

Power Up

2 Cor 10

When you come into this world the pressure to perform...the pressure to impress starts pretty early. The minute you're born people start making comments about your appearance. Aren't you a gorgeous little thing. Look at those chubby little cheeks. And I'm sure that's code for something.

You get home from hospital and within a couple of weeks people are grading you on how well you sleep, how well you feed. You've got all these things you've got to achieve. You've got to roll over, you've got to crawl and talk, and walk and you've got to count and spell. You've got to learn not to yell. Then there's the colours and the shapes and sizes.

You're not even at kindy yet...And already.....you're on the performance treadmill with the rest of us. Measuring up. Trying to be a success.

And I don't care who you are. I don't care if you're a toddler or a teenager. Whether you're a girl or a grandma. You're looking sideways. And you're measuring your success.

It's just the way it is. And advertisers know it.

So you drink powerade to be powerful. And beat the opposition.

You wear the NIKE logo like the winners of the world. Just about everything. Where you live. What you drive. What you wear. Who you associate with. Everything stacks up...and plays a part in the measure of your success.

But as Paul answers his critics here in chapter 10. He's offering up a different paradigm. He's offering a different measure of success.

Which I think you'll find is quite liberating. It's a way of getting off the treadmill. As he points out what success looks like... from God's perspective.

And I just want to point out one thing about the church at Corinth in particular. Something Paul says about them in the first chapter of his first letter. I want to take you back to this. Listen to this. This is what he says.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;

Paul's a charmer isn't he. You're not that wise most of you. Or influential. Not likely to make it onto the cover of WHO. Because you're mostly NOBODIES. And he's just getting going.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

Here's the point. Corinthians. As you take that sideways lookYou don't really measure up.

But God chose you. Not to BECOME the most influential. But to shame them.

To show God's power in your weakness. Which is Paul's overarching big point in chapters 10 and 11. And in a sense, the central theme of the whole letter.

So here's a bunch of Christians who by and large don't measure up..... by the standards of the world.

But in Paul's absence. And in the name of Jesus. There are people saying. You can. You CAN be strong. You CAN be influential. You can POWER UP. Which has got to be an attractive offer.

Problem is....it means leaving behind the kind of teaching Paul taught. And the kind of example Paul set. Because that's weak. And so are you. If you want to hold to it. That's the first criticism.

It's weak. And secondly, it's UNIMPRESSIVE. Nothing to boast about at all.

So let's start by having a look at number one. Starting from verse 1.

You pick up the accusation there. Paul says.

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ I appeal to you. I, Paul, who am timid when face to face with you, but bold when away!

The word's got back to Paul. There's some mud slinging going on. And the word is – he's weak. Paul's like the chihuahua on the other side of the fence. Yap yap yap...He's all bark and no bite.

He writes tough letters. Which is true. He's said some tough things in his letters. But in person. And you get a bit of an insight into what Paul's demeanor was like – they say IN PERSON....he's timid.

Now if you're in a western movie and someone makes that kind of accusation what you're supposed to do is you're supposed to say. Are you callin' me yeller?

And then you duel it out to the death.

But Paul says. You got me. He says. If you're calling meek weak. Then I'm guilty.

As guilty as Jesus himself. If you want to call him weak. There in the first verse.

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ I appeal to you he says.

I BEG YOU...that I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of the world.

See if Paul was gentle with people. If he seemed meek. Then it wasn't WEAKNESS... he was demonstrating Christ-likeness.

Which is not weak at all.

And that's a pretty important thing to get a hold of.

Because all around Australia there's a bit of an imbalance in our churches. That is. There are more women than men.

Aussie men don't come to church. In part because of the perception that Jesus is a bit of a wuss. He's a sort of a mummy's boy. HE'S SOFT...

All of this meekness and gentleness stuff. According to the standards of the world....that's WEAK..

But here's the gentleness of Jesus. According to Colossians one. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Which means he could crush us with his little pinky.

But instead. He toughs it out by living the life of a man.

Not a rich man or a popular man. A hated man.

Who demonstrates his power and authority. Calms the storm. Casts out the sickness and the demons.

But lets himself be humiliated. When he doesn't have to. Who toughs out the rejection. And the flogging. And in the end... death by crucifixion.

To rescue us from our own ignorance and stupidity.

And you have to say – tough guy. Do you think you could do that?

See it's not weakness to have power. To have authority. But to choose not to use it for the sake of others.

To do that. Is real strength. Which is what Paul's getting at.

It might look like weakness by the measure we use. But it's not at all.

When you've graduated from the police academy something pretty frightening happens. You get a gun. You get a gun ...And you get ammunition to go with it.

But you dread the day when you have to pull that trigger. You never want to have to use it. But you will if you have to.

It's not weak to exercise authority carefully.

Ken Todd tells this great story of this constable that turns up at the scene and there's a stand off with a guy who's got a shotgun. And it's back in the days where as a police officer you only had a gun if you owned one yourself. And this constable turns up and he's the only policeman with a gun.

And according to Ken it's a fairly big pistol.

And the bad guy comes rushing out waving the shotgun around constable holds his gun up to the bad guy. And he's shaking like a leaf. And the gun's shaking....And this constable says to the guy. Would you PLEASE PUT THE GUN DOWN. PLEASE. I DON'T WANT TO SHOOT YOU HE SAYS. BUT IN A SECOND THIS THINGS GOING TO GO OFF. So please....PLEASE PUT THE GUN DOWN.

Ken tells the story a lot better.

But the point is. It's not weak to show restraint...in the use of your authority.

And Jesus showed incredible restraint. As Lord of all. He came to serve. Not to be served. He came to seek and save the lost.

And it's not weak to demonstrate gentleness to people. See it's not that Paul doesn't have authority. He does. It's just that he doesn't wave it around like a big stick. He doesn't exert his authority to build himself up. To big note himself....Instead he uses it to build others up.

Paul's like the dad who loves his kids. He'll carry them on his shoulders if he has to. He'll take a flogging if he has to. Which he did a number of times. But he'll only be bold. He'll only use his authority if he has to.

Is that weakness?

Verse 8 for even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.

We don't live by the world's measure Paul says.

Though some people might think we do.

But it's not weak to be meek. And it's not soft to be gentle with people.

Verse 3 for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

See the criticism is that Paul's weak. Impotent might be a better description. He doesn't have any clout. No one jumps when he says jump.

But we don't wage war like everyone else he says. On the contrary.

What you say is weak. Is actually the power of God. Our weapons have divine power.

There halfway through verse 4. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Now. Just for a second...turn your mind back to September 11 2001.

And the terrorists mount a huge attack on an American stronghold. By targeting some of their greatest monuments.

And as you think about it you can't deny the potency of the attack.

The demolition job they did on the twin towers.

But Paul says. We don't wage war that way.

We don't destroy buildings. We don't kill people.

And we don't play the power games of politics. Or the power games of the office.

Or wherever there's some kind of power struggle.

And you might think that's weakness.

But I disagree Paul says. On the contrary.

As we preach the gospel of Jesus. And as we live it out. There's a demolition going on. A divine one. Verse 5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. That's what the gospel does. It's truth that chips away at all your wrong ideas about God. Until God brings it all tumbling down.

Timber.

See here's how we do things. Not just them out there. This is what we do. This is what sin does. It builds its own empire. God didn't make me. God doesn't own me. I can live how I like.

God's a tyrant. God's not loving. I can't know God. And the list goes on and on. But the good news says. God did make you. And he does own you. And you can know God. And he's worthy of your trust. And he deserves your service. And he IS LOVING.

And as Christians speak the truth. And as they live it out. There's a war going on. And God's at work.

And the Corinthian church are prime example number one....of the potency of that. There's a bunch of people God did his demolition work on. THROUGH PAUL. Only they're not dead. They're ALIVE IN CHRIST. They've got NEW LIFE. TRUE LIFE. Because God knocked down the old life to the ground.

God's demolishing those long held barriers. And he's taking his captives.

And you see it through history. People who were avid atheists. Like CS Lewis. Become followers of Jesus. Like a man by the name of Frank Morrison, in the 1920s, a journalist commissioned to write a book to disprove the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, after carefully examining all the evidence, becomes a Christian, writes a book called *Who Moved the Stone?*

We take captive every thought Paul says, and make it obedient to Christ. As God works his divine power through his humble servants.

He's taking captives. And you're one of them. If you're a Christian. You know how those barriers came tumbling down for you.

It was through the message of the weakness of Christ. And maybe you can even remember the messengers who brought it to you. Who God used powerfully.

So that's criticism number one. You're weak if you follow the example of Paul who followed the example of Jesus.

But meek is not weak. And it's not soft to be gentle.

But here's the second critique. And that is. Paul's not very impressive. And you pick that up in verse 10.

He says...some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is UNIMPRESSIVE and his speaking amounts to nothing."

As far as looks go Paul's the Susan Boyle of the ancient world.

As far as looks go...he's not particularly impressive. And that actually might be right. There's one account of how Paul looked that may well be right.

Here's what it says.

A man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting and he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long.

Not very flattering is it!

And they're saying. When it comes to impressiveness, he doesn't match up. And He doesn't speak all that well either.

Now in those days if you wanted to be taken seriously as a public speaker you had to measure up. You had to be impressive physically. Or your words didn't carry any value. And the way you spoke had to be equally impressive...how else could people take you seriously?

And they're pointing to Paul – and saying you can't take him seriously. Surely you're aiming a bit higher?

And it's a real danger. Because that's our world too. We're all competing to be the success. We're all looking across the field. And it's so tempting to follow the leader that has the impressive qualities we aspire to. And to aspire to what he or she aspires to.

Let me show you an example. Because this isn't just a first century idea. Let me introduce you to Joel OSTEEN.

SLIDE - OSTEEN

Here's a guy who measures up pretty well....according to the standards of the world. I mean look at that smile. Those teeth. Joel's got the prestige. Joel's got the MONEY. He's a RICH MAN.

And Joel says you can have it too. Joel says Christian you can have your BEST LIFE NOW. Which is the title of his best selling book. You can measure up. That's what God really wants for you. And it's appealing.

But Paul says it's the wrong measure of success.

Paul says if that's the kind of thing you're really going to value. If that's what you're going to boast about....then you're being very shallow. Come with me back up to verse 7.

You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.

The Corinthians know impressiveness is not a qualification. Paul's already pointed that out they weren't in that category.

And if you jump back down to verse 12 he says here's the fatal error in that way of thinking.

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves they are not wise.

In other words. If you're measuring your success purely by where you sit in the pack. If you measuring success by comparing yourself with others. You're using the wrong measure.

That's not something worth boasting about.

You either end up thinking you're better than others. Or you're jealous. And it's the wrong measure anyway. That's the world's measure.

If you're going to boast. You need to boast in the Lord. Verse 15 here's our hope Paul says. Not for our own success. But that your faith would grow. That God's work in you would grow. And in turn. So would the gospel.

Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.

Do you see the difference? If you're going to boast. Boast in the Lord. Verse 18 for it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Now in chapter 11 Paul's going to talk a bit more about that. And he's going to do a bit of boasting. Except it's reverse boasting in weakness which is God's strength. But we'll look at that next week.