

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_2 Cor_chp10C)

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 10:7-18

Paul’s Authority (2 Cor 10:7-11)

⁷ You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸ For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. ¹⁰ For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." 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.

Observations:

- Evidently Paul’s critic(s)

10:7 At least one critic seems to have been claiming that he had received apostolic authority from Christ that was every bit as binding as Paul's if not more binding.

10:8 Paul said he could have said more about his apostolic authority without having to exaggerate. His opponents had charged that it was only in his letters that he could express himself forcefully. His authority was for building up (v.8) and serves as a contrast between his edifying ministry in Corinth with the destructive work of his critics (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17- *"If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."*)

Paul had stressed the divine origin of his call and gospel when he defended himself to the Galatians (Gal. 1:1, 11-12, 15-16).

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead). (Gal 1:1)

¹¹For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:11-12)

¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. (Gal 1:15-16)

Here in 2nd Corinthians, he stressed the divine origin of his authority (3:5-6; 13:10) and how it had been appropriately used.

10:9-10 Paul's uses irony in his reference to terrifying his readers (v. 9) as is clear from verse 10. His critics argued that Paul was unimpressive – probably a reference to his oratorical abilities as well as his physical appearance – both highly prized attributes in Greek society. The real power of Paul's influence came through the Holy Spirit's working through his words. Paul admitted the inferiority of his rhetorical skills (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 11:6).

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Cor 1:17)

¹And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ²For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things. (2 Cor 11:6)

"Like so many who judge things according to the outward display of this world, Paul's opponents interpreted meekness as weakness, forbearance as cowardice, and gentleness as indecision (cf. v. 1; . . . 11:21 . . .)—or at least they had sought to induce the Corinthians to place this interpretation on Paul's character."

10:11 Paul was perfectly capable of being as forceful in person as he was in his letters (cf. 13:2, 10).

Application

- Spiritual leaders discourage any focus (positive or negative) upon themselves.
- It is extremely easy for the spiritual leader to be unaware of the manner in which approbation can slip into his ministry, speech and conduct.
- Like Paul, we should seek to insure that the focus of our lives and ministries does not succumb in any way, perception or reality, to a self-exaltation instead of Christ-edification.

The Limits of Paul's Authority (2 Cor 10:12-18)

¹² For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. ¹³ But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵ not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, ¹⁶ so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. ¹⁷ But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. ¹⁸ For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

Paul defended his right to preach the gospel in Corinth and denied his critics' claim that they had been responsible for what God had done through Paul there. He did this to vindicate his former actions and to prepare for future ministry in the regions beyond Corinth.

These critics contested Paul's special calling and his legitimate right to minister to Gentiles. Moreover in their unrestrained self-commendation they were claiming the credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth.

10:12 In irony Paul claimed to be a coward, as his critics accused, when it came to comparing himself with his critics. They cited their own conduct as normative and then prided themselves on measuring up to the standard. The Corinthians would be just as foolish if they measured Paul's apostolic credentials by using the same subjective standard that his critics applied to themselves.

J. B. Phillips' paraphrase of the first part of this verse captures Paul's irony well.

"Of course, we shouldn't dare include ourselves in the same class as those who write their own testimonials, or even to compare ourselves with them!"

10:13-14 Evidently Paul's critics were claiming that the apostle had exceeded the proper limits of his ministry by evangelizing in Corinth. They proudly refused to admit that Paul's commission as the apostle to the Gentiles gave him the right to minister as far from Palestine as Corinth. He responded that he had not exceeded the territorial limits of his commission by planting the church in Gentile Corinth.

Paul's ministry had definite divinely prescribed limits. He was to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Rom. 1:5; cf. Gal. 2:9) and he was to do pioneer missionary work (Rom. 15:20). His ministry at Corinth had been within those bounds. He had not overextended his authority by coming to Corinth. It was his critics who were overextending themselves by claiming that Corinth was their special domain.

"We may conjecture that had they come to Corinth and confined their ministry to the synagogue (as Cephas had?), there would have been no problem. The difficulty appears to be that these newcomers are not content with that; they wish to move into Paul's God-assigned 'field' of ministry, the Gentiles."¹

10:15-16 Paul was anxious that all the Corinthians acknowledge that he was not doing what his critics were doing. They were taking credit for what God had done through Paul in Corinth. They were apparently claiming that the spiritual vitality of the Corinthian church was due to their ministry in spite of Paul's influence.

This is sometimes a temptation for those who follow others in ministry. Sometimes they confuse unconsciously, or as in the case of Paul's critics consciously, the results of their work and the results of their predecessors' work.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to continue to support him as he reached out to yet unevangelized fields such as Rome and Spain in the future (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:11; 15:24, 28). He hoped that his ministry would take him even farther still.

Pioneer evangelism precluded the possibility of Paul falling into the error of his critics. He could not claim the credit for what his predecessors had done since he had no predecessors when he planted a new church. Paul did not want to build on, much less take credit for, the foundational work that his

¹Barnett, p. 488.

predecessors had done but to preach the gospel in previously unevangelized areas (Rom. 15:18-21). He did not, however, object to others building on the foundation that he had laid or watering what he had planted (1 Cor. 3:6, 10). He did object to their failing to give credit where credit was due.

Paul spoke as though his future was in the Corinthians' hands. In Paul's thinking, it was because for Paul to proceed into unreached areas he needed to have his former churches, including Corinth, in good spiritual condition. Paul wasn't just interested in numbers and statistics alone so that he could boast. His motives were pure.

Paul wanted to plant a church and then make sure it continued to follow the Lord faithfully before he moved on to plant other churches. If it did not, he felt responsible to get it spiritually healthy before he moved on. The faith of the Corinthians would continue to grow as they responded positively to Paul's instructions. Then they would be able to provide the support (prayer and perhaps financial) that was essential for him to expand his ministry (v. 15b).

10:17-18 In summary, Paul purposed not to take credit for (boast in) what others had accomplished in their service for Christ. He could not even boast about what he had accomplished since it was God who was at work through him. His only boast therefore would be the Lord. He quoted Jeremiah who expressed this thought well (Jer. 9:24; cf. 1 Cor. 1:31). The only commendation worth anything is the work that God has done through His servants, not their words. This is His commendation of them (cf. 5:9).

In this chapter the contrast between Paul's view of ministry and his critics' view stands out clearly. They had different motives, different authority, different loyalties, different objectives, and different procedures. In all these contrasts Paul emerges as the truly Spirit-led apostle.

"If there is currently a temptation to import models of ministry from management, the social sciences, or academia, the New Testament sources indicate the inadequacy of all nonbiblical models."