

The Minister's Posture: Eager for Peace, Ready for Battle

2 Corinthians 10:1-2

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Introduction

Well we come once again this morning to our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. And, having concluded our study of chapters 8 and 9 before the holiday break, this morning we begin the third and final main section of the letter: chapters 10 to 13. So open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Both this morning and next Sunday, our focus will be on the first six verses of 2 Corinthians 10. Though we won't get past the first two verses today, I want to read all six at the outset. 2 Corinthians 10, verses 1 to 6: "Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! ²I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."

Now, in coming to this text, we come as I said to a new major section in 2 Corinthians. And when that's the case, I think it's helpful for us to zoom out and be reminded of the big picture of the book—both of the content of the letter, as well as our major purpose in studying the letter. We began studying 2 Corinthians because I wanted to guide GraceLife into an extended study of Christian ministry. You see, we are a well-taught group. If GraceLife was asked to sit down and take an exam on Bible knowledge or on Christian doctrine, I'm confident that our scores would be higher than most churches in our community, and even in our nation. And it is a privilege to have been so well-taught—to be the beneficiaries of sound, faithful, biblical preaching and shepherding for nearly 50 years. And we thank the Lord for our pastor and the way that he has been used in our church.

But one of the great dangers of being so well-taught is that it's easy for our heads to outrun our hearts. With so many so-called "churches" and "ministries" who are biblically illiterate, and teach unsound, unbiblical doctrine, and who conduct their ministry in ways that are foreign to Scripture, it's easy for us to think that Christian maturity is simply knowing and proclaiming and defending the truth in the midst of falsehood. And maturity certainly is not less than that! But if we're not careful, we can forget that biblical preaching and sound doctrine exist in the service of the practical application of the truth in our own lives. Spiritual maturity is not merely knowing

truth, or confessing truth, but practicing the truth that we know and confess in our daily lives. And the truth that we have been taught so well is practiced in the sphere of our ministry one to another.

And so all throughout this series on 2 Corinthians, I have emphasized and insisted that we have all been called to Christian ministry. Ministry is not just for pastors and missionaries and seminary students and Christian educators. Every member of the body of Christ has been called to ministry in the body of Christ. We've seen that established from 2 Corinthians itself. In chapter 3 verse 6, Paul calls us ministers of a new covenant. That is to say, if you have become a partaker of the New Covenant in Christ, you are a minister of that New Covenant on behalf of Christ. In chapter 5 verses 18 to 20, Paul says that we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Which is to say, if you have been reconciled to God through the work of Christ, you have been called to minister that reconciliation to those who yet remain God's enemies through the preaching of the Gospel.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the Apostle Peter identifies the church as a royal priesthood—a kingdom of priests. Well what do priests do? They minister and mediate the blessings of God to those whom they serve. And Peter says every believer is such a priest, who ministers the blessings of God both by speaking the Gospel to the unbelieving world, and by serving our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. And in Ephesians 4:11 and 12, Paul says that Christ has given the church pastors and teachers—not to do all the ministry of the church! But He has given pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, unto the building up—the edification—of the body of Christ. Pastors and teachers and other vocational ministers are given to the church in order to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. The task of ministry to one another in the body of Christ falls to each and every one of you.

And that doesn't mean that you find some administrative role somewhere and count your job done. It doesn't mean that you bring food to fellowship events, and that's the way you serve, so "Leave me alone!" It doesn't mean that you email your Bible study's prayer requests out to the members of the study, and "That's it. Don't bother *me*; I serve the church!" No! Those tasks are important, and if you serve in those ways: thank you for serving the body. But most fundamentally, this kind of ministry to one another consists in being in one another's lives, in meeting practical needs, in asking one another the difficult questions and holding each other accountable to the standards of Scripture. It means laboring alongside one another in sanctification—strengthening each other's hands in the fight against sin and in the pursuit of holiness. And all of that means making time for one another! I know life is busy. I know the week is long. I know there are other commitments you have to keep. But friends, if you're serious about your relationship with Christ—if you're serious about being faithful to the ministry that Christ has called you to—you'll be in a Bible study, you'll be in each other's lives and in

each other's houses, you'll know one another's families, and you'll be spurring one another on to love and to good deeds.

It has been my goal to expose you to the reality of this ministry to which you've been called, and to press the responsibilities that that ministry brings upon your consciences. And to do that, I chose to preach through 2 Corinthians, because the overarching theme of this letter is joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction, displayed especially in the model of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, and his conflicts with the Corinthian church. After planting that church on his second missionary journey, and after corresponding with them by letter on several occasions, addressing various issues of ministry—ranging from disunity to immorality, from marriage to spiritual gifts—the Corinthian church had been infiltrated by false teachers from Jerusalem claiming to be apostles of Christ. And these men knew that if they were going to make room for their teaching, they were going to have to discredit Paul's teaching. But because you can't discredit the truth, they set their sights on Paul. If you can't undermine the message, do your best to undermine the messenger.

And so these men launched a full-scale assault on Paul's character. They began cooking up every accusation they could think of in order to sow seeds of doubt about Paul in the minds of the Corinthians. They accused him of harboring secret sin; they accused him of embezzling the money he collected as church offerings; they accused him of lacking true apostolic credentials since he wasn't an original apostle from the original Jerusalem church. He wasn't a skilled communicator, he didn't attract a large enough following, and his life was marked by far too much suffering for anyone to think that he had been sealed with Christ's divine blessing.

And sadly enough, it worked. The Corinthians began to doubt Paul's integrity and the legitimacy of his apostleship. And once you start questioning whether Paul's ministry was approved by Christ, you start to question whether the Gospel that he preached was true. And when you start to doubt the truth of the Gospel, your soul is in grave spiritual danger. So Paul attempted to put things to rights by making an ahead-of-schedule visit to Corinth. But when he got there, an influential man in the church sided with the false apostles and openly insulted Paul before the entire congregation. And instead of defending Paul's character and the Gospel he preached to them, the Corinthians allowed this man's factiousness to go unchecked.

After this what-he-calls "sorrowful visit," Paul wrote the Corinthians a severe letter, sternly rebuking them for failing to properly deal with sin in the church, and for straying from his apostolic teaching and message. He sent Titus to bring the letter to Corinth, and then arranged to meet Titus to hear how the Corinthians responded. And we hear about that report in chapter 7, and learn that God had sovereignly worked through Paul's severe letter, and through Titus's peacemaking ministry, so that the majority of the Corinthians repented of their sin and reaffirmed their love and loyalty to Paul.

Now, as Paul is writing Second Corinthians, he writes out of a concern for the ongoing spiritual health of the Corinthians and out of a desire to defend the Gospel. And so this letter aims to be a decisive refutation of the false teachers' accusations and a full vindication of his apostolic authority and ministry. In the first major section of the book—in chapters 1 to 7—Paul writes to explain his past conduct, including his decision to change plans and visit the Corinthians ahead of schedule. But in the process, from chapter 2 verse 14 all the way to chapter 7 verse 4, he launches into an extended definition and defense of New Covenant Gospel ministry. And it's as we've studied Paul's exposition of New Covenant Gospel ministry that we've learned countless lessons concerning our own ministry as ministers of the New Covenant—both to the lost who need the Savior and to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

Well then, having learned of the majority of the Corinthians' repentance, and that his relationship with the church had been restored, in chapters 8 and 9 he brings up the matter of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. They had begun this collection about a year prior, before everything was stalled by the conflicts surrounding the false apostles, and now Paul writes to exhort them to bring that effort to completion. And that is because, he also informs them, he's going to be sending Titus and two other brothers back to Corinth ahead of him, to ensure that everything is prepared for when he comes.

And with the instruction for the offering now in the rear-view mirror, Paul comes to the third and final major section in his letter, in chapters 10 to 13, in which he aims to prepare the church for his own arrival in Corinth, which is soon to come. And one thing that you'll notice about chapters 10 to 13 is the drastic change in tone in comparison to the first nine chapters. This section is decidedly more serrated, more intense, more sarcastic, and more polemical than the previous chapters have been. And that's puzzling at first, because he's received the report from Titus that there has been wide-ranging repentance, so much that he can say in chapter 7 that he has great confidence in them, that he is filled with comfort and is overflowing with joy!

But Paul is a wise pastor. And while he knows that God had indeed worked genuine repentance in the majority of the church, he's not naïve enough to think that any and all opposition has been entirely eradicated by a sternly-worded letter and a visit from an associate pastor. False teachers do not give up that easily, and those duped by their deceptions are not so easily rescued. Though there had been large-scale repentance, there was still an unrepentant minority in the Corinthian congregation who, though perhaps driven underground by what they hoped was a temporary defeat, were hoping to bide their time and rekindle their rebellion when the time was right.

And so while in the first nine chapters Paul was for the most part addressing the repentant majority, here in chapters 10 to 13 he turns to address that small pocket of unrepentant, recalcitrant rebels. He warns them that he *is* coming to them again soon, and that when he comes

he will be ready to deal severely with those who stubbornly persist in their rebellion. In chapter 13 verse 2 he says, “I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone.” But he also makes it clear that he doesn’t relish that scenario. He has no desire to enact discipline on those whom he considers to be his beloved spiritual children, but he will do what he has to do to preserve the purity and integrity of the Gospel and the Church of Christ. And so he says, sort of as a summary of the entire section, in chapter 13 verse 10: “For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

Now, you have to understand that a key aspect of the false teaching that the Corinthians had been duped by was this concept of *triumphalism*. Jesus was a conqueror of sin and death, the believer is said to have overcome the world through Him, and so suffering and weakness and affliction in ministry were sure signs that one was under the judgment of God, or at least not walking in the “victory” that was available in Christ. This gave birth to a sort of “ministerial success syndrome.” The mark of God’s blessing upon a minister of the Gospel was *outward success*: an imposing presence, rhetorical eloquence, a large following, financial success, and ostentatious displays of spiritual power.

But Christianity is not a religion of worldly triumph. There is massive triumph in the Christian life—triumph over sin, over the flesh, and over Satan. And there will be triumph over all things in this world—both physical and spiritual! But that triumph awaits the return of Christ and the full realization of His eschatological kingdom. Jesus Himself teaches us that the *cross* precedes the *crown*. And so the Christian ministry is not made up of the high-powered, put-together, well-respected, perfectly-polished, cultural elite! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:13 that we are the scum of the world, the dregs of all things! He says in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that we’re just earthen vessels—just clay pots. Why? “So that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God, and not from ourselves.” And if God can be shown to be powerful against the backdrop of human weakness, Paul says in chapter 12 verses 9 and 10, that’s a reason for rejoicing in weaknesses.

And so Paul was none of the things that the false apostles had convinced the Corinthians you had to be if you were a successful Christian minister, blessed and approved by God. In fact, in chapter 10 verse 10, Paul cites one of their accusations. He says there, “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’” “Sure, he talks a big game—when he’s writing letters from thousands of miles away! But then he shows up in person and he’s just no big deal. He’s not much to look at. He’s not all that great of a speaker. He doesn’t have any of the outward marks of the high-powered, triumphalistic, super-spiritual celebrity pastors! There’s no way such an unimpressive man could be a genuine apostle of Christ!”

He gives us another glimpse into this accusation in verse 1, when he speaks sarcastically of himself. He says, “I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!” So the charge was that Paul was two-faced! “You know, this Paul is a real piece of work! He writes these letters, like 1 Corinthians, where he calls you spiritually immature (3:1) and fleshly (3:3), where he threatens to come with a rod of discipline (4:21). He writes the severe letter, sternly-worded and insisting that certain people must be put out of the church! But then when he shows up in person, he’s this sheepish, mild, timid, weepy fellow who can’t even stand up to the guy who’s disagreeing with him! It’s plain what you have, here! He’s a big talker—when he’s a safe distance away! But in person, when it’s time to put up or shut up, he tucks his tail between his legs and goes and cowers in the corner, all weak and wimpy and teary-eyed!”

Now, Paul himself had explained these things. He did say, in 1 Corinthians 2:3, that when he was with the Corinthians previously, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” But that was because Paul *was* a genuinely humble man, who recognized the awesome weightiness of his calling as a minister of the Gospel. Besides, he kept his ministry simple and centered on the cross of Christ, without displays of fleshly ostentation, 1 Corinthians 2:5: “so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” In 2 Corinthians 2:4, he explains that he wrote severely in his letter precisely because he loved them and cared for them enough to bring correction to them. He says, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.” But it didn’t matter. The false teachers were intent upon casting his humility and genuine tenderness as cowardly weakness. He was like a little dog who barks loudly only from a safe distance, but cravenly runs for cover whenever confronted up close.

Now, in these opening six verses of chapter 10, and really throughout the entirety of chapter 10, Paul responds to these accusations, and demonstrates that his authority as an apostle *is* genuinely granted by and approved by the Lord Jesus Christ. And the way he responds to these accusations provides a lesson for all of us as we seek to carry out our ministry to one another. If we’re faithful to be engaging in the ministry to which we’re called—laboring alongside one another in the fight against sin and in the fight for holiness—we are going to face conflict. We are going to need to exercise compassion, and we’re going to need to seek to bring correction. Observing Paul’s response to the accusations against him teaches us about what our **posture** is to be in the face of the conflicts of ministry.

And in the first two verses of chapter 10, we learn that that **posture** is twofold. The faithful New Covenant minister of the Gospel must be **eager for peace**, but **ready for battle**.

1. Eager for Peace (v. 1)

In the first place, then, the faithful minister must be **eager for peace**. And we see this primarily in verse 1. Paul says, “Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!”

Now, Paul begins this crucial section of his letter—one in which he is going to say some very difficult things for very foundational reasons—with the phrase, “Now I, Paul, myself.” This indicates that Paul is personally invested in what it is he’s about to say. He’s about to discuss something of critical importance to his heart. Though he may be separated from the Corinthians by a distance, his heart is not far from them. He is deeply concerned about their spiritual state, recognizing the threat the false apostles pose to the Corinthians’ souls. Their rejection of him as the Lord’s apostle would entail their rejection of his message as the Lord’s Gospel. As a genuine minister of Christ, Paul’s ministry was so bound together to the Gospel of Christ that to speak of one was to speak of the other. And he recognizes that this is a crucial juncture in the life of the Corinthian church. Either they were going to go down the road of heresy, apostasy, and false doctrine, or they were going to repent and return to the true Gospel from the Lord’s true apostle. And so this is a deeply personal cry of Paul’s heart.

We see something similar in the book of Galatians. All throughout that letter he had been taking aim at the Gospel-corrupting heresy of the Judaizers. And when he comes to chapter 5, he speaks in language more severe than anywhere else in all of his letters. He says in verse 10 that the one who is disturbing them will bear his judgment, which is virtually consigning that false teacher to hell itself. And then in verse 12 he says, “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves,” or literally, *emasculate* themselves. “If circumcision makes you righteous, why not go further and really attain righteousness?” It’s just searing sarcasm. Well, just ahead of these severe rebukes, Paul says in Galatians 5:2, “Behold I, Paul, say to you.” Very similar to our passage in 2 Corinthians. When Paul discerns that the spiritual welfare of his dear spiritual children is being threatened, his loving concern for them drives him to speak with the utmost severity against those who are troubling them. This is personal for him. These are his children, as far as he’s concerned. And so we see this deeply personal introduction that arrests our attention and clearly displays Paul’s genuine affection and personal investment.

And he says, “Now I, Paul, myself *urge* you.” And the word “urge” translates the popular Greek word *parakaleō*, a word that Paul has used numerous times in this epistle. It can be used in a number of senses, such as “to comfort,” “to encourage,” and “to help,” but in this context it has the connotation of appeal and entreaty. “Now I, Paul, myself *appeal* to you.” “I *entreat* you.” And in framing his comments this way, he implicitly demonstrates that the charges leveled against him are false. Here he is, writing one of his letters—and even though he will have some difficult things to say, he introduces them all not by ordering them with apostolic commands, but by tenderly and earnestly appealing to them, entreating them. “Please don’t persevere in this rebellion. Please be reconciled to the truth.”

And he appeals to them “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” The term “meekness” is the Greek word *πραΐτης*. And it’s one of those words that the commentators and dictionaries have a lot of glosses for. One commentator glosses it as considerateness, unassumingness, patient submissiveness, and free from contentiousness and aggression (Harris, 667). Another says it is opposed to roughness and severity, a calm and soothing disposition, in contrast to rage, wrath, or vengeance (Guthrie, 467). Pastor John writes that this term denotes “the humble and gentle attitude that results in the patient endurance of offenses. [It] marks those free of anger, hatred, bitterness, and a desire for revenge. The word denotes not weakness, but power under control” (324). And that last sentence is absolutely key for this discussion, because that is precisely what the false teachers had claimed, and the Corinthians had believed, was the case. They had mistook Paul’s meekness for weakness, and despised him for it.

The term that gets translated “gentleness” is the word *epieikeia*, which also has a paragraph full of synonyms in the dictionaries and commentaries. One scholar lists the following: kindness, considerateness, magnanimity, reasonableness, fairness, forbearance, yieldingness, moderation, gentleness, clemency, consideration, patience, self-forgetfulness, great-heartedness, and selflessness (Harris, 667). It’s one of those terms that is impossible to capture in translation, but I think it’s best understood as that quality which causes someone who is entitled to something to graciously refuse to insist on what is due to them. The concepts of reasonable flexibility, temperate gentleness, patient forbearance, humble surrender, and happy contentment are all at play.

You say, “Mike, those are a lot of words and concepts. Can you give us a concrete example?” Well, yes I can—especially because Paul does! He himself points to the embodiment of these character traits of meekness and gentleness, when he says, “Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” The Lord Jesus Christ was the premier example of meekness—of strength under control. You could say that His meekness was infinite, because it takes infinite discipline and humility to control infinite power. Here was God Himself, upholding the universe by the word of His power, nevertheless concealing His power beneath the veil of His humanity, and submitting to all the limitations of life as a human being (though without sin). Here is the source of all strength wearied by a day’s journey; the bread of life hungry; the fountain of living waters thirsty. He is fully aware of Judas’s treachery, and yet when He is betrayed with a kiss, what does He say to Judas? “*Friend*, do what you have come for” (Matt 26:50). And when Peter decides that he’s not going down without a fight, and draws his sword and slices off the ear of Malchus the slave of the high priest, Jesus immediately rebukes him and says, “Don’t you realize that I have *twelve legions* of angels at my disposal?” That is meekness. That is power under control.

That interaction had made an impression on Peter, because years later he would write of the Lord's suffering in 1 Peter 2:23, "And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." Isaiah 53:7 says, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth." Jesus sustained the entire cosmos by the word of His power, Hebrews 1:3. All He would have had to do was say the word, and the guards, and the soldiers, and the executioners would have disintegrated into a pile of ash. And yet here was our spotless Passover Lamb, led to His slaughter, *silently*. Yieldingness, unassumingness, refusing to insist on His own rights. And when He finally *was* crucified—when the Author of life was put to death by men whose lives He was sustaining at that moment—He prayed for them, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus was the embodiment of meekness and gentleness. He says it Himself. Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am *gentle*—or *meek*—and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 21:5 records the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 in Jesus, which says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, *Humble*—or *meek*, same word—and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." And in Matthew 5:5, in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are the *meek*, for they shall inherit the earth."

And so do you see what Paul is doing? He is responding to the charge that his "unimpressive personal presence" and humble demeanor is nothing more than weakness, and can only mean he ministers without the approval of Jesus. Do you hear the absurdity of that accusation? Paul can't possibly be identified with Jesus, because he's meek and gentle! And Paul says, "Christ Himself was the embodiment of meekness and gentleness! These charlatans would have thought *Jesus'* personal presence was unimpressive and *His* speech contemptible!" He's saying, "I'm only following in the footsteps of my Master." And in fact, that's exactly what Peter says ought to be the case in that same passage. 1 Peter 2:21: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

Christ doesn't break the bruised reed. He doesn't snuff out the smoldering wick. He weeps over Jerusalem. And Paul says, "Don't expect me to respond to sin against me any differently than my Lord responded to sin against Him. Don't judge me merely by outward appearances and thus miscalculate my meekness as weakness, anymore than you would mistake Jesus' meekness for weakness. His gentleness didn't mean He lacked authority; far from it! Well the same is true of me, His apostle. If I'm gentle and humble in your presence, it's not because I lack the confidence of apostolic authority; it's because 'Christ crucified' is not only the *message* of my ministry, it's the *model* of my ministry as well. And dear Corinthians, can you really trust teachers whose

argument against my legitimacy is that I look too much like Jesus? Would our Lord Himself escape the censure of these triumphalistic impostors?”

It’s brilliant. And it speaks to us as we seek to minister the Gospel and the Word of God among our brothers and sisters in Christ. It teaches us that no matter what kind of conflict we’re in—whether it’s a full-scale mutiny propped up by gossip and slander, as in Paul’s case, or whether it’s just that we recognize we need to bring correction to a brother who is in sin—our default posture must never be that of *relishing* controversy! When people have sinned against us in the course of our ministry, our first instinct cannot be to fly off the handle, guns blazing, shooting first and asking questions later! We are to follow Paul as Paul follows Christ, refuse to insist on our own rights, and humbly, meekly, gently appeal to our brothers and sisters to forsake the folly of their sin—to entreat them to repentance.

Pastor John writes, “Good soldiers take no pleasure in using deadly force and do so only with great reluctance. . . . A noble warrior’s power is constrained by his compassion and exercised only when there is no other option. . . . Instead of seeking personal vengeance on his enemies, Paul showed them the same patience that the Lord Jesus Christ had shown him (1 Tim 1:16)” (323–24). The faithful minister is **eager for peace**.

II. Ready for Battle (v. 2)

But though the faithful minister is eager for peace, he is also **ready for battle**. He is eager to conciliate, but he is willing to be bold. He’s eager to deal gently, but he is willing to afflict the conscience with the sword of God’s Word. He is eager to preserve peace, but he is **ready for battle**. And we see this starting in verse 2. I’ll read both verses again: “Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”

And you can hear both emphases—that twofold posture—as we read both verses together. He has just given counter-evidence to the false apostles’ first charge, namely, that he writes to them with heavy-handed severity. And he’s done that by showing them that he is eager for peace, by appealing to them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. But now he gives counter-evidence to the second charge: that he is weak and timid and mousy when in the Corinthians’ presence. In effect he says, “Now this is my appeal. Please don’t force me to act with bold confidence when I come to you again.” Chapter 10 verse 11: “Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”

He had already said something like this to them in the first epistle. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 4, starting in verse 18. 1 Corinthians 4, verses 18 to 21: “Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” “You want the rod? You want boldness? You want confidence? You want severity? Trust me, you’ll get all of it you can handle. But please, let’s not have it come to that. Wouldn’t you rather me come with love and a spirit of gentleness?” So you see it: eager for peace, but **ready for battle**.

You say, “Wait a minute. What happened to the ‘meekness and gentleness of Christ’?!” Well, Christ Himself teaches us that meekness and gentleness are not incompatible with a stern fierceness against error and against the enemies of the truth. When our Lord found that the people had made His Father’s house into a marketplace, John 2:15 says, “He made a scourge of cords,”—He made a whip!—“and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” When He had His fill of the Pharisees hypocritical, man-made religion whereby they burdened the consciences of God’s people, He delivered the most scathing denunciation of anyone anywhere in all of Scripture in Matthew 23. He pronounces curses of woe upon them, calls them sons of hell, blind guides, fools and blind men, whitewashed tombs, full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, serpents, a brood of vipers, and He sentenced to the punishment of hell itself. Oh, the Lord Jesus was eager for peace; He was the very embodiment of meekness and gentleness. But when it came to standing for the truth in the face of false teaching, our Lord was **ready for battle**. And Paul says, “The same is true for me, the Lord’s servant.”

Commentator Philip Hughes captures this dynamic well when he writes, “Christlike meekness and gentleness must not be misunderstood as though they are incongruous with sternness in refuting the propaganda of false teachers who are attacking the foundations of the divine gospel that Paul had faithfully communicated to the Corinthians (cf. 11:3f). In harmony with the supreme example of Him who is the Church’s Lord, plain-spoken severity in the face of spiritual imposture becomes *everyone* whose concern is for the truth of God and the salvation of souls” (346). So Paul says, “Please, I ask”—literally, “I request;” there’s that tenderness—“I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”

“The confidence with which I propose to be courageous.” What confidence is that? It is the resolute boldness that is grounded in his conviction that he *is* a genuine apostle, that Christ *has* sovereignly appointed him and entrusted him as a steward of the mysteries of God, and that he *does* possess the authority to exercise discipline within the churches, even to the extent of driving the enemies of truth out of there. And the word “courageous” is the Greek word *tolmaō*, which

speaks of one who is daring, one who acts fearlessly despite the threat of consequences (cf. MacArthur, 326). Paul is fearless. 1 Corinthians 4: “These men think they’re something? Well let me tell you something: The kingdom of God doesn’t consist in talk! It consists in power. And when I come again we’ll see who’s got the power!” And then 2 Corinthians 13:2 and 3: “I said it while I was with you last time, and I’ll say it again now. If I come again to Corinth, I will not spare anyone. You want proof that the one who speaks in me is Christ—Christ who isn’t weak toward you, but mighty in you? If you don’t repent—if you continue on in this foolish rebellion alongside these *phonies* who preach no true Gospel at all—I assure you, you’ll get proof.”

So you see, Paul’s tenderness ensures that he’s not spoiling for a fight—that he doesn’t just go around devoid of all compassion thrashing everyone in his path. He has no desire to be severe or inflict punishment. But he *will* do so. His tenderness and compassion will not cause him to abdicate the role of authority that Christ had placed him in. He is the Lord’s apostle, and Christ is using him to bring authoritative correction to the error that has infiltrated the church. And he recognizes that it is no true compassion—no genuine love—that refuses to confront sin with biblical correction. See, love constrains us to have the difficult conversations with our brothers and sisters, in which we patiently and gently make them aware of their sin, and insist upon their repentance. The loving servant of Christ’s flock is willing to endure all manner of conflict for the sake of his brother’s mortification of sin and joy in Jesus. He is eager for peace, but he is **ready for battle**.

Conclusion

That’s the lesson that these opening two verses have for us. Each one of us needs to strike this balance in our lives, as we serve one another in our ministry to the body of Christ, because each of us has a tendency to one or the other of these extremes. On the one hand, some of you are so **eager for peace** that you’re tempted to be cowards. You’re tempted to shy away from any kind of conflict whatsoever. “Oh, no! I can’t tell that person that! If I confront her on that she may never speak to me again! Or, at the very least, if I do bring it up, it’s going to be this long, drawn-out battle, where I know I’m going to be misunderstood. And you know, I’ve got to work on getting the log out of my own eye anyway, and I don’t want to come off as unloving or judgmental. So yeah, best to leave it alone.” And in the meantime the cancer of sin goes unchecked and unrepented of, and grows and spreads throughout your sister’s soul.

You need to recognize that the faithful minister of the Gospel is courageous enough to get over the fear of what people might say or do to you if you confront them over their sin, because their genuine spiritual health is more important than your sensitive ego! because their progress in holiness is worth more than a false, pasted-smile, phony “peace”! You may convince yourself that it’s just patience, or moderation, or being an even-keeled, chill kind of person. But it’s no more than what Calvin calls “criminal cowardice” (319).

On the other hand, others of you are so **ready for battle** that you're tempted to be impatient and graceless. You're a hammer in search of a nail. You're just ready to crack that whip and overturn those tables! "But Pastor Mike! That's sin! What else can I do but confront it! Love confronts! Didn't you just say that?!" Yes, but that's where the meekness and gentleness come in—that *praiūtēs*, that strength under control; that *epieikeia*, that sweet reasonableness that moderates inflexible severity in accordance with commonsense justice. We must be bold, but our boldness must not be relishing the opportunity to run someone over. It must be a brokenhearted boldness, that would much rather come to terms of peace, but will endure conflict if necessary.

So, the faithful minister is courageous enough to get over his fear of what people might say or do to him if he confronts them over their sin. But that same faithful minister also takes no perverse delight in delivering that correction. And we need to be on guard against that, because our hearts will deceive us into thinking we're stalwarts for righteousness, when really we're just hard people looking to beat up on others, perhaps so that we don't deal too intimately with the sin in our own lives.

I'll close with a quote from John Calvin, who I think summarizes these two verses so well, and captures the benefit of the application with insight. He writes, "It is the duty of a good pastor"—and we could broaden it to the priesthood of all believers by saying, It is the duty of a good *minister*—"to allure his sheep"—or again, his fellow-sheep to whom he ministers—"peacefully and kindly, that they may allow themselves to be governed, rather than to constrain them by violence. Severity, it is true, is, I acknowledge, sometimes necessary, but we must always set out with gentleness, and persevere in it, so long as the hearer shews himself tractable. Severity must be the last resource. 'We must,' says he, 'try all methods, before having recourse to rigor; nay more, let us never be rigorous, unless we are constrained to it.' ... From this we see, *when* it is time to act with severity: after we have found, on trial being made, that allurements and mildness have no good effect. 'I shall do it with reluctance,' says Paul, 'but still I have determined to do it.' Here is an admirable medium; for as we must, in so far as is in our power, *draw* men rather than *drive* them, so, when mildness has no effect, in dealing with those that are stern and refractory, rigor must of necessity be resorted to: otherwise it will not be moderation, nor equableness of temper, but criminal cowardice" (319).

Let us not be cowards, and let us not be brutes. Let us be marked both by courage and by compassion. As we minister to one another in the body of Christ—as we get into each other's lives and labor alongside one another in our conflict against sin and our pursuit of holiness—let us strike the proper balance as captured in the life of the Apostle Paul. By God's grace, let us be **eager for peace**, but let us be **ready for battle**.