "*meekness*" means "power under restraint." It was used for a wild stallion after it was broken. Meekness referred to the person who was submitted to the bit and bridle of God's will.

Paul had approached the Corinthians gently and meekly - but his enemies interpreted his *meekness* as *weakness*. They were saying, "He's kind because he has no clout. He's tender since he has no authority." They had mistaken his *humility* for a *lack of ability*.

The false teachers said Paul could write a mean letter, but in person he was timid. Take away his pen and he'll shrink in fear. Paul replies, verse 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."

Paul is saying, "If you want bold, I'll bring bold!" He tried to be nice in his first letter, but they took it the wrong way. If he has to be more direct; then so be it!

Recall Balaam beat his burro, but the problem wasn't his donkey. The animal swerved to dodge an angel in the path that Balaam couldn't see. God pitied the beast of burden and opened his mouth to rebuke Balaam.

"What have I done to you that you have struck me three times?" In short, *"who's the real jackass here?"*

As Christians, we are called to be beasts of burden. We're servants. We bear one another's burden - but that doesn't mean we should let folks mistreat us. Like Paul, there're times when we should defend ourselves.

Being used and abused are not synonymous.

Paul loved the Corinthians. He would lay down his life to serve them - but he wasn't going to remain silent while they verbally assaulted him and his ministry!

Verse 3, *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh."* Paul explains his ministry.

He didn't *"walk in the flesh"* or rely on human ingenuity. He never resorted to gadgets or gimmicks, or grunt that didn't rely on the power of God's Spirit.

He says in verse 4, *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God..."* Nations don't fight nuclear wars with conventional weapons. Neither do Christians fight spiritual battles with *fleshly* weapons.

Bright ideas, strenuous effort, human manipulations are no substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit.

A bank loan alleviates your cash flow crunch, but how will it corral the greed that caused your spending?

A nicotine patch helps with withdrawals, but does it supply the calm you need when you're stressed?

A cold shower will relieve some sexual tension, but how do you conquer the lust that churns in your heart?

A bottle of pills will get you to sleep at night, but will it resolve the guilty conscience that kept you awake?

Here's my point, human remedies may do some good - but **spiritual progress and permanent change is the result of the power and intervention of Jesus Christ.**

Paul tells us, **"the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.."**

Sin produces strongholds. Sin begins as a wrong choice that then becomes an infatuation - then a habit - then an addiction. **It slowly digs an inescapable rut.**

At first, sin enters our life at our invitation. But ultimately, it outlives its welcome, and **becomes extremely difficult to dislodge.** It turns into a **stronghold.**

And you can't conquer a stronghold with cleverness and manipulation. When a sin burrows itself deep into our psyche, it only gets uprooted from the inside out.

It takes spiritual power to bust up a sinful **stronghold.**

We need spiritual weapons like... *the truth of God's Word, the power of the Spirit, prayer, faith, love, the blood of Christ, the word of our testimony, the name of Jesus, fellowship with Christians, worship, wisdom...*

Paul tells us, **"casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God..."** Strongholds

take root and strengthen when we believe the lies of the devil - *when we buy into doubts about God and listen to arguments against God.*

This is why Paul advises us, “**bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...**” To level a stronghold you have to see yourself and life in Christ.

Here’s Paul’s strategy... *bag up your thoughts!* This is a battle that’s fought in your head. Take charge of every wandering thought and fickle emotion. Make every impulse harmonize with the truth that’s in Christ.

It’s like catching butterflies. Grab every thought and bring it under God’s will - in obedience to His Word. *Train your mind to obey not stray. **Mind your mind.***

And he says in verse 6, “**and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.**”

Paul had disciplined the Corinthians. Some had *repented*, others had *resented*... Here, Paul says once you re-ordered your thinking to obey Christ - and cultivate a *disciplined mind*. Once, you’re living a *disciplined life*, then God will use you to *disciple others*.

Paul continues, “**Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?**” The Corinthians were good at jumping to conclusions. They would size a person up before they heard his heart. *They did this to Paul.*

And we need to be careful lest we do this to others...

For years, people drove down McDaniels Bridge Road and threw beer bottles into our church yard.

Pastor Jeff was in charge of the grounds and was usually the guy who picked up the bottles. He'd collect the beer bottles and dump them in his office trash can.

One Sunday, an usher approached me and said we needed to talk. He whispered seriously, "*Pastor Jeff has a drinking problem. I'm finding beer bottles in his trash.*" Obviously, he'd jumped to a wrong conclusion. Which happens when you only examine appearances.

At least, our usher handled it appropriately. He came to the proper authority. He didn't gossip and spread false accusations... like the Corinthians did to Paul.

Paul writes, "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."

Some of the Corinthians doubted Paul's *salvation!*

Yet if Paul wasn't in Christ, neither were they... since they were saved through the gospel Paul preached.

Verse 8, "For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed - lest I seem to terrify you by letters."

The last thing Paul was into was self-promotion. But the Corinthians were forcing him to defend himself.

They accused Paul of writing intimidating letters.

Paul's ministry was never to *bully*, but to *build up*. Yet to continue to do so, he needs to silence his critics.

Verse 10, "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and

powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." In other words, he's mighty with the pen, but he's wimpy and tongue-tied in person.

There was some truth to this claim. A third century novel entitled, "*The Acts of Paul and Hecla*," gives an interesting physical description of the Apostle Paul...

"He was small in size with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel." In other words, you were impressed by his spiritual - not physical traits.

Other traditions say that Paul spoke with a lisp.

As far as Paul's physical features were concerned, he was less than impressive to *look at* or *listen to*.

And this was as far as the false teachers were able to discern. They noted his *physicality* - not *spirituality*.

I'll never forget the local radio station that refused to air our radio program, *Chapter-By-Chapter*. The station manager didn't like my voice. He said it wasn't, "radio quality." I didn't argue. It's probably not "*radio quality*."

I'm just thankful the quality of my voice didn't limit God. He's now used our program all over the world.

In essence, this is what the Corinthians were saying about Paul. His voice wasn't "*radio quality*." His content was OK, but he needed to work on his presentation.

The Corinthians liked pastors to be entertaining speakers - they fixated on celebrity pastors - those with an air of

success. To them, *slick was preferable to substance. It was flash over faith - style over truth.*

Warren Wiersbe tells of a pastor he heard speak who was eloquent but void of a biblical message. A friend next to him summed up the man's sermon with a verse - 1 Kings 19:11, "the LORD was not in the wind."

A sermon needs to be substantive, not just hot air.

Verse 11, "Let such a person 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." When Paul arrives in person, he'll show them how bold he can be!

After his appearance, they'll wish he'd sent a letter.

"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves."

One of the challenges with ministry is the difficulty we have in measuring our progress. It's not like a business where you just check sales or profit margin.

A pastor can faithfully sow the seed, but that's no guarantee of how fruitful he'll be. In Jesus' parable of the sower, he teaches us to expect a 25% success rate. Some of the seed never takes root - other seed is choked by the weeds - still some seed gets burned up by the sun... Only a quarter of the seed takes root.

If your business is widgets you can measure - *how many you make, and sale, and at what price...* There's a bottom line, but not so, in Christian ministry. That's why it's foolish for Paul to compare himself with others.

Verse 12, “But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” Comparison is foolish, but many Christians and pastors and churches succumb...

How many people did you have on Sunday? How big is your building? - or budget? - or staff? We compare against each other. According to Paul, this is "not wise!"

Remember, much of Christian ministry goes on below the surface - it can't be seen or measured.

A pastor can be faithful to disciple the 20 people God gives him - or he can be lethargic in a church of 2000! **It's faithfulness, not numbers, that constitute success.**

Verse 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.

God defines success not by the volume of ministry you do, but by how well you handle what you've been assigned. We all have a sphere in which we're to be faithful. And Paul's sphere included the Corinthians.

God would rather us all be thorough in what He gives us, than to expand our ministry and do it sloppily.

Paul writes, “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...”

Paul's goal was to be faithful in the scope of what God gave him. And despite what his opponents said that included Corinth. They were part of *Paul's parish!*

Verse 15, when Paul came to Corinth, he was “not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors...” Paul never took credit for what God did through someone else. Paul wasn't a glory grabber.

He pioneered unreached areas... but as soon as he was gone, these false teachers - *the Judaizers* - would enter in and takeover the churches the apostle started.

And this is how cults operate today. They don't target unreached people. They prey on new Christians, and spin deception on folks who aren't spiritually grounded.

“But having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.”

Paul was into planting new churches in new areas.

He was a pioneer. He went where no man dared to go before. Paul wanted the Corinthians to mature, so he could move on to plant new churches elsewhere.

Verse 17, “But he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” Here's a quote from Jeremiah 9:24... *glory not in wisdom, or might, or riches - but only in the Lord.*

Often, Christians assume *spiritual success* means *successful service*. **Spend more time and do more stuff** and God will be pleased, but not necessarily.

According to Jeremiah 9:24, *true success has more to do with knowing the Lord than serving the Lord.*

Recall, Martha served Jesus frantically while Mary sat at His feet and spent time in His presence. Jesus commended her,

"Mary has chosen that good part."

Chapter 10 closes, "For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."

Pastors can pat each other on the back - Christians pass out rewards - and boast of accomplishments - but all that matters is to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and hear, "Well done good and faithful servant."

In the final analysis, that alone will constitute true success in ministry. That's the ultimate measurement.

Chapter 11, "Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly and indeed you do bear with me." Realize, Paul's line of thinking from this point onward was foreign to him. He didn't usually talk about himself.

Usually, Paul shunned the spotlight. But here he turns it on himself. He's forced to defend his ministry.

Though necessary, Paul refers to it as "*a little folly.*"

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy." Paul wasn't jealous "of" the Corinthians. He was jealous "for" Jesus' sake. His Lord deserves a loyal bride.

What if you were the best man at your friend's wedding, and you saw the bride sneak off with another man. You'd hurt for your friend. You'd feel the betrayal.

This is how Paul felt when a Christian was disloyal to Jesus... "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Paul viewed himself as a father, the Corinthian believers as

a daughter, and Jesus as the bridegroom.

In his day, it was a dad's obligation to safeguard his daughter's purity until she was presented to the groom.

And it was Paul's job to *watch-over* the Corinthians, and *turn-them-over* to Jesus - pure and undefiled.

As your pastor, this is how I see my responsibility. I'm a spiritual dad over a large family. *I'm concerned if you stray.* This is why I so often take a protective posture.

Verse 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."

And Paul was right to worry - for Satan is skillful. Ephesians 6:11 warns us about "the wiles of the devil."

Recall, the serpent's ploy in the Garden of Eden?

He **doubted** God's Word, "Has God indeed said?" He **denied** His Word, "You will not surely die." He **distorted** God's Word, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil..." *but he painted it as a desirable state.*

Sadly, Eve swallowed the lie and ate the fruit, and we've all been suffering spiritual heartburn ever since.

Let's all stay true to the simplicity that is in Christ.

A wise, old pastor once gave some good advice to his young apprentice. He said, "Preach a full Gospel: Christ and nothing less. A plain Gospel: Christ and nothing more. A pure Gospel: Christ and nothing else."

"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!" Paul was worried about their lack of discernment.

They'd already revealed how gullible they were by putting up with the false teachers who'd lied about him.

"For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles." The false apostles in Corinth went by this title, "*most eminent apostle*" - or literally, "*super apostle*." Paul laughs - they have nothing on him. He was more of an apostle than any of them were...

For "Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge." How do you evaluate a pastor... *What gets said* is far more important than *how it's said*.

I've heard it put, "The test of a preacher is that his congregation goes away saying, not '*what a lovely sermon,*' but '*I will obey.*'" God could care less about sermons that *sound good* if they don't *do any good!*

"But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things." The Corinthians should've been ashamed for ever doubting Paul. He'd proven himself.

Verse 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?" While living in Corinth, Paul worked a secular job. The man made tents. He refused to draw a salary from the Corinthians lest anyone accuse him of only being in it for the money.

But instead of recognizing the integrity in this approach, the

false teachers were saying Paul didn't draw a salary because he didn't deserve one. He lacked the credentials of a true apostle and pastor.

Paul explains in verse 8, "I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you." He took finances that could've gone to other churches and used them to support his work among the Corinthians.

Verse 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." The churches of Berea, Philippi, Thessaloniki supported Paul while in Corinth.

His approach had been so noble. *How could the Corinthians have turned on him, and doubted him?*

I wonder about this today. I know pastors who love God and their congregation - and they make personal sacrifices to serve - *yet struggle to make ends meet.*

Whereas, other pastors dominate and manipulate people and use them for their own ends. Yet the church treats them like royalty. *The pompous preacher* is loved more than *the man of God*. It's a tragedy!

This is what happened in Jeremiah's day. **Jeremiah 5:31** reads, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so." It's sad, but *fleshly people* like *fleshly, flashy, forceful preachers*. They don't like men who remind them to *walk humbly and serve sacrificially*.

Paul tells us in verse 10, “As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!” This is why Paul feels compelled to prove himself to this church - because he loves them deeply.

“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.” Paul will boast and defend himself, to silence the accusations of his critics.

Verse 13, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. The false teachers called themselves “super apostles” - in reality they were only *“pseudo apostles.”*”

They were bogus. They majored in deceit!

Paul says it shouldn't surprise the Corinthians to see Christianity feigned. He explains why, “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.” Jesus referred to Satan as “a wolf in sheep's clothing” - and here, Paul calls him *“an angel of light.”*

Shakespeare put it, “The devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape.” Satan is a master of disguise.

He goes by a million aliases - he has a zillion fake IDs and phony passports... he hates to be identified.

Don't expect Satan to appear in red leotards, and horns, and a pointed tail - carrying a pitchfork. Satan is too

sophisticated to come at you as you would expect.

The element of surprise is his most effective weapon.

Expect the enemy to attack wearing a short skirt and low-cut blouse... Or as a father-figure, an old guy, you think you can trust... Or he's the so-called friend who tells you he has the stuff that'll help you kick your depression. Just take it and your problems are gone!...

Expect Satan to offer you a deal so sweet, you'll almost miss *the fine print* and overlook *the one catch*.

Is it any wonder that **alcohol** has the cleverest commercials? I wish for once they showed you the truth - **a more truthful commercial would look like this****

(VIDEO CLIP)

Paul concludes his caution on appearance.

Verse 15, “Therefore it is no great thing if his (Satan’s) ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” If Satan can appear as “*an angel of light*,” his demons can appear with “*reverend*” attached to their name. **Beware of bogus pastors.**

Verse 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. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.” Again, for the sake of his defense, Paul is indulging in a practice foreign to him - he’s boasting.

Verse 18, “Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.” He's stooping to the level of the Corinthians - engaging in terms they can understand.

Read the next statement with sarcasm, “For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! 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.” The Corinthians tolerated the exploitive practices of the false apostles.

They allowed themselves to be *entrapped by legalism, taken advantage of financially, intimidated socially, and they even succumbed to physical abuse.*

Why would anyone put up with such shenanigans in the name of God. Paul is amazed at how *gullible* the Corinthians were - and he’s angry at the *diabolical* men who were passing themselves off as apostles of Christ.

Verse 21, “To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that!” Again notice his sarcasm. His critics had accused him of being weak. He’s saying, “Yes, I’m glad I’m too weak to abuse people like the false apostles.”

“But in whatever anyone is bold - I speak foolishly - I am bold also.” Paul will match credentials with anyone.

These false apostles have nothing on him, “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.” Despite what they claimed to be Paul matched their qualifications.

Paul's love for the Corinthians reminds me of a man who asked his wife, “Honey, did you ever love anyone before me?” His wife thought a bit, and then replied...

“No, darling. I once respected a man for his great

intelligence. I admired another man for his remarkable courage. And I was captivated by yet by another man for his good looks and charm... But with you, darling, well how else could I explain it, except love?"

What motivated Paul to love the foolish and fickle Corinthians could only have been the love of God.

Paul has reminded the church of **his jealousy toward them, his generosity to them** - now he grows even bolder - he innumerates **his sufferings for them**, all he went through to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles!

Verse 23, "Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool... (again, Paul doesn't like to have to boast.)

"Are they ministers of Christ? I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often..." And in the next few verses, Paul is going to hold up **his missing fingertips.**

He reveals an amazing list of sufferings - *many of which go unmentioned in the book of Acts.* All we know about some of these episodes we learn from this list.

Verse 24, "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods..." **Only one** such beating is recorded - in Acts 16.

"Once I was stoned..." This is mentioned in Acts 14, and again in Galatians 6:17. Paul was left for dead.

"Three times I was shipwrecked..." **Only one** shipwreck is mentioned in the NT - in Acts 27.

"A night and a day I have been in the deep; 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...”

This was the result of *persecution from the enemy*.

But he also suffered from the *execution of his ministry*... “in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...” He endured it all to get them the Gospel.

And to top it off - the icing on the cake that was Paul’s ministry, verse 28, “besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” And this may’ve been Paul’s most relentless stress. It was a concern he carried daily.

In all his waking moments, the health of the churches weighed on his mind and heart. All other issues were secondary to what he calls “*my deep concern.*”

And as a pastor, here’s where I know a little of Paul’s heart. Even on my day off - *I’m not off* - I’m still thinking of you and all the folks who constitute this church.

It too, is “*my deep concern.*”

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

Paul got emotional when he heard of a believer who was taken advantage of or wounded in some way.

“If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.” Here’s the sure-fire proof of his apostleship...he doesn’t count numbers of souls saved or churches started.

He points to his sufferings. It's not being a **star**, but his **scars** that prove his legitimacy.

Verse 31, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands." Paul has been boasting - so what experience does he use to illustrate the pinnacle of success? *How does he want to top-off his resume'?*

Preaching in Athens? Church planting in Asia?

Well, how about a sneaky exit from Damascus? He was lowered from the wall like a baby in a basket... not exactly a flattering picture for a promotional packet.

Here's Paul's point, the false teachers said they were chosen because of their exceptionalness. *Paul said the opposite, he was nothing special, yet God used him!*

What kind of leader would you want to follow... A guy full of pride, or a guy dependent on God's grace?

Would you rather follow an Ivy League, prima donna aristocrat, or a fellow worker with missing fingertips?