

PRODIGAL

CHURCH II

A SERIES IN 2 CORINTHIANS



PRODIGAL CHURCH (SEASON 2) – SUBMIT EVERY THOUGHT TO CHRIST

Sermon Study Guide 2 Corinthians 10 — Week of November 28, 2021

BIG IDEA

When false ideologies enter the church, Christians must directly, courageously, and ferociously fight lies with God's truth. The most sinister lies come from confessing Christians, who come as wolves in sheep's clothing. Therefore, every believer must take every thought captive to obey Christ.

CONTEXT

There is a tone change in chapter 10. Paul is switching gears from the last two chapters' discussion regarding the collection of donations for the Jerusalem church, to addressing something he has been saving for the end: speaking directly to the false teachers who have infiltrated the young church plant. False teachers had entered the church under the guise of mature, seasoned believers, but in reality, they brought a critical spirit, undermining Paul's authority, questioning his doctrine, and mocking his approach to ministry. Their most menacing power play is to undermine the authority of Paul as an apostle, and supplant his influence with their own. Paul didn't make himself an Apostle, Jesus did. By undermining Paul as an Apostle, the false teachers are undermining Jesus as King.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our 2021 Mosaic Members' Christmas Celebration is this Saturday, December 4 at 6pm. Please check your email to RSVP and to signup to volunteer if you can help with preparations, setup, and/or teardown.

2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Paul recognizes the threat to Gospel ministry everywhere, and he responds with an elaborate comparison of his ministry with the fake-apostles who had arrogantly trespassed into the church the Apostle had planted.

2 Corinthian 10:1 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—

Commentary: The false teachers had been circulating the criticism: Paul is only "bold" when away. He's only "bold" in his letters, they said.

But when he's here, he's afraid to speak directly, with the same weighty authority. Paul responds by reminding everyone that meekness and gentleness was the way of Jesus Christ Himself. In the ancient world of Paul's day, humility was regarded not as a virtue, but as weakness. Kind of like today. Can you name one humble politician? Paul was a deeply humble servant of God, drawing confidence only from the Lord, the Lord's call, and the Lord's divine power at work through him.

Lesson: Meekness isn't weakness, it's strength in submission to Christ. You can be humble, meek, gentle, and bold, all that the same time, like Jesus Christ.

Cross references:

- Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
- Philippians 2:7-8 ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

2 Corinthian 10:2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

Commentary: I'm always ready to come with boldness, but I'd prefer not to. "I beg you" = please don't make me come with boldness. Please put your lives and the church in order, in absolute submission to Christ. But if the false teachers continue accusing me of walking according to the flesh, I'll come at them with Spirit-filled power and boldness.

Lesson: The more you submit your life to Christ, the less energy your spiritual leaders need to invest in leading you to follow Christ, and the more energy we can focus together to reach the unsaved.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 13:2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them—
- 2 Corinthians 13:10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.
- 1 Corinthians 4:18 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.
- 1 Corinthians 4:21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?
- 2 Corinthians 10:6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 Corinthian 10:3-4 ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Commentary: "Flesh" is an important theological term. To live according to the flesh, is to live according to the sinful nature, and its sinful principles and destructive power. To live according to the flesh is to live in rebellion to God. Paul doesn't live a rebellious life (according to the flesh), but a life of absolute submission to God. Paul could not effectively destroy demonic strongholds if he had used weapons of the flesh. His weapons of warfare have divine power because they aren't his.

Yes, Paul has sinful flesh just like every human does. However, he doesn't wage war according to the flesh. So, from the outside, he just looks like a regular guy. Because he looks so ordinary, it's hard for some people to receive his words as having apostolic authority. So, when he writes a Spirit-filled letter, the words seem to be more powerful than when he speaks them in person, partially because he communicates with such depth, it takes time, energy, humility, prayer, and meditation to understand and receive.

Lesson: The only way to win spiritual battles is by waging war with spiritual weapons: prayer, faith, Holy Scriptures, Holy Spirit.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 6:7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;
- Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.
1 Corinthians 9:7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?
- 2 Corinthians 13:3-4 ³since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.
- 1 Corinthians 2:5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
- Jeremiah 1:10 See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

2 Corinthian 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Commentary: what are the strongholds that Paul is destroying? What are the strongholds we are called to destroy with divine power? "Strongholds" references the central arguments of an opposing message. Any argument, any idea, and lofty opinion, any worldview, any ideology, any philosophy, any thought that is raised against God and obfuscate knowledge of God. These thoughts take people captive. So, to help set the captives free, we must first take rebellious thoughts captive. We must first submit every thought to perfect obedience to Christ. To do this, we must know the Word of God inside and out, and wield the Holy Sword of God's Word against demonic ideas. Ideas are not neutral. They are either completely truth, therefore from God, or partially false, therefore from Satan. Don't judge Holy Scripture from the perspective of any other ideology. Judge every ideology from the perspective of Holy Scripture. We aren't called to just "win arguments." We're called to destroy any ideas opposing Christ.

Lesson: Start with yourself: take every single thought you think captive to obey Christ.

Cross references:

- 1 John 4:1-6 ¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ⁴Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
- Isaiah 2:11-12 ¹¹The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. ¹²For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low;

- 2 Corinthians 9:13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,
 - Romans 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
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2 Corinthian 10:6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Commentary: There are two groups in the church: those loyal to Paul and those who have been swayed by the false teachers. Thanks to Titus' report, Paul is confident that the church is ready to obey the Lord completely, and reject the wolves in sheep clothing.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 10:2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.
 - 2 Corinthians 2:9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.
 - 2 Corinthians 7:15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.
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2 Corinthian 10:7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

Commentary: Look at all the data. Stop thinking so superficially. Stop judging a book by its cover. Stop judging people based on man-made categories (like looks, skin color, ethnicity, background). If you are in Christ, and confident about it, pray to the Lord. Let the Lord reveal to you, Paul belongs to Christ just as much as you do. Paul is a Christian too. Paul needs Jesus too. Paul isn't Jesus, he belongs to Jesus.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 5:12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.
 - John 7:24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."
 - 1 Corinthians 1:12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."
 - 1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.
 - 1 John 4:6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
 - 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.
 - 2 Corinthians 11:23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
 - 1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?
 - Galatians 1:12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
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2 Corinthian 10:8-9 ⁸ For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. ⁹ I do not want to appear to be

frightening you with my letters.

Commentary: Our authority is not our own, the Lord gave it to us. So, when I speak of my authority, Paul says, I'm not boasting in myself, I'm boasting in the Lord and His grace to me. The Lord entrusts Paul with Apostolic authority for a particular purpose: build people up. Build their faith, knowledge, love, service. Build their souls, hearts, minds, strength. Build their relationships. Build their families. Build their lives. The false-apostles on the other hand, are destroying you. Look what they've done with the church: defiance, division, destruction. Judge them according to their fruit: what have they built? Oh, nothing? They've only come to criticize what someone else built? Red flags. Paul calls them "super-apostles." Haha savage

Lesson: Do you use the authority God has given you to build up those under your authority?

2 Corinthians 11:5 Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 13:10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.
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2 Corinthian 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."

Commentary: Paul is very in tune with the accusations of his critics. What does "bodily presence" have to do with anything when I'm talking to your soul? Focus on the words. Yes, they are weighty and strong, because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. When I'm in your presence, says Paul, please look past the bodily presence. Look past the speech. Focus on the words, the ideas, the truth.

Lesson: Learn to look past outward appearance, and look into the heart of a person, just like God does.

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 11:21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.
 - 2 Corinthians 12:7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
 - 1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.
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2 Corinthian 10:11-12 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

Commentary: Paul is a man of integrity, the same man of God when absent and when present. In verse 12, Paul is using sarcasm, which is a powerful technique to communicate the obvious. Oh no, I wouldn't dare to compare myself to the "super-apostles" who draw their authority from themselves and from other people. Self-commendation is self-condemnation. Self-praise is dispraise. Their self-commendation is proof they don't really understand the Gospel. When you truly understand the Gospel, you start saying things like: "I am the chief of sinners. I am a slave of God. I'm a soldier in the army of King Jesus."

Lesson: Stop asking: "what do people think of me?" Start asking: "what does God think of me?" Does God commend my life?

Cross references:

- 1 Corinthians 2:13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.
 - 2 Corinthians 10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?
 - 2 Corinthians 12:6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.
 - Proverbs 27:2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.
 - Proverbs 26:12 Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
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2 Corinthian 10:13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you.

Commentary: God assigns influence to each one of us. Influence is the capacity to effect change in a person's life. Whom has God placed under your influence? Are you using your influence to build up? If God has entrusted influence to you over someone, it's not yours, it's God's. Therefore, you can boast about the influence God has entrusted to you; but not beyond limits. Also, be careful whom you allow to influence you. Are they influencing you to grow in your faith, submission, obedience to Jesus Christ? If not, why are you listening to them?

Lesson: God has assigned an area of influence to you. What is it? Are you stewarding your influence well?

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 10:15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged,
 - Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
 - Romans 15:20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,
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2 Corinthian 10:14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.

Commentary: Dear Corinthian church, please don't forget that we led you to Christ. We were the first ones to come "all the way to you" with the Gospel of Christ. It was us, not the false teachers.

Cross references:

- 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

- 1 Corinthians 4:15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
- 1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

2 Corinthian 10:15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged,

Commentary: We were not the only ones God used to grow your faith, but we were certainly part of the process. Paul hopes that the faith of the Corinthian believers grows. As their faith grows, the influence of Spirit filled ministers will grow as well. There is nothing wrong with aspiring to grow in both faith and influence. Christian, are you growing in your ambition to grow your faith and your influence, so you can help others grow in their faith in Christ?

Lesson: Spiritual influence grows to the degree that you help people grow in their faith.

Cross references:

- 2 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.
- Acts 5:13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.

2 Corinthian 10:16-17 ¹⁶so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. ¹⁷"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Commentary: We know from Romans 15:24-28, Paul had the ambition to take the Gospel west, all the way to Spain.

Romans 15:24-28 ²⁴I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

Historically, it appears Paul did in fact make it that far, because Clement of Rome, writing at the end of the first century, claims Paul traveled to the furthest limit of the West, which is how people referred to Spain in those days.

Cross references:

- 1 Corinthians 1:31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."
- Jeremiah 9:23-24 ²³Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

2 Corinthian 10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Commentary: The only approval and commendation that matters is the Lord's. We should aspire to

bring every aspect of lives into submission to Christ so that we one day will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 10:12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.
 - Romans 2:29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
 - 1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read 2 Corinthians 10.

1. Pastor Jan meditated upon how Christians should channel the new courage, boldness and power that they receive through saving faith in Jesus Christ for much of the sermon. What thoughts and reflections about Christian courage, boldness and power stuck out to you?
2. Did the sermon convict you of the need to speak Biblical truth more boldly to yourself in any ways or areas?
3. Did the sermon convict you of the need to share the gospel more boldly with any family members or neighbors in your life? What are you going to do this week to start acting on these thoughts?
4. What are some notable ways that Jesus Christ exhibited boldness before his followers and critics during his time on earth?
5. What is the association between (1) leading a bold Christian life and (2) practicing generous hospitality in life?
6. **Read verses 4-6.** Are you doing anything regularly in order to build a skillset that will help you dismantle satanic “strongholds” in your own heart, your household, neighborhood, workplace, or school? What is your daily/weekly approach?
7. Did the sermon convict you of any changes that you need to make in the way that you prepare your heart for Sunday worship or engage in Sunday worship?
8. In the text, Paul meditates much upon the relationship of the congregation with him, their leader. Does the text or sermon provide any insight that helps grow your understanding for how to engage with pastoral authority or authority in general?
9. What kind of interaction is Paul hoping to have with the church by sending these instructions ahead of his next visit? How does reflecting upon this help grow your expectations for an ideal church gathering or cultural dynamic?