

2 Corinthians 10:7-18 – “True vs False Apostles”

Once again, we're in a section of Scripture where Paul is having to call out these false apostles who were hijacking what was established in Corinth through the gospel – the gospel truth that was brought to them by Paul.

In order to undermine this gospel, they undermined the deliverer of it which was Paul. They said he's not a true apostle, that his message wasn't in line with other apostles, that he was quite a coward – strong in writing but timid in person. And he makes tents?? This guy can't even make it in the ministry, you can't trust him!

This was their attack against Paul, these were the weapons they were fighting with. But Paul had said previously that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (10:4). He doesn't need to rely on deceptive practices and tearing others down to make himself look good.

But over these remaining chapters Paul is going to address these attacks. But he's not counter attacking or arguing, he's just presenting truth. And he begins to show what a true apostle looks like. He's not going on the defense but rather gives a good offense, an offense of truth.

1. Paul's Authority – 10:7-11

10:7 - *Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.*

An Asian Presbyter during the 2nd century said of Paul, “Paul was a man small of stature, with a bald head & crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.”

Not your typical evangelist poster boy. And the people here were judging Paul simply by his looks.

- Sadly the Greeks (remember Corinth was a Greek city) put a lot of emphasis on style over substance. They were focused on image more than content.
- Do we ever do this? When we look at people as they are outwardly, we are being fleshly, not godly. Paul was one of the mightiest men of God in the Bible, yet the people were quick to dismiss him for all the wrong reasons.
- Aren't you glad that God doesn't do this to us? In the account of Samuel going to Jesse's house to anoint the next king, they went through all the

sons of Jesse, thinking that one of these guys must be the God ordained king based on appearance and stature. Jesse wouldn't have even considered bringing David into the mix unless Samuel had pressed him.

- **1 Samuel 16:6–8**, *"So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him!"⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."⁸ So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."⁹"*
- God doesn't look at the outward appearance. We don't get accepted by God because we're so mighty or put together the right way, it's because of a humble and contrite heart. He looks inwardly to our attitudes and heart.
- Nobody should have any right in thinking they are of Christ because they are impressive outwardly. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). In the same way they have been accepted and are in Christ, so too Paul is accepted and is in Christ.
- In fact, if those in the church doubted Paul's salvation, they too were in trouble since they received the gospel from Paul!

10:8-9 - *For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—⁹ lest I seem to terrify you by letters.*

Paul was given authority, but it was to build up, not to tear down. These false apostles were destroying people rather than blessing them.

- One sign of a spiritual mature person is how they handle positions of authority. A spiritual leader will use their influence to encourage others and build them up. An immature, or unspiritual leader, will use their authority to build themselves up. They turn things around to try and elevate themselves rather than elevate or build up others.

This is God's desire for people in authority – to edify others and not to destroy! This is a very good evaluation of your spiritual maturity – are you coming alongside others for their benefit and good, to build them up? Or are you looking to puff yourself up by tearing down others?

Now for Paul, there would be a time where boasting or proving his authority was necessary to silence these false apostles (***I shall not be ashamed...***).

From chapters 10-12 Paul is going to talk a lot about boasting. He uses the Greek word *kauchaomai* 18 times in these 3 chapters. This word is translated boast or glory. Paul emphasizes this word boast to push back against the false apostles boasting in their greatness. Paul says he will boast only in his weakness because then Christ is shown more in His greatness.

In doing so, Paul's not attempting to defend himself personally, but rather the message and ministry he's been commissioned to share.

But I love how Paul takes little fun pokes at the things people were saying. He sarcastically says he doesn't want to freak them out by the power of his writing.

10:10 - “For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”

These people were getting sidetracked by the messenger and not hearing the message. They were fixated on Paul's appearance and thought he couldn't have any authority.

Some traditions say that Paul spoke with a lisp, or perhaps stuttered. This is what is meant by his **speech** being **contemptible**.

We've seen the history of the kind of people God uses in the Bible. We already saw how David would have been overlooked by man's evaluation.

Remember Moses was trying to get out of God's calling by saying he wasn't eloquent and was slow of speech (Exodus 4:10).

- I'm so glad that God isn't looking for those that are polished and perfect. If so, I'd be out. But secondly, people would be so prone to give the glory to the individual rather than to God. Because when you see a guy like Paul carrying out such an incredible work, it's evident that God is behind that.
- Warren Wiersbe tells of a man he heard preach one time who used great impressive words but lacked any real biblical content or message. One of his friends said as they left the meeting, “First Kings 19:11 describes that performance perfectly: ‘The Lord was not in the wind.’”¹

Yet people were fawning over him and saying what an amazing message it was. Most likely in 20 minutes time they wouldn't remember much of what was said. A pastor needs to have substance, not just hot air.

“The Greek world admired physical beauty and leisure, while despising imperfection and manual labour. In terms of Greek values, Paul the tentmaker, of

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 665). Victor Books.

amateurish speech and doubtful appearance, had little to commend him. Before he became a noted orator the young Demosthenes was subjected to ridicule in Athens on account of his poor physique and weak voice. This had to be rectified by a long and rigorous programme of physical and vocal exercises.⁶ ‘He corrected his lisp and his indistinct articulation by holding pebbles in his mouth while he recited long speeches and he strengthened his voice by running or walking uphill ... reciting speeches ... in a single breath.’⁷ This indicates the seriousness with which physical bearing and public speaking was viewed in the Greek world. To Greek eyes Paul was very inferior.”²

But they will soon see a different side of Paul...

10:11 - *Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.*

Paul is saying here that if they want him to be like his letters, then that’s what he’ll be when he sees them in person. They will be confronted with a weighty and powerful, upfront and in person word from Paul.

There were times Paul needed to do some house cleaning. As a shepherd, there are times when you need to care for the sheep, but sometimes in caring for the sheep you need to protect them from wolves. And to do so you can’t be timid, but bold!

2. Paul’s Appointment – 10:12-16

10:12 - *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

Paul’s critics in Corinth could boast because they were comparing themselves with others around them. Even comparing themselves to those in the church (remember this church has been called out for their carnality).

- Listen, the ugliest jewel is going to sparkle and shine next to a heap of dung.

We don’t compare ourselves with others. Our standard will always be flawed when we do. If I say I’m a good hockey player, yet am comparing myself to my grandson who takes about 5 attempts just to make contact with the puck, my

⁶ See Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander* (Penguin, 1973), pp. 189–193.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

² Barnett, P. (1988). *The message of 2 Corinthians: power in weakness* (p. 161). InterVarsity Press.

measurement is not wise. If I'm boasting in this and then one day face off against Elias Pettersson, you will quickly see the flawed assessment of my hockey skills.

- And that's the problem with comparing ourselves to one another. We'll always find someone who we're better than. And that only leads to boasting in ourselves, and thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to.
- The problem is that we shouldn't be measuring ourselves laterally, but upwardly. We need to measure ourselves not by man but by The Man, the God man, Jesus Christ.
- He's the standard we are to use in assessing where we are at in our spiritual walk and our maturing into the likeness of Jesus Christ. When we compare ourselves to Jesus we suddenly realize that we have nothing to boast of in and of ourselves.
- Don't worry about other people's accomplishments or abilities. Just keep asking, *'How does my life line up with what God has for me? How does my life look in comparison to Jesus?'*

Comparison by any other standard will either cause us to boast in self thinking ourselves as being better than we are, or cause us to loathe ourselves thinking ourselves to be failures based on the wrong standard of measurement.

It's **not wise**. Comparison by the wrong standard does not bring about spiritual fruit and will rob you of joy.

10:13 - *We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.*

Paul would not boast of things outside of his authority or boundary. And notice, Paul didn't just go where he wanted when he wanted. There was a directing and guiding from God. He operated within the **sphere which God appointed**. This included Paul ministering in Corinth. He was God's man for the job in delivering the gospel and planting the church there in Corinth. These other guys are riding on his coattails and trying to sabotage this genuine work of the Lord.

10:14 - *For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;*

Paul wasn't trying to be something he wasn't called to be. He wasn't trying to make himself something he wasn't. He didn't create a ministry for himself or take on an authority out of the blue. He didn't order his missionary card through some website. This was a genuine, God ordained work. Paul came with the gospel of Christ to this city and to this church. No easy task! But look at the fruit.

10:15-16 - *not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, ¹⁶ to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.*

Paul repeats the idea here of not boasting in other people's labours, most likely because this is what his opponents at Corinth were doing. They were glorying in the work at Corinth as though they had something to do with it. They weren't responsible for the ministry there, nor should they have even been there because God had not called them there.

- Here's a good rule of thumb, don't go where God has not called you, and don't attempt to do what God has not called you to do.

3. Paul's Approval – 10:16-17

10:17 - *But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*

Paul quotes from Jeremiah where we read in **Jeremiah 9:23–24**, *"Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the Lord."*

These are three things that the world seeks after. And it still rings true today. People still prioritize wisdom, might, and riches – academics, athleticism, acquisition – mind, muscle, money – but none of these things are lasting. We can fill our minds with wisdom and knowledge, but they will eventually begin to wear down and let you down.

We can take great pride in our might and strength, but it too begins to fade. Our riches are fleeting at best.

- "Neurologically, our brains hit their peak at about twenty years of age. Physiologically, a man is at his apex of physical strength between twenty-seven and twenty-nine. Financially, only a fool thinks his finances are immune to abrupt changes in the economy or the geopolitical situation. But eternally, if you know God, you'll always be at the top of your game."³
- If you're living for or dependent on the wrong things, you will find that it will let you down eventually.

³ Courson, J. (2006). *Jon Courson's application commentary: Volume two: Psalms-Malachi* (p. 495). Thomas Nelson.

Ever been around those people that are always boasting in themselves or their accomplishments?

- I'm sure we could all find things about ourselves that we could boast in. I find that I amaze myself sometimes by what I do, and then at other times I leave my keys in the fridge. You see it all comes back against you if you're seeking to promote yourself or boast in self.

Aren't you glad that all this boasting in self will cease in heaven, for all that we have to glory in is in the Lord. If it's gonna cease in heaven, why not let it cease now? The only thing worth boasting in is the Lord!

10:18 - *For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.*

We could all puff ourselves up around other people, or in comparison of other people. But what does the Lord think of you? That's what really matters. Who are you in Him?

How is one commended in the Lord? By living to glorify Him and not living for self promotion. It's a life that is seeking to make much of Jesus in every area of their life rather than living for personal gain.