*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 18 - 23

*Second Corinthians Chapters Ten and Eleven*

**Monday, May 18 2 Corinthians 10:1-11**

*“The meekness and gentleness of Christ”*

 Attacks were apparently being leveled at Paul. Because this is a letter, we have only Paul’s answer to his critics and are forced to reconstruct from his responses the nature of the criticism. Evidently, they said: (1) that Paul was only brave when he was writing letters but cowardly in face-to-face situation (v. 1, 9-10); (2) that he did not have the same kind of relationship to Christ that they had (v. 7); and (3) that his boasting was unbecoming of an apostle (v. 8).

 Criticism should always be handled in the Spirit of Christ. And because Christ had been gentle and patient with his critics they accused him of being weak. Paul, in turn, confessed to meekness and gentleness, but he claimed it was not the sign of a weak character but of the character of Christ (v. 1). As Christ used meekness in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:5), and as Paul used it here, it is descriptive of being in control of our feelings. Being meek doesn’t imply that we never feel impatience or anger but rather that we don’t allow those feelings to dictate our response. This attitude of Paul is in stark contrast to the bitterness of the attacks of his critics.

*Meekness in the face of criticism, which the world sees as weakness, honors you, Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 19 2 Corinthians 10:12-18**

*“Whom the Lord commends is approved”*

 Paul’s critics came to the church in Corinth with exaggerated claims for themselves, and since quite a few people were impressed, Paul felt it necessary to expose what was behind their boasting. He accused them of inventing their own criteria for spiritual success; they were “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves” (v. 12). To use a worldly standard to measure spiritual impact has the effect of having no standard at all.

 One of the reasons that the work of God is so difficult to evaluate is that spiritual work is hard to measure by worldly standards. How do we measure the impact of prayer or the result of a sermon or track inner spiritual growth? How do we know exactly what is being accomplished by faithful Christians who live lives of integrity before their peers and their neighbors? How do we judge the future impact of teaching the Bible to children? Paul suggested a standard for measuring spiritual work, telling us that if we want to boast about our spiritual work, boast only that it is God who has enabled us to do the work.

*I thank you, Lord, for making possible the work I do for you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 20 2 Corinthians 11:1-6**

*“I am jealous for you”*

 Paul is not expressing resentment over being rejected by some who are being led astray by false “super-apostles.” Rather, it is Paul’s “paternal” relationship to the Corinthians and their ensuing “marriage” to Christ which explains his jealousy. According to Jewish betrothal customs in the New Testament era, a father pledged his daughter to her future husband and was then responsible for her purity until the marriage took place. In the same way, Paul is fighting for the faithfulness of the Corinthians because of their current temptation to commit spiritual adultery.

 Just as the devil deceived Eve by calling into question the sufficiency of God’s provisions (Genesis 3:1-13), so too he is seeking to undermine the Corinthians’ purity of devotion to Christ by enticing them with “a different Jesus,” as if the Christ of Paul’s gospel were not enough. Satan tempts God’s people by presenting a substitute savior: In the garden it was the false promise that they could provide for themselves without consequence; in Corinth it was the promise that the real “Christ” would provide for them health and wealth.

*Give us wisdom, Lord, to recognize false teaching in your name. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 18 - 23

*Second Corinthians Chapters Ten and Eleven*

**Thursday, May 21 2 Corinthians 11:7-15**

*“I did not become a financial burden”*

 Paul’s willing practice of self-support while sharing the gospel in Corinth was being used by his opponents against him. From Plato through Paul’s day, the Sophist philosophers and professional orators charged fees and took money for their teaching, since a free or cheap message implied that the message itself was not worth much. In his opponents’ view, Paul’s refusal to accept money was not an expression of Christ-like love but a tacit admission of the inferior nature of his teaching and apostleship.

 Given the precarious nature of itinerant craftsmen in Paul’s day (he was a tentmaker), he reported that his self-support was made possible in that the Macedonian churches supplemented his income when needed. The Macedonians’ generosity as an expression of God’s grace, combined with Paul’s self-support as an extension of the gospel of Christ, made it possible for him not to “burden” the Corinthians. There is therefore no basis for his opponents’ accusation that Paul was somehow using the ministry or the collection for Jerusalem to serve his own ends.

*Ministry for personal financial gain, Lord, does not honor you. Amen.*

**Friday, May 22 2 Corinthians 11:16-21a**

*“I will boast a little”*

 The false so called “super-apostles” who have been preaching a fake Christ and a counterfeit gospel in Corinth, while at the same time denigrating Paul’s teaching and apostleship, have been boasting about their human achievements. In order to show the foolishness of this kind of boasting, Paul says that he is going play the fool by doing some boasting of his own. Thereby, he hopes to show the Corinthians how foolish it is of them to listen to boasting of any kind that is based in human abilities rather than in what the Lord has done.

 Paul also points out how foolish it is of them to be so enamored with his opponents who have enslaved and exploited them for their own financial gain, while rejecting Paul who has asked nothing of them financially. The insulting “slap in the face” probably refers to the way in which Paul’s opponents denigrated as second class citizens of God’s Kingdom those Corinthians who didn’t share their Jewish heritage of which they were so proud. In stark contrast stands Paul whose pride in, and affection for, each believer is without nationalistic prejudice.

*May we boast only in you, Lord, crediting you for our achievements. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 23 2 Corinthians 11:21b-33**

 *“I boast about the things that show my weakness”*

 To boast about one’s Jewish heritage, about being a descendant of Abraham, and about one’s service for Christ are all foolishness for these are all prideful pointings to oneself. Paul could have engaged in this kind of boasting and done it better than any of his opponents, for his heritage and connection to Abraham and service for Christ outshone theirs. But, he refused to point to himself in this way.

 Instead, if there is any boasting to be done, it will be in the strength of Christ in the midst of his weakness. So, Paul turns to an account of his suffering. His various arrests, imprisonments, and punishments were suffered as an apostle for the gospel. His beatings refer both to the Jewish punishment of thirty-nine lashes and to the Gentile punishment of being beaten with rods. He suffered for his mission to the Gentiles as well as for his desire to share the gospel with his countrymen, and in his suffering the Lord, who also suffered while ministering in this world, was with him and revealed through him. And this, Paul says, is evidence of his true apostleship.

*It is especially when we are weak, Lord, that your strength can shine through us. Amen.*