

Title: So, You think you're tough – eh? Pt.1

Text: 1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Theme: The strong, realize they are weak.

Series: 1 Corinthians #38

Prop Stmt.

Read Text:

It is going to take me at least 2 Sundays to get through this text. Honestly, I could spend 6 months on it, but there are other books in the Bible I want to preach through before I go home with and to Christ. So, this is what I am attempting to do. I want to draw your attention this morning to three things:

- 1) The Connection
- 2) The Construction
- 3) The Conclusion

This morning I am going to preach the connection, explain the construction and point out the conclusion. Next week, I will assume the connection, preach the construction and get really worked up about the conclusion. Clear as mud? First of all – the connection.

1. **The Connection** – “For” (10.1)

That word “for” is a connecting word. When Paul wrote this, he did not have a chapter division here. His argument about the use of rights and privileges and the demand for self-discipline is connected to what he is about to tell us. Keep that in mind.

The story could be told thousands of times. A person who seemed to be just like the rest of us, came into some money or a position of influence and before long, this new found power was like a poison. In truth, it wasn't the power or the position that was the heart of the problem, but that's usually how we view it. The person at the top has the privilege and uses that position to express his freedom.

We have seen so many examples of how people at the top take advantage of the people at the bottom, that we just expect that sort of behavior out of people at the top. The guy at the top sells the company, makes millions and walks away while the new owners fire half the workers. The politician forgets his roots, cuts deals that pad his wallet, but result in selling out his constituency. Those are the stories that make the news. There are many exceptions to that image, but it seems that we are so distrustful of leaders that it is easy to assume they have it in for us, they are hiding something, or they are on the take. Some are.

Genuine Christianity is so opposite of our world, because our leader, our captain, our hero is so incredibly unusual. Instead of using his power to take, he used his position to die. The ones at the top serve. The strong serve the weak. You do not get to the top in order to be free from others, you use your freedom and your strength to serve others. We

honor Christ. We exalt the Savior. We worship Jesus. We admire him not only because He is God and He is glorious, but we admire Him because in his glory He lived humbly. We worship Him not only for his transcendence, but also because his transcendence is accompanied by condescension. This God of all, knows my name. We love him for his uncompromising justice, but we love him even more because his justice is tempered with mercy. We love him for his majesty, but we love him even more because his majesty is seasoned with meekness. We are impressed that He is equal with God, and we stand speechless to find that even as God's equal, he submitted himself to God and prayed to Him and depended upon Him and obeyed Him. We love Christ because he of how worthy he was of all good, but we love him even more because of how patient he was in suffering of so much evil. We love his wit, his wisdom, his stumping of the proud scribes and his confounding of the arrogant Pharisees. But we love him even more, when this teacher of teachers tells stories that capture the hearts of children, and when this King of kings stops to bless the children. We are amazed that this man could calm a storm, walk on water, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. But we are truly moved to worship when we see this most powerful man who ever walked on this earth, God, the very God, robed in human flesh, stop to speak with a beggar, and stop to talk to a castaway woman. Later, we look with wonder why He would refuse to use His power by getting off the cross, and why He would refuse to call upon a legion of angels, who stood ready for His beckoned call, before His mission on the cross was done.¹ Do you see what is going on in this letter that Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth? Do you see what we are being called to be and do?

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, while Christ observed the Passover dinner with his disciples, He washed their feet. The King served His subjects. The Ruler humbled Himself before those He ruled. Those concerned about etiquette and protocol would be aghast, they would say, "He has forgotten his place." Oh no! We do not understand meekness. The sermon that He preached in that action was deafening. It finally drowned out the blaring voices of those who were arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom and it defined for us, what strength and leadership, and power and position looks like in the church.

But, in the church at Corinth, the blaring voices of arrogance were loud and boisterous again. The divisions were deep, the animosity was bitter, the battle lines were drawn. People were fighting and in some cases, they were fighting over things that were not worth fighting over, but no one wanted to stand down. Everyone had a right! Into this noisy scene comes the apostle Paul, like His Savior. Instead of using his rights, he sets them aside in order to serve. He is following the Savior, and he adds his voice in an echo of Christ and bids us to come and die. Die to our self-centeredness. Die to our demands to having it our way. Die to our desires to be served. Die to our visions of grandeur. And instead, live to serve, like Jesus, like Paul. So, you think you're tough – eh? You think you are strong, how is your serve?

Matthew 5.5

We do not understand meekness very well because we see so few examples of it.

¹ This paragraph was taken from John Piper's book, *God is the Gospel*, pp. 52-53.

Genuine Christianity is not the ticket to wealth, or power or influence. Genuine Christianity is a relationship with the Son of God, who makes you and calls you to be like Him. The stronger you grow in Christ, the weaker you will realize you are. In the church, positions of leadership, positions of strength and influence, are positions to serve. Everything that we have been studying this year so far from 1 Corinthians 8 and 9 can be summarized in 10.31-11.1. You have one life, and it is pretty quick. Instead of living on the take, live on the give. Instead of trying to get glory to yourself, give it up for God. Instead of looking out for yourself, look out for others. Instead of worrying about your rights, worry about reaching people with the gospel. That is what Paul tried to do because that is exactly what Christ did. But, before we get to the end of this section, we have chapter 10 to plow through. This chapter is full of warnings. And interestingly enough, the warnings are directed at the people who think view themselves as being strong.

People who perceive themselves to be strong tend to be presumptuous. They think the rules apply to everyone but themselves. They think they are invincible. They think that they are the authority, the standard, and the ideal. The world would be so much better off if everyone was like me or did it my way. After all, everyone waits to hear what they will say. Everyone should want to be with them. They have the answers. They are the influence. They are in the know. But not so in the church! That may be how it is in the world, but we do not live like that in the church. Here, we are all called to follow Christ and Christ used his position of strength as a platform from which to serve. When we forget that, which we have a tendency to do, we put ourselves in great jeopardy. That is what the entire grammatical structure of these first 10 verses is screaming. I am calling it the construction, because I want you to see how Paul builds his argument.

2. **The Construction** – All vs. Most (10.1-10)

A. **They all** – (10.1-5)

- 1) They all were under the cloud – v.1
- 2) They all passed through the sea – v.1
- 3) They all were baptized into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea – v.2
- 4) They all ate the same spiritual food – v.3
- 5) They all drank the same spiritual drink – v.4

Bam Point! – (v.5)

It is almost impossible to overstate how emphatic this verse is. The contrast that has just been established is huge! In spite of the fact that these people experienced these incredible displays of God's power and mercy, for most of them, it did them no good at

all. We know that because their corpses were left rotting in graves all the way from Egypt to the Jordan River.

B. Most (the sum of some) – (10.6-10)

- 1) Some set their hearts on evil things
+
- 2) Some indulged in pagan revelry
+
- 3) Some committed sexual immorality (23,000 died)
+
- 4) Some tested the Lord (killed by snakes)
+
- 5) Some grumbled (killed by the destroying angel)
= Most were in deep weeds

3. The Conclusion – (10.11-13)

A. Examples

B. Warnings

Spiritual Experience does not mean genuine spirituality.

Spiritual Experience is no guarantee of faith.

Past Spiritual Experience is no substitute for present faith-driven obedience.

This does not mean that we should not seek to experience God or be afraid of experiencing God. It only means that you cannot live on the fumes of yesterday's experience and presume that you are now stronger than what you really are.

C. Promise