

XIII. The Gravitas of Paul

March 17/18/19, 2015

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Aim: To live lives of humility by taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ and boasting only in the Lord.

This second letter to the Corinthians has often been viewed by scholars as composed of parts of more than one letter from Paul to this church. Particularly, it is often thought that chapters 10-13 have come from another of Paul's letters, possibly from the painful letter he wrote to them when there was so much trouble in Corinth, and to which he refers in 2:3-4 and 7:8. However, the epistle makes sense in the form in which it has come down to us, and therefore we should interpret it without recourse to theories of fragmentation.

Even though Paul acknowledged the repentance in the church, he was wise enough to know that the false teachers were still a force to be reckoned with. The general repentance of the congregation had likely only driven their poisonous stream underground. There some bided their time, hoping to rekindle the rebellion against Paul. In the meantime, they surely conducted more subtle warfare against him. To stamp out the last traces of the rebellion, the apostle launched a search-and-destroy mission to root out the remaining pockets of resistance at Corinth. His attack was two-pronged. The preliminary bombardment, as it were, came in the last four chapters of this epistle; the final assault came when Paul visited Corinth a couple of months later (12:14; 13:1). The last section of this epistle, then, is addressed to the recalcitrant minority; namely, the false apostles and their remaining deluded followers.

In this part of 2 Corinthians, Paul turns to answer the biting criticisms of the new ministers and their superiors within the Corinthian church. It is clear from what is written that Paul, his ministry, and his doctrines were under wholesale attack.

It is here that 2 Corinthians takes an ominous turn. Whereas chapters 1-9 were directed to the repentant majority in Corinth, chapters 10-13 focus on the unrepentant minority. Paul now goes to war against rebellion!

A. Paul's Warfare (2 Corinthians 10:1-6)

The Corinthians, or a group of them, have been captivated by the outwardly impressive ministers from Judea. Power and prestige lay at the heart of their ministry. They brought letters of recommendation (3:1) and pointed to ecstatic and visionary experiences to legitimize their claims (5:13; 12:1). They boasted of the distance they had traveled in coming to Corinth (10:13-18). The newcomers and their Corinthian friends despised Paul, as is evident from his self-defense offered throughout these latter chapters.

At present a small unrepentant minority of detractors and interlopers opposed Paul in Corinth. Guided by their inverted values, they judged Paul's ministry to be fleshly. His unimpressive persona, his lack of rhetorical skills, his meek and humble demeanor, his poverty, his working with his hands, the absence of ecstatic experiences and visions, his incessant trials and difficulties (rather than 'successes') were, to his opponents, incontrovertible evidence that his ministry was of the flesh and not of the Spirit. The inverted values of Paul's opponents plus their rejection of Paul's apostolate meant that nothing less than the gospel was at stake, and ultimately the salvation of their souls. So now in chapter 10 Paul calls the faithful in the Corinthian church to obedience in joining him in disciplining his unrepentant opponents.

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1. Defending Against Accusations (10:1-2)

a) *Accusation of Wimpiness (10:1)*

(1) The Character of Christ (10:1a)

¹I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—

Before beginning his assault on the false apostles and their followers, the apostle expressed his unwillingness to engage in combat. A noble warrior's power is constrained by his compassion and exercised only when there is no other option. That is the spirit in which Paul introduced this forceful section of his epistle.

In New Testament Greek, a writer has several available ways of stressing his authorship. Paul does this particularly strongly here. His emphatic, 'I, Paul,' also occurs several times elsewhere in his letters (cp. Gal. 5:2; Eph. 3:1; Col. 1:23). Why this emphasis? Is it because he is going to say some strong things now and he wants them to remember that he is writing with apostolic authority? Possibly. ON the other hand, it could be to stress that this is his own personal sentiment rather than that of Timothy, whom he associated with him in the writing of the letter (1:1). Paul does go on to write of the image of him which some at least at Corinth entertained, and there is no evidence that Timothy had been under attack there, so it would be appropriate for Paul to emphasize that he is here writing strictly on his own behalf.

Prautēs ('meekness') is usually translated 'gentleness' in the New Testament. It refers to the humble and gentle attitude that results in the patience endurance of offenses. *Prautēs* marks those free of anger, hatred, bitterness, and a desire for revenge. The word denotes not weakness, but power under control. *Epiekeia* ('gentleness') is translated 'kindness' in its only other New Testament appearance (Acts 24:4). When applied to those in authority, it means 'leniency' and describes those who graciously refuse to insist on the full measure of their legal rights.

'Meekness' is an essential aspect of Christian character. Its practice means we will not quickly take offense. Some small injustice, unkind word, or action will not immediately upset us, making us cause a fuss. At the same time, we will avoid at all costs needlessly upsetting others by thoughtlessness and insensitivity. Along with meekness goes 'gentleness.' While always pursuing truth and righteousness, our Lord Jesus was never loud, aggressive or threatening, even when wrongly accused or maligned. Meekness and gentleness characterized His earthly life and ministry. As we grow in our knowledge of Him, these characteristics will similarly mark us. They are essential in any pastoral care we exercise.

(2) The Characterization of Paul (10:1b)

I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—

In chapter 10 the dominant objection is that he is authoritative only when away, through his letters (cp. v. 10). When present he is 'timid,' not a quality they valued. It is probably that their perception of Paul arose directly from his quite deliberate presentation of himself. That he was 'timid' was due entirely to his imitation of 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ' (cp. Is. 42:2; 53:7), qualities which Jesus specifically pointed to in the famous invitation to the 'weary and burdened' (Mt. 11:29).

Four accusations had been leveled against Paul. *The first accusation was that he was guilty of cowardice.* He was accused of being 'humble' when face to face with the Corinthians but 'bold'

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when away from them. He was charged with being timid with them, but a bully when absent. While it was appropriate that Paul should answer the accusation, he did not appeal to the Corinthians on the basis of his God-given authority as an apostle, but rather ‘by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.’

The apostle begins with an appeal to the faithful Corinthian majority couched in brilliantly measured irony. Paul knew what his enemies were saying about him—and part of it was true. He certainly had been humble when he was with them. That was his characteristic day-to-day demeanor. Paul also had written them a bold scorching letter after his surprise painful visit (2:1-3). However, his detractors were woefully wrong in imagining that he was a cringing and obsequious little man who could only be bold when he was away penning his paper bullets.

The NIV translation places ‘timid’ and ‘bold’ of verse 1 within quotation marks, for Paul gives the impression that he is quoting things said about him at Corinth. His critics there implied he was really a fundamentally cowardly man who had tried to promote an image of boldness through his letters. Paul obviously does not accept this criticism.

Perversely, Paul’s enemies put a negative spin on his compassion, scornfully condemning it as cowardly weakness. *Tapeinos* (‘meek’) is used elsewhere in the New Testament as a positive virtue, but Paul’s opponents meant it in a derogatory sense. When confronted ‘face to face,’ his adversaries insinuated Paul was a weakling; in today’s terminology, he was a wimp. But put him a safe distance away, they sneered, and he would act as fierce as a lion.

Paul’s enemies obviously suffered from a values deficit because they regarded humility not as a grace but as a weakness. Apparently, they were influenced by the classical Greek tradition that regarded great men as anything but humble. In fact, classic literature couples meekness and humility with servility, which stands opposite to nobility and dignity. Thus Paul’s arrogant detractors were living their lives in profound dissonance with the values of the Bible and Christ Himself. Thus Paul, by identifying himself with Christ, demolishes the accusation that his own meekness and gentleness are signs of weakness or a lack of power and authority. Paul’s subtle irony has taken the wind out of his detractors’ sails and demonstrates that their values are eternally different from those of Christ.

The allegation that Paul was bold when absent but weak when present was a clever contrivance. Any way Paul answered could be twisted. If he reaffirmed his strength in his letters, or defended his meekness in their presence, he would seemingly confirm one of the false allegations. Therefore, to answer his opponents’ charges, Paul shows in this closing section of the epistle how his life and words weld strength to weakness, proving that one can be a bold warrior for the truth, while at the same time compassionate.

If we read on for a few verses, we can hardly help being struck by the apparent contrast of the words ‘meekness’ and ‘gentleness’ with the pictures of Paul, first as a military demolitions expert and then as a stern disciplinarian intending to punish acts of disobedience. This contrast is so stark that it seems certain Paul intended his readers to notice it. Jesus Himself could speak and act very strongly, in casting out the money-changers from the temple and in pronouncing a whole series of woes against the Pharisees, yet His heart was full of tender love, and these strong words and acts were all within the context of the gracious saving purpose that brought Him into the world. Paul could also be tough but he too was motivated by love. Love sometimes has to be angry. By writing as he has, Paul made that crystal clear.

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b) Accusation of Worldliness (10:2)

²*I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.*

Because of his compassionate desire to spare the rebels, Paul called on them to repent. If they did, when he was present with them he would not need to ‘be bold with the confidence’ he had in his authority. The aorist infinitive form of *tharrheō* (‘bold’) is ingressive, meaning, ‘to become courageous.’ The apostle pleaded with them not to force him to display the confrontational courage of which he was capable. ‘Courageous’ translates a synonym, *tolmaō*, which has the connotation of being daring, of acting without fear regardless of the threats or consequences. When it came to defending the truth, Paul was absolutely fearless.

Though Paul’s irony was powerful, it is lovingly gentle as he extends his plea in verse 2. Here the apostle warns the faithful majority of the Corinthians to abandon any complicity with the minority, lest they too suffer his bold judgment. As to who the ill-fated ‘some’ are, they are probably not the Corinthians themselves but outsiders. These interlopers doubtless fancied themselves as superior and cosmically gifted—masters of rhetoric, knowledgeable of mysteries, recipients of visions and ecstasies.

In verse 2, he refers to ‘some people.’ Some commentators consider this evidence that Paul is here writing only for the recalcitrant minority. It needs to be pointed out, however, that although he refers here to some, these chapters are in fact addressed to all, just as the remainder of the epistle is. Such people may be only a minority, but such minorities can grow, and Paul clearly felt the whole church needed to read what he had written.

Again Paul’s plea is ever so gentle. He begs the Corinthian majority to respond in obedience so he will not have to show boldness to any of them, and so the minority who will be subjected to judgment will be minimized, even reduced.

The false teachers and their followers slanderously accused Paul of living ‘according to the flesh,’ that is, of being controlled by the sinful desires of unredeemed humanness arising in a corrupt heart. He was, according to them, motivated by evil self-interest, the lustful pursuit of money, and illicit desires.

This vocal group apparently accused Paul of worldliness of outlook. The words, ‘according to the standards of this world,’ render a phrase that literally means ‘according to the flesh.’ Here it relates more to the lifestyle that results from a worldly outlook. How strange this criticism seems when we read First Corinthians! There he spends the first four chapters showing the great contrast between worldly thinking and the wisdom that comes from God. Not only so, but there is plenty of evidence in the First Epistle that worldliness of outlook, for example party spirit, was alive and well amongst some of the Christians in the Corinthian church. These recalcitrant should have been considering their own attitude.

That he was ‘worldly’ probably means that Paul did not pretend to be more than an ordinary man. There was nothing to Paul beyond what could be seen and heard (cp. 12:6). His ‘power’ was to be experienced only in the gospel he spoke, not in himself. Of himself he was nothing, nobody; quite mundane, really. The new ministers, however, apparently presented themselves as powerful and extraordinary. In despising his humility and his ordinary humanity, his critics revealed it was in fact they, not Paul, who were worldly in their perceptions and therefore lacking in the true power of God.

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The second accusation was that he was worldly and lacking in spirituality. Some suggested that his behavior was governed by the standards of the world, ‘according to the flesh.’ This was equivalent to accusing him of deviousness. Paul tackles this accusation head on. Paul, like us, had to live in the world. That is essential to God’s present purpose for His people, His church. Living in the world, however, Paul and his colleagues did not wage war as the world does. He immediately puts this accusation in the context of the spiritual battle in which all Christians are engaged.

2. Attacking Against Accusers (10:3-6)

These verses are complexly dominated by the analogy of the warrior. The concept of spiritual warfare is one that lies behind a great deal of the New Testament (cp. Eph. 6:10-20).

a) *Spiritual Weapons (10:3-4a)*

³*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.* ⁴*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh...*

Paul recognized that the followers of Christ have to live in the alien environment of the world (cp. Jn. 17:14-16). Paul’s general statement of verse 3 is given more detailed articulation in the verses that follow. First of all he writes of the weapons he used in the spiritual struggle (cp. 6:7).

‘For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh’ is a play on words. In verse 2, the false teachers had accused Paul of walking in the flesh in a moral sense—of being corrupt and immoral, driven by lust, greed, and pride. Playing off his opponents’ moral use of the term, Paul affirmed that he did ‘walk in the flesh’ in the physical sense; that is, he was a man. He denied the false charge that he was corrupt (cp. 1:12) but acknowledged the reality of his humanity.

But though Paul walked in the flesh in the physical sense, he did ‘not war according to the flesh.’ He was a man, but he did not go to battle using human weapons. *Strateuomai* (‘war’) means ‘to engage in battle’ or ‘to serve as a soldier.’ All believers are soldiers in the spiritual war against the kingdom of darkness. A spiritual war, however, cannot be successfully fought with fleshly weapons. To successfully fight the spiritual war requires weapons from the heavenly arsenal. The key to being successful in spiritual warfare is becoming proficient at wielding the sword of the Word of God against the lies people believe. It is impossible to fight error without knowing the truth.

Notwithstanding his gentle, peace-loving nature, Paul, like Christ, will wage warfare if necessary, as he goes on to explain. Conventional warfare, as conducted by the false apostles, would be fought with dazzling flourishes of rhetoric voiced by imposing men whose esoteric preaching was laced with personal accounts of their visions and ecstatic experiences and spiritual exploits. But Paul’s method of warfare was utterly unconventional, ‘not ... according to the flesh.’ He embraced supernatural weapons (cp. Eph. 6:10-20). Passages in 2 Corinthians suggest that the weapon Paul employed was the proclamation of the gospel (e.g. 4:2-6; cp. Rom. 1:16).

As Christian believers, our proper weapons are God-given and spiritual rather than human and material. The weapon of truth and other spiritual weapons are identified in Ephesians 6:10-18. Our union with the Lord Jesus, the careful practice of truth and righteousness, the straightforward declaration of the gospel, the daily experience of salvation, and the active use of the Scriptures and prayer are power spiritual hardware.

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Moreover, the Corinthians (or some of them) were gravely mistaken in their underestimation of the strength of human rebellion against God, something Paul likens to the owner of a powerfully guarded fortress, apparently impenetrable to outside attack. We do well to follow Paul in his realistic estimate of the entrenched power of unbelief and pride in the human mind. Only the right weapons will subdue and capture this proud fortified rebel who places himself over God; those right weapons are the words of the gospel.

These weapons may not seem sharp to men but in fact divine power resides in them (cp. Rom. 1:16). That power is much greater than any show of physical strength, being different in kind, belonging to a different dimension and a superior realm from physical power. That spiritual power demolishes strongholds.

b) Spiritual Warfare (10:4b-5)

Paul stacks up military terms in this passage: ‘waging war’ (v. 3); ‘weapons,’ ‘warfare,’ and ‘strongholds’ (v. 4); ‘destroy arguments and every lofty opinion’ (literally, every high thing,’ i.e., tower) (v. 4); and ‘being ready to punish every disobedience’ (i.e., court-martial) (v. 6). By stacking these terms, Paul portrays his ministry as a mighty conquering army that overcomes every opposing force. Paul’s arsenal of weapons has ‘divine power.’ Paul is not contrasting his weapons with spears and missiles but with the conventional weapons of his opponents: ingenuity, rhetoric, showmanship, splashiness, spiritual pretension, personal charisma—the kind of things Paul disavows.

(1) Destroying Strongholds (10:4b)

...but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

First, they ‘have divine power to destroy strongholds.’ Every fortified city had strongholds, bulwarks that were particularly impregnable. ‘Strongholds’ references the central arguments that fortify his opponents’ message. Paul’s gospel has ‘divine power’ to demolish impregnable arguments.

The term ‘fortresses’ would convey to the New Testament reader the thought of a formidable stronghold. Corinth, like most major cities in Greece, had an acropolis. Located on a mountain near the city, the acropolis was a fortified place into which the inhabitants could retreat when attacked. *Ochurōma* (‘fortresses’) was also used in extrabiblical Greek to refer to a prison. People under siege in a fortress were imprisoned there by the attacking forces. The word was also used to refer to a tomb.

The ‘strongholds,’ whatever visible form they take, are Satan’s. He aids and abets men and women in arguments and pretensions that oppose the true knowledge of God. He encourages deceptive fantasies, proud arguments, and barriers of human pride. In particular, he prompts people to deny the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) Destroying Arguments and Opinions (10:5a)

⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God...

Second, the military metaphor expands to destroying high towers and ramparts. Paul’s language of destruction here is not merely about winning arguments or debates. He means something far more: his weapons destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God. Paul is reference the

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citadels of sin in our lives—every high thing, every haughty thought, every action that forms a barrier to the knowledge of the living God (cp. Rom. 1:16).

Fleshly weapons cannot successfully assault the formidable strongholds in which sinners have entrenched themselves. Paul defines them specifically as ‘speculations’ (*logismos*), a general word referring to any and all human or demonic thoughts, opinions, reasonings, philosophies, theories, psychologies, perspectives, viewpoints, and religions. The ‘fortresses’ in view here are not demons, but ideologies. Paul further defined sinners’ strongholds of ideas as ‘every lofty thing’—that is, any unbiblical system of thought exalted as truth—that is ‘raised up against the knowledge of God.’ There is the key. Spiritual warfare is not a battle with demons. It is a battle for the minds of people who are captive to lies that are exalted in opposition to Scripture.

Paul used the Word of God and came to God in prayer in order to demolish arguments (v. 5). He did so, not only explicitly in messages like the synagogue sermon recorded in Acts 13, but also in his preaching to the Gentiles (cp. Acts 17). The word translated ‘pretension’ means literally ‘that which is lifted up,’ and Paul may be here picturing the high walls of a city. Just as Israel, following God’s instruction, saw the walls of Jericho collapse, so the Christian, using the power spiritual weapons God gives him, may see similar victories, although now in the spiritual realm.

The terms, ‘arguments,’ ‘knowledge of God,’ and ‘every thought,’ suggest ideological enemies. The church has always had these, in Paul’s day, in later generations, and still today. Paul encountered ideological foes, both among the Jews and the Greek philosophers, and he employed arguments, based on the Scriptures and the gospel, to overcome them. There is a place still for Christian apologetics, the godly use of argument in support of the truth.

The phrase ‘knowledge of God’ is not entirely intellectual, for it implies personal acquaintance with God as well as conceptual knowledge of Him, but its use in a verse like this shows there is an intellectual side to the Christian’s knowledge of God. The gospel is a communication of truth designed to give the hearer a clearer understanding of what God is like and what His way with men and women is.

(3) Taking Every Thought Captive (10:5b)

Third, in ancient warfare when strongholds were captured and towers pulled down, the defenders were taken into captivity. Here Paul extends the military language to thought. The word ‘thought’ refers more specifically to the mind as our intellectual center of our being. Most Americans are materialistic, but Christ transforms such thought patterns and installs new paradigms. Could anything be more wonderful than to have every thought experience captive obedience to Christ?

The objective of our warfare is to change how people think, ‘taking every thought’ they have and making it no longer captive to a damning ideology, but ‘captive to the obedience of Christ.’ To do so, the proper weapon is necessary. To assault and throw down the fortresses of false religions, opinions, beliefs, and philosophies, only one weapon will suffice: the truth. *Aichmalōtizō* (‘taking captive’) literally means, ‘to take captive with a spear.’ Using God’s truth, believers smash enemy fortresses to the ground, march the prisoners out, and bring them into subjection (‘obedience’) to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The expressions, ‘take captive,’ and ‘obedient,’ suggest the widespread practice in the ancient world of enslaving defeated enemies, and the first readers of this letter would undoubtedly pick this up from Paul’s language here. At the very least, it means that the Christian preacher is

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concerned that rebels against Christ should be subdued by their voluntary surrender to Him. This shows that faith itself involves obedience. What is remarkable is that it is thoughts that are to be taken captive. As Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 1-4, God's wisdom is utterly different from that of the world, and the Christian, in receiving new life, is given the mind of Christ, a new way of thinking. This shows that wrong thinking is not always due simply to reasoning defects. It can be willful commitment to an ungodly philosophy of life.

Like Paul, we are so to proclaim Jesus Christ as Son of God, as crucified to save sinners, as Lord, and as judge, that 'every thought' of the hearer is captured to obey Christ. Let it be said that preaching, whether based on the New Testament or the Old Testament, whether exegetical or thematic, fails at its most critical point if it does not on every occasion bring the claims of the Lordship of Christ and His saving power into the clearest focus.

c) Spiritual Warning (10:6)

⁶...being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

The incredible military might of Paul's gospel warfare will be unleashed when Paul comes again to Corinth. But Paul does not want to do it along because he knows that church discipline is most effective when the entire church willingly participates. Paul asks the Corinthians to disassociate themselves from his opponents and their fleshly version of Christianity. He hopes that the disassociation will bring some of them to repentance and protect the faithful majority of the Corinthians from their effort. Paul will be bold when he comes, he will be ready, and he will not shirk his responsibility. But how much better if he did not have to take such measures because the church had engaged in discipline.

Paul has moved in his analogy from handling weapons to overcoming strongholds, and now he moves on through taking captives to punishing offenders. He writes of the completion of obedience by the Corinthians as something that still lies in the future. What does this imply? Perhaps that the offenders at the church still retained some sympathizers among the general body of the believers there, and that Paul felt the need for this punishment to wait until all the main body saw the need for disciplining them. He was concerned not only that the right thing should be done but done at the right time. Paul does not say what the punishment of the offenders should be, but it is clear that the church needed to express in some clear way its strong disapproval of what these people were doing.

Paul had the courage and the competence 'to punish all disobedience' at Corinth. He would not allow the purveyors of error to destroy the church. But he also had the discipline to wait until the church's 'obedience' was 'complete.' Paul would not unleash his formidable apostolic power on anyone until each had taken his stand.

B. Paul's Authority (2 Corinthians 10:7-11)

Paul's enemies in Corinth had so effectively read their Greco-Roman culture back into their Christianity that they interpreted the gospel in terms of their values. They boasted in the preacher's presence and bearing; they boasted in rhetorical eloquence; they flashed their résumés and endorsements and letters of commendation; they bragged of their large honoraria; they boasted of their connectedness that inferred greatness by association; and, they compared themselves to one another. As a group, Paul's enemies had become boastful and dismissive of Paul's authority because Paul displayed none of the values that they so treasured. So here Paul

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answers them with a defense of his authority (vv. 7-11) and a charge to embrace a ministry that boasts only in the Lord (vv. 12-18).

1. Paul's Conduct (10:7-8)

a) *Confidence in Apostleship (10:7)*

(1) Look (10:7a)

⁷*Look at what is before your eyes.*

In verse 7 he accuses the Corinthians of making superficial judgments. A reading of First Corinthians might lead us to conclude that they were likely to do that. In that epistle is evidence of thinking not fully captive to Christ. They should have learned the danger of superficial judgments even from the Old Testament (cp. 1 Sam. 16:7).

‘Look at what is before your eyes’ is literally, ‘Look at the things before your face.’ Look at the facts—not at what these false teachers say, but at what all you Corinthians can plainly see. The Corinthians must look carefully at Paul and his teaching. If they do, the truth will become apparent.

Paul commanded the Corinthians to look at what was obvious; to consider the facts and evidence that was right in front of them. If they did, the obvious conclusion was that Paul was a true apostle (cp. 1 Cor. 9:1-2), and his adversaries were the deceivers.

Paul might well have chosen to express his thoughts and perhaps doubts about his critics’ relationship to Christ. Rather, however, than responding in kind, he urges everyone involved to look at obvious facts. When others take a different and sometimes opposite view to ourselves, we should not immediately question their relationship to the Lord Jesus! Unfortunately, that does happen! It occurs sometimes, for example, when Christians discuss subjects like election, baptism, the gifts of the Spirit, and church government.

(2) Remind (10:7b)

If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

The third suggestion was that Paul and his colleagues were suspect members of the church. It seems to have been suggested that they did not genuinely belong to Christ. Doubts were cast upon their regeneration. To be viewed as suspect members of the body of Christ is a particularly sad and damaging suggestion to handle. Those who engaged in such a whispering campaign were judging by the wrong criteria. Those who presumed to make such a judgment displayed dangerous self-confidence about their position and standing.

The expression, ‘belongs to Christ,’ used twice in verse 6, is unlikely simply to mean ‘is a Christian.’ Paul was much more likely to use his favorite expression, ‘in Christ,’ for that. Literally, the Greek phrase here means ‘of Christ’ and, in this context, probably refers to apostleship. He is not at the moment questioning the claim of the false apostles (that will come later), but rather asserting his own right to make such an apostolic claim.

The false apostles asserted that they were emissaries of Jesus Christ. They made arrogant claims of being personally commissioned by Him, having superior knowledge of Him, and wielding greater authority from Him. Paul’s use of the singular ‘if anyone’ may indicate that he was

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singling out the ringleader of the false apostles, who likely was the most vociferous in making such claims. The Greek text indicates a condition assumed to be true; Paul did not have a hypothetical situation in mind, but a real one. The false apostles were actually making these claims.

One unnamed person in particular is ‘confident (overconfident?) that he belongs to Christ,’ that is, that he is a Christian minister. Presumably this person, who was probably not a newly arrived minister but a Corinthian, was a leading critic of Paul. Let him ‘consider again’ that Paul is also a minister; the very church congregation in which he sits is proof of that!

By claiming to be Christ’s, the false apostles were undoubtedly claiming more than just that they were Christians. They also meant that they were the true apostles of Christ. They likely also claimed a transcendent, higher knowledge of Him. While claiming inflated credentials for themselves, the false apostles completely denied Paul’s authenticity. At this point, Paul did not deny their claim; he would do that later in his argument (11:13-15). Here he merely noted that he, too, had a valid claim to belong to Jesus Christ. The issue could not be decided on the subjective basis of personal convictions, either Paul’s or the false apostles’. For that reason, Paul, as noted above, called on the Corinthians to examine the objective evidence.

Paul’s detractors’ claims to be of Christ were not simply claims to be Christians; rather they were elitist assertions because they believe that they were of Christ in some special way. Their claims bore a clubbish, inner-circle attitude. They saw themselves as the spiritually knowledgeable, the *cognoscenti*, and likely conveyed it with a smug tone of voice and corresponding tilt of the head and facial expression; ‘we—are—of Christ.’ Their elitist argument cut two ways: they couldn’t make that subjective claim, and they couldn’t deny Paul the right to make the same claim. Moreover, Paul’s claim was freighted with apostolic precedence. Paul belonged to Christ long before any of the Corinthians, and likely before any of his detractors. ‘Look at what is before your eyes’—namely, authentic apostolic authority.

b) Confidence in Authority (10:8)

⁸*For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.*

In verse 8, he employs the term ‘boast,’ which he has already used (see 1:12), and which he will use extensively in the remainder of the book. A superficial reading of these chapters may give the impression that Paul was an arrogant man, over-concerned about his status. This would be a big mistake. The fact that his apostleship was under attack was very serious. He probably cared little for personal status, but there are times when a servant of Christ is compelled to assert the authority that he has been given by Christ, not for his sake but for the gospel’s. This was such an occasion.

The Apostle Paul had an innate aversion to giving even the slightest appear of boasting about himself. Paul didn’t want to do the sin that he criticized others of doing. However, because of what was at stake, Paul took the risk. We must understand here that Paul’s boast was in the authority of the new-covenant ministry that he had been expounding and celebrating from chapter 2 on. We know this because his words ‘for building you up’ are from the introduction to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:28b). Thus, as a minister of the new covenant of Christ, Paul pictured his ministry as building up the church. So if the Corinthians would think a little about it, they would remember that it was Paul who brought them the gospel, founded the church, and built them up in the faith.

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Unlike the abusive, destructive false apostles, Paul used his authority for building the Corinthians up and not for destroying them. A true man of God will inevitably have a positive impact on the church as he edifies, strengthens, and matures it. On the other hand, false teachers invariably bring discord, disunity, destruction, and even death to the church.

There was plenty of evidence that God had used him to build up the church. What though had the false apostles done? Their ministry had been anything but edifying or encouraging. They had sown discord in the church. Paul's language here regarding building up and not destroying is somewhat reminiscent of God's words to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:10). In saying he is not ashamed of his authority, he uses a word from the same root as he employs in Romans 1:16, where he declares he is not ashamed of the gospel. His use of this word here is quite appropriate, for the apostleship he asserts now and the gospel he describes in that passage in Romans are intimately related to each other.

Against those who wish to apply personal or stylistic tests to him Paul points back to his unique and historic commission by the risen Lord and to the tangible evidence of that in the continuing existence of congregations of Gentile believers. Paul's unusual words 'If I boast somewhat freely ... I will not be ashamed' probably echo the vocabulary of his critics as they seek to promote their ministry against his. Paul is simply stating that the Damascus Road commission is the basis for all that he does in ministry and he is not ashamed of it.

Paul received his authority to be an apostle from the Lord Jesus. He is careful to explain and stress the nature of this authority. It was for the building up of God's people rather than their destruction. Paul was not ashamed of his mandate to build up God's people. Rather he boasted of it with an appropriate kind of boasting.

2. Paul's Character (10:9-11)

a) *Apparently Inconsistent (10:9-10)*

⁹*I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. ¹⁰For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."*

The false apostles perversely tried to assign to Paul the very evils they themselves were both familiar with and guilty of. They charged that he was an abusive leader, who tried to intimidate the Corinthians into submission. The false apostles no doubt pointed to the severe letter (2:3-4) as a prime example of Paul's purported abusive treatment of them. Paul replied to those false allegations by assuring the Corinthians, 'I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.' He was not trying to terrify the Corinthians into obeying him. His goal was to bring them to repentance, so they would experience all the blessings that accompany salvation.

To Paul's critics in Corinth, matters of personal ministry style were uppermost. In their eyes he was a disappointment, wherever he was. His letters they found 'frightening'; they thought he set out to intimidate them. This contrasted strongly with his 'timidity' when face to face (v. 1), which was, to them, a complete let down. He was like some canine guardians, 'all bark and no bite!'

Though they were certainly not impressed with Paul's physical appearance, what the false apostles really meant by 'his personal presence' was his persona, aura, or demeanor. According to them, he lacked the kind of charisma and personal charm that commanded respect and loyalty. They no doubt reinforced that claim by depicting Paul's departure from Corinth after the

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sorrowful visit (2:1) as an ignominious retreat. The apostle, they sneered, was a sniveling, cowering wimp who crawled out of town after being offended. In their mind, that demonstrated that he lacked the power of a great leader. The false teachers intended by this cutting criticism to portray themselves as strong, decisive leaders and Paul as weak and wishy-washy.

In his detractors' estimation, Paul's bodily presence was 'weak.' Paul in person cut a sorry figure and was far from the Greco-Roman ideal. As to Paul's speech, it appears that his performance varied. His eloquence seemed godlike to the dwellers of Lystra (Acts 14:8-12). Nevertheless, he was no match for Apollos's rhetorical style. And poor Eutychus fell asleep during one of Paul's discourses (Acts 20:9).

Not content with ridiculing Paul's personal presence, the false apostles condemned 'his speech' as being 'contemptible.' By that they meant that he lacked the polished oratorical and rhetorical skills so highly prized in Greek culture. It is true that the apostle repudiated eloquent sophistry, though surely capable of it, preferring instead to preach the gospel in simplicity and power (cp. 1 Cor. 2:1-5). The false apostles, on the other hand, used their polished oratory and slick manipulative skills to sway and seduce victims for their own prestige and power.

As we have already seen in verses 1-2, his opponents maintained he was really like two persons: the fierce writer and the meek and mild speaker. Today we know his writings but not his speaking, except for the few sermons and brief addresses recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. These are certainly in tune with his letters.

The accusation of verse 1 is repeated in another form in verse 10. Here Paul's critics suggested that there was no substance to his letters, and that he would never do what he said he would. It is not dissimilar from the accusation referred to in chapter one, where some had said this about his promises (1:17). He simply states that when he and his colleagues do arrive in Corinth, their critics will soon see that what they are in their letters they are when present.

As to Paul's letters, some were scorches. Various, Paul had threatened *destruction* to the destroyer of God's people (1 Cor. 3:16-17) and then *exclusion* from the Kingdom to those who continued in sin (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Paul had also three times called for *judgment* among God's people (1 Cor. 5:1, 2 and 2 Cor. 2:4-11). Therefore, we can be quite sure his tearful letter was a formidable, fiery missive (cp. 2:4; 7:8). Of course, Paul knew all that was being said about his looks and his speech and his letters, as well as the negative connecting of the dots by his opponents leading to the conclusion that he was a spineless little phony.

To that point, Paul had written three letters to the Corinthians; the present letter was the fourth. The complain is that the letters are what he should be in himself, weighty and forceful. But he is not that; far from it. When he does finally come it is an anticlimax. Physically he is 'unimpressive and his speaking' is beneath contempt. When analyzed, this criticism relates to Paul's physical appearance and his 'speaking' or voice. Unfortunately, our only information about Paul's statue is far removed from our period and of uncertain reliability (*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*). Paul may have been unimposing and unimpressive. He may have lacked the high professionalism of the much-vaunted orators of the day. Possibly he suffered from some disability or deformity (cp. 12:7-8). Whatever is being referred to, Paul's critics seized hold of it together with his stubborn preference for supporting himself rather than receiving their patronage (11:7-11) as fatal objections to his genuineness as an apostle. The Greek world admired physical beauty and leisure, while despising imperfection and manual labor. In terms of Greek values,

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Paul the tentmaker, of amateurish speech and doubtful appearance, had little to commend him. To Greek eyes, Paul was very inferior.

Without doubt, these men who judged so superficially (cp. v. 7), will have mistakenly graciousness for weakness. It was not really so much the actual words he used in communicating with the Corinthians to which they objected, but the style of his relationship with them, his gracious demeanor.

b) Always Consistent (10:11)

¹¹*Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.*

The apostle's life was totally consistent; he was the same person 'in deed when present' as he was in the letters he wrote 'when absent.' He was no hypocrite; his integrity was unimpeachable.

And because Paul knew what his enemies were saying, he put them on notice! There was no disjunction between Paul's words and deeds, and there never would be. His character was of one fabric. In truth, Paul's arrogant detractors ought to have been terrified!

Next, he declares that when he came to Corinth, he would act in complete accord with what he was saying here. Let them take note of this warning! It would have been very foolish to say this unless he fully intended to carry out what he had said. We can therefore be sure of his sincerity here.

However, rejoins Paul, let this man reflect on the true situation. In reality Paul's ministry is exactly the same wherever he is – whether 'absent', by letter, or 'present,' in person. What he says in his letters he will be in his actions when he is with them.

C. Paul's Boasting (2 Corinthians 10:12-18)

Paul now goes on a withering offensive against his critics, the visiting 'apostles,' who, it seems, are making comparisons within their group and between their group and Paul. At this point, a new note enters Paul's letter and it remains almost to the end. This new note is irony. It is quite crucial for the reader of this letter to recognize this, for without it the whole tone of what Paul writes in these chapters may be completely misunderstood.

1. Boasting Improperly (10:12)

¹²*Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*

Paul had been dismissed as 'timid' by these opponents (v. 1). Now, with irony, he virtually admits to timidity in one area of things, for the verb translated 'dare' here is one associated with bold, brave action and is translated as 'bold' by the NIV in verse 2. He is saying that he does not have the courage to compare himself to these men. That would be altogether too bold a thing to do! Why? Because of what his opponents are doing. They are proud men and are always blowing their own trumpets and singing their own praises, so that they are creating in the minds of others an altogether exaggerated image of them. Who can really compete with the person who writes false references for himself!

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Paul, assuming a mock humility, shows that he is so unlike those who criticize him from the pinnacle of assumed superiority. They say that he is a coward in person. Well, he has to admit that he does not rise to their awesome courage. He could never dare to place himself on the level of people who bravely sing their own praises and elevate themselves by the folly of mutual comparisons.

The phrase ‘we are not bold’ has the sense of ‘I do not dare.’ The apostle had no intention of replying to ‘those who commend themselves’ by commending himself; he would not dishonor God by stooping to their level (cp. Pr. 26:5). The false apostles’ standard of comparison was subjective, based on such superficial, external factors as personality, charisma, and oratorical skills. They invented their own personal standards for greatness, met them, and then proudly proclaimed their superiority. But those who do such things are foolish and irrational. The self-centered and self-satisfied are always self-deceived.

The folly of the self-appointed apostles is that they had set up their own subjective standards of excellence (training in rhetoric, speaking fees, ecstatic experiences, commendations, awards, and so on) and then judged themselves by conformity to those standards! These false apostles had no desire to measure themselves by the objective criteria used by Paul—allegiance to the gospel, conformity to Christ’s character, and participation in Christ’s sufferings. Thus, as Paul clearly saw, to claim apostolic authority by self-created criteria was to be ‘without understanding.’ The false apostles of Corinth boasted in folly.

In this way, these men were revealing they were no different from the non-Christian teachers in Corinth. Those who instructed others for money, and especially those who taught rhetoric, did a great deal of boasting in their endeavor to attract more fee-paying students to their classes. In fact, modesty in this respect would probably have been interpreted as due to lack of qualification.

The fourth suggestion was that Paul and those who worked with him were second-class servants of the Lord Jesus. It would seem that these detractors were not slow to tell the Corinthians how much better and superior they themselves were. It is one thing to write our CV, but another to write our own references!! Paul’s critics did not hesitate to do both! Paul’s detractors were suggesting, in effect, that there are rankings among Christians. However, God alone is able to judge both churches and individuals and to evaluate the true worth of their work. We should beware of this snare, since it leads us to think as the world thinks. To measure or compare ourselves with others is always unwise.

What does 12b imply? Does it mean that each of these men set himself up as a standard, and then, in conversation with others, pointed them to his own imagined virtues or gifts? You cannot compete with such a person, because he has made his own qualities the standard of judgment. On the other hand, the way Paul expresses his thought here could be an idiomatic way of saying that the men concerned make comparisons simply within their own circle. If they are all false, then the folly of such a course of action is obvious. On either interpretation, these men were certainly not manifesting a proper humility, and this shows the aptness of Paul’s comment that they were not wise.

Paul regards the whole exercise of comparison as futile. Comparison as a rhetorical device was widely practiced among the Greeks. We also seen an example among Jews in the Pharisee’s favorable comparison of himself to the publican, in the parable told by Jesus (Lk. 18:9-14). Since the newcomers were ‘Hebrews’ (11:22), it is likely that their comparisons arose from

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Jewish rather than Greek practice. Paul's references to it, however, were in Greek categories in accordance with the understanding of his readers.

2. Boasting Properly (10:13-16)

a) Past History (10:13-15a)

¹³*But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you.* ¹⁴*For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.* ¹⁵*We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others.*

Paul refers to the missionary concordat made a decade earlier in Jerusalem in which it was agreed that James, Peter, and John should go to the Jews while Paul and Barnabas would take the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9). This agreement established 'the field God has assigned' (v. 13) to the two missionary enterprises. The Greek word *kanōn*, translated 'limits' (vv. 13, 15) and 'field' (v. 16) originally applied to a carefully specified area in which local communities were obliged to provide donkeys and carts as public transport for Roman officials who were passing through.

Paul introduces the idea of divinely established limits for Christian work. In verse 13, the NIV has rendered the Greek word *kanōn* as 'field.' The word was sometimes used in this sense with reference to a limited sphere of work. Its basic sense, however, is 'measuring rod,' and it came to be used regularly of a norm or standard. In the meeting with James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:1-10), these leaders, recognizing the good work Paul and Barnabas had done among the Gentiles and the evidence that the grace of God was at work through them in that sphere of service, agreed with them on a division of labor. This was a comity agreement, in which these leaders committed themselves to the evangelization of the Jews, leaving Gentile evangelization to Paul and Barnabas. If Paul's opponents at Corinth had come down from Judea, and perhaps purported to know or even to have been sent by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, they were in fact showing that they were charlatans by the very fact that they did not recognize this comity.

In contrast with their ambitions pretensions, he was content to remain 'within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to' him. He did not chafe under his God-ordained limits; he did not want to have a bigger or more important ministry than God intended for him. Paul was perfectly content with the sphere of ministry God had marked out for him. He focused on excellence rather than success; on the quality of his ministry rather than its size; on the depth of his ministry rather than its breadth. The false apostles' claims that Paul had overstepped his bounds were without foundation, since God had ordained his sphere of ministry 'to reach even as far as' Corinth. For the Corinthians to argue otherwise was to saw off the very branch on which they were standing. To deny Paul's legitimacy as an apostle was to deny the legitimacy of their salvation and their church.

For Paul there was a proper sphere for boasting—namely, the divinely given areas of service. Paul confined his boasting to the geography of his own apostolic ministry, which, by the way, included Corinth! The place where he did his pioneer evangelism and church planning defined for Paul the 'area of influence' that God had given him. Paul rejoiced when others built upon his apostolic foundation, as he explained in his initial letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:10). However, the false apostles were not content to build on Paul's foundation. They boasted that any spiritual vitality in Corinth was due to *their* ministry, not Paul's.

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Why was Paul so concerned about this? After all, we see from Philippians 1:12-18 that there were circumstances when he rejoiced that others were working in his ‘patch.’ Not only so, but in dealing with the party spirit at Corinth, Paul showed no concern about the influence of Apollos, recognizing him to be a true servant of God. These two examples show that Paul’s real concern was not to protect his sphere of service and to insist that it was his own private preserve. If the genuine gospel was being preached and edifying teaching being given, this gladdened his heart. This comity arrangement was simply a practical one to facilitate the onward progress of the gospel, not a means of safeguarding somebody’s personal ‘empire.’ The situation at Corinth was different, however, for the issue was not work being done by a true servant of God, like Apollos, but by opponents who were corrupting the gospel in some way. They were not preaching it faithfully nor building true Christian teaching on it, and this was serious.

Not only was Corinth within the field God had assigned to Paul, but he had actually entered that part of the field, as of course they well knew (v. 14). It was he who had first preached the gospel of Christ in their city, so that, humanly speaking, the Corinthian believers owed their salvation to the work done by him and the members of his evangelistic team. Paul says he would not take a leaf out of his opponents’ book and lay claim to work he had not done (v. 15a). They must have been saying that they had done the real work at Corinth, not by Paul. Perhaps they had claimed that the work done in the hearts of the Corinthians had to be supplemented by their own ministry to perfect it. If so, this gives them a similarity to the heretics in Galatia.

The false apostles invented a fanciful litany of their supposed achievements. Unlike Paul, they were not hesitant to boast ‘in other men’s labors.’ Having no legitimate accomplishments of their own, they were eager to take credit for those of others. But in reality, they had made no contribution to the Corinthians’ spiritual growth, because they were not true servants of God.

The only judgment we may really give about our own work and service is in terms of any sphere or task to which God has plain called us. The apostle knew that there was no uncertainty about the Lord’s call to him to preach the gospel to the Corinthians (cp. Acts 18:9-10).

Here then, is a principle modern churches would do well to keep in mind. We are not meant to be in competition with each other. If God blesses a neighboring church’s evangelistic endeavor, this should bring joy to our hearts.

b) Future Hope (10:15b-16)

But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence.

It seems as though, in the way the Holy Spirit guided the early church to a strategy of evangelism, certain cities and the churches established in them came to be seen as key centers from which the gospel might be taken to other areas. Jerusalem, where the gospel was first preached (Acts 2), and Antioch, from which all three of Paul’s missionary journeys began (Acts 13:1-3; 15:35-41; 18:23) are obvious examples of this. It seems likely too that six of the seven churches in the province of Asia mentioned in Revelation 1-3 were evangelized from the other, the church at Ephesus.

It certainly looks as if Paul hoped the Corinthian church would make a good base for further advance. A glance at its position on the map shows that, in addition to its key position as a maritime trading center, it was the gateway to southern Greece. Few places in the eastern

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Mediterranean were better situated to serve as an evangelistic center. No doubt Paul was concerned that the church there might have become so disaffected towards him and his work that it could not furnish such a base.

Paul's plan and hope was that as the Corinthians' faith grew, he would be, within his sphere, 'enlarged even more' by them. His goal was, with their assistance, 'to preach the gospel even to regions beyond' Corinth. That was not possible at the time, however, because of the Corinthians' sin, immaturity, and rebellion. It would have to wait until they completely rejected the false apostles and returned to sound doctrine and holy living.

Because he was the apostle to the Gentiles, it was right for him to seek to meet the needs of other areas further on. Whether he was thinking of southern Greece or of Italy or even further afield we do not know, although we do know from Romans 15:24 that within a few months he was thinking about Spain. The plan set out in Romans 15 was probably already forming in his mind, so that he would be thinking in terms of westward evangelization.

The great apostle always had his eyes on the west, toward Rome's Seven Hills, to 'castles rising in Spain,' to 'spires away on the world's rim,' as poets have put it (cp. Rom. 15:24). The apostle hoped that the Corinthians' growth in faith, evidence by their rejection of his detractors (cp. 6:14-7:1) and their participation in the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (ch. 8-9), would allow him to go on westward with his mission to the Gentiles. He knew that he could not go until the faith of the Corinthians was stabilized.

Their hope was that God's work in and through the Corinthians would continue and thus enlarge their sphere of activity as they worked from Corinth to surrounding areas.

3. Boasting Principle (10:17-18)

a) Boasting (10:17)

¹⁷“*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*”

There is only one proper boast and principle for boasting: 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' Here Paul references Jeremiah 9:23-24, which is a call to acknowledge God for all His gracious acts and providence. What is striking, though, is that Paul gives us a shorthand version that substitutes 'in the Lord' for Jeremiah's list of what the Lord provides. This is because God is known for what He does.

Paul hastens to draw attention to the danger of human boasting (v. 17). This is an Old Testament principle (Jer. 9:23-24), and one with which Paul's first readers were well acquainted from his earlier letter (1 Cor. 1:31).

This essential truth, found throughout Scriptures, is a stinging rebuke to all self-glorying false teachers (Jer. 9:23-4; cp. Ps. 20:7; 34:2; 1 Cor. 1:31; Rom. 15:17-18; Gal. 6:14).

Paul was a highly God-centered and Christ-centered man. To him the most unhappy thing about the boasting of the false apostles at Corinth was not that they denigrated his own work there, but that they drew glory away from God, the ultimate Evangelist and Pastor. This was far more serious than any devaluing of work done by him or any other Christian worker. It is God alone whom must have the glory. Just as he had done in 1 Corinthians 1:31, Paul quotes here from Jeremiah 9:24. This present quotation is significant because of its context in Jeremiah, for in the first half of the chapter the prophet is writing about his adversaries among the people of Israel, an

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obvious parallel to the situation in which Paul found himself in relation to his opponents in the Corinthian church.

b) Commending (10:18)

¹⁸*For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

In Paul's view, it is pointless to authenticate or disqualify ministries on the basis of comparison of self-commendation. 'It is not the one who commends himself who is approved,' he observes, 'but the one whom the Lord commends.' What ultimately matters is God's approval.

False teachers are totally focused on the here and now, as they pursue fame, accolades, notoriety, prestige, wealth, and power. But true servants of Christ look toward their heavenly reward. They are not men pleasers; whether the world condemns or commends them is of no particular significance in the long run. What matters is 'whom the Lord commends.'

The sentiment of verse 18 is obvious but it needed saying. The most basic things can be overlooked when we start moving along the wrong track in the Christian life, and a reminder of these basics never does any harm.

The church today faces the same challenge that it always has, to sort out the true preachers from the false deceivers. The sad story of the Corinthian church's gullibility has been repeated throughout history, as undiscerning believers have fallen for the lies of false teachers. As a result, churches, educational institutions, and denominations throughout the world have abandoned biblical truth. The Corinthians should have been able to tell the difference between true and false spiritual leaders, and so should today's church.

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-15.