Several weeks ago, Steve Kroft interviewed Christopher Hitchens on 60 Minutes. Hitchens’ most recent book is titled *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. Hitchens is the kind of opponent Paul was up against at Corinth.

Paul calls them Super Apostles. In 2 Corinthians 11:20, he gives us a snapshot of their approach.

> “You put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or **takes advantage of you** or **pushes himself forward** or slaps you in the face.”

The Super Apostles’ presence at Corinth raised a vital question: What does it mean to be strong before God . . . in Christ . . . in everything we do? (2 Cor. 12:19)

Paul answers that question by painting a series of contrasts . . .

**I. PUSHING MYSELF FORWARD VS. RELYING ON GOD’S GRACE (2 Cor. 12:11-13)**

The first building block in the Super Apostles’ “tactics of strength” was to build themselves up by putting others down.

**A. Paul’s Embarrassment**

> I’ve made a fool of myself, haven’t I? But isn’t that the game you’ve been playing at Corinth – all this talk about superior and inferior apostles. Don’t you see how foolish it is? – 12:11
B. Paul’s Correction

1. “I am not inferior even though I am nothing”
2. “The things that mark an apostle were done . . . with great perseverance”

SUMMARY: What does it mean to be strong before God . . . in Christ . . . in everything we do?
- The less I exalt myself at others’ expense, the stronger I become
- The more I define myself by Christ, the stronger I become
- The fuller I give myself to God’s call on my life, the stronger I become

II. TAKING WHAT I WANT VS GIVING WHAT I HAVE RECEIVED (2 Cor. 12:14-18)

The second building block of the Super Apostles’ “tactics of strength” was to focus on “taking from” rather than “giving to” others.

The Super Apostles were “empty cups.” Paul knew “grace in exchange for grace.”

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:

“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

– 2 Cor 9:6-11

SUMMARY: What does it mean to be strong before God . . . in Christ . . . in everything we do?
- The harder I lean on God’s grace, the stronger I become
III. FIGHTING FOR MY RIGHTS  
(2 Cor. 12:20-21)

This is the third building block of the Super Apostles’ “tactics of strength” – and there’s no stated contrast, though one is implied.

“Ressentiment is grounded in a narrative of injury, or at least, perceived injury; a belief that one has been or is being wronged.”

What’s the antidote?

“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” – 1 John 1:2-3

SUMMARY: What does it mean to be strong before God . . . in Christ . . . in everything we do? Add a fifth and final item to our list:

• The brighter we reflect God in “community,” the stronger we become

CONCLUSION

The Super Apostles got it all wrong.

Strength is not about pushing, and taking, and slapping as they thought. That’s just foolish.
The truth is . . .
- The less I exalt myself, the stronger I become
- The more I define myself by Christ, the stronger I become
- The fuller I give myself to God’s call, the stronger I become
- The harder I lean on his grace, the stronger I become
- The brighter we reflect God in community, the stronger we become

I for one think the apostle got it right. How about you?