

2 Corinthians 10

^{10:1} By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.

Paul is down to the last few chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians. He has finished his encouragement regarding giving to the poor in Jerusalem. In the following verses, Paul will defend his pedigree as a true apostle of Christ.

If Paul had walked with Christ during His ministry on earth, there would be no doubt that Paul was an apostle. We have seen it time and again, that members of some of the churches questioned whether or not Paul is a true apostle. He spent the first two chapters of his letter to the Galatians trying to dispel any arguments that he was not an apostle. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he did the same thing. So what is the difference between an apostle and a disciple? A disciple is a follower or student of Jesus or His teachings but an apostle is one commissioned by God/Jesus. When did the 12 apostles get their commission from Jesus? Pentecost, Acts 2:1-4. When did Paul get his commission from Jesus? Road to Damascus.

In verse 1, Paul uses terms like “humility and gentleness”, as well as “timid”. These words show the change in Paul when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. Before his meeting with Jesus, Paul would most likely not have used such words. Evidently some of the Corinthian Christians said that Paul behaved differently in person than he did in his first letter. In person he was “timid” but in his letter he let them have it and he wrote “boldly”.

I believe that letters, emails or texts are ok for providing information. “We had a great time on vacation.” “We bought 4 pairs of shoes.” It is very difficult to read the writer’s emotions or body language in written communication. People do tend to write more boldly than they are willing to speak in person, which can get them into trouble. In both of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul has said that whatever you do or say, do it with love. 1 Corinthians 16:14 says, “*Do everything in love.*” (NIV) This is the same feeling that you get in “*the humility and gentleness of Christ*”.

In verse 2, Paul says that when he comes to Corinth, hopefully he doesn’t have to be “bold”. It would be difficult to do everything in love when the Corinthian Christians are not listening or accepting what he is teaching. Again, it is not everyone in the church that is causing the problems. It was believed to be a vocal minority.

“Paul hopes that the Corinthians will change their attitude towards him and his credentials as an apostle so that he may come to them in gentleness, not severity.” (Guzik)

At the end of verse 2, Paul says that there are some in the Corinthian church that think Paul and his mission team “*act from human motives*” (NLT) or “*walked according to the flesh.*” (NASB) This

makes me think of Christians that live as Christians on Sunday but like nonbelievers the rest of the week. If Paul is on a mission for Jesus and collecting no pay for himself, as well as enduring all sorts of hostility, how can he not be fully committed, 24/7/365.

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

In verse 3, Paul says that “*we walk in the flesh*” (NASB) or “*we live in this world*”. Since we are all human beings then that is the only way that we can walk. He concludes this verse with “*we do not wage war as the world does.*” This verse says the same thing that he told the Ephesians. Ephesians 6:12 says, “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*”

We may be walking as mere mortals but we are battling Satan and his minions. If we battle as mortals then we will fail. Defeating Satan requires spiritual weapons or as the NLT says, “*We use God’s mighty weapons*”.

At the end of verse 4 (NASB), Paul says that God’s mighty weapons are “*divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*” Read Ephesians 6:10-18. How do we get this divine power that can “demolish strongholds”? Put on the full armor of God.

“The Corinthian Christians tended to rely on and admire carnal weapons for the Christian battle:

- Instead of the belt of truth, they fought with manipulation.
- Instead of the breastplate of righteousness, they fought with the image of success.
- Instead of the shoes of the gospel, they fought with smooth words.
- Instead of the shield of faith, they fought with the perception of power.
- Instead of the helmet of salvation, they fought with lording over authority.
- Instead of the sword of the Spirit, they fought with human schemes and programs.” (Guzik)

We use the full armor of God which are attributes of Jesus to (verses 5-6 NASB):

- a. Destroy speculations and every lofty thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.
- b. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.
- c. We will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

⁷ You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸ So even if I boast somewhat freely

about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.

In verse 7, Paul has realized that those causing problems in the Corinthian church are judging things by outward appearances. They were saying that Paul was bold when he was writing to them but he was ‘timid’ or ‘meek’ when he was with them. He finishes verse 7 by saying, on the outside he may appear weak but they should consider that Paul and his team “*belong to Christ just as much as they do*”.

“But they knew Paul only on an outward, surface level. The people who criticized Paul and said that there were “two Pauls” — one reflected in his letters and one evident in person — really didn’t know Paul except on a surface level.” (Guzik)

1 Samuel records when the prophet Samuel went to anoint David as king. In verse 7, God said to Samuel, “*Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*” (NIV)

In verse 8, Paul tells them that he does not want to boast about any authority that Jesus gave him. Paul was humbled by his experience on the road to Damascus. Do you remember the Paul that put Christians to death because he was so confident that he was right? Now he does not want to boast about his authority that he knows he has been given by Jesus. He is a changed man. The authority given to him by Jesus was given to Paul to edify or build up those that he was teaching. It was not given for humbling or tearing them down. In Paul’s mind, he was using his authority properly, so he had nothing to be ashamed of.

⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” ¹¹ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.

In our study of Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Christians, I have said several times that Paul isn’t pulling any punches or holding back. In verse 9, Paul says that he is not trying to frighten them with what he is putting in his letters.

He continues in verse 10 with what they are saying about his first letter. They called it “weighty and forceful” but his personal presence is weak or unimpressive and his speech is contemptible or worthless (NLT). Some theologians believe that Paul may have been sick when he was in Corinth. Whether he was sick or not, being thought weak would not have bothered Paul.

In a couple of chapters Paul will write about a thorn in his flesh that he prayed for God to take it away. Paul says, “*But he (Jesus) said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made*

perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV)

The human way is to attack the person when you cannot attack his message. As Paul said in verse 7 of this chapter, there are some Corinthians that are attacking him based on his physical appearance. Paul may be physically weak but through his faith in Jesus, he is spiritually strong. How could you look at all that Paul endured or accomplished for “Christ’s sake” and think him weak?

In verse 11, Paul is saying that whether we are telling you in person or in a letter, we are the same people and it should be treated the same way. Paul says that he can be as tough in person as he was in his letters, if that is what they want. Sometimes we think that in order to show love to someone we must be weak or humbled around them but there are times when tough love is necessary. We do it for their own good.

¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

In this verse, Paul blasts his critics. He says that his critics should not make themselves the standard by which they measure others or themselves. I would imagine that if you are the standard, then you would measure up pretty well and others might not measure up too well. This verse makes me think of Matthew 7:1-3. Jesus said, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

Paul wrote about this same type of thinking in Romans 12:3. He said, *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”* Paul says that if you think that you should be the standard then you are ignorant or not wise. It is not the way that Jesus thought nor is it the way that God wants you to think.

¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. ¹⁴ We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ.

In verse 13, Paul says that when it comes to boasting, Paul will not go beyond what he considers “proper limits”. When sharing the Gospel message with others, it is best to speak about how God changed your life. That is what Paul is talking about. Those that preach the prosperity Gospel go beyond “proper limits”. Paul’s sphere of influence was assigned by God. Paul followed God’s

moving and every church that he planted was part of God's plan. Acts 16:6-10 gives an example of God's leading. Paul moved as he was led by the Holy Spirit. It was not by chance that Paul ended up in Corinth. It was by the leading of the Holy Spirit. He counted the church in Corinth part of his sphere of influence. He could boast about what God had done in that church because God had worked through him to plant it.

In verse 14, Paul says that it would not be a stretch for him and his team to claim authority over the Corinthian church because Paul and his team were the first ones to share the Gospel message of Jesus in Corinth.

¹⁵ Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, ¹⁶ so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory.

In verse 15, Paul says that they claim credit for what they have done. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 3:6-9), Paul says that he "*planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.*" Paul was great at planting churches and he would follow up to make sure things were going well. Growth of the church was up to God and those that made up to the church. He could only claim credit for planting and checking on the church.

Consider that Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half and then moved on to other churches. That was the goal of Paul's ministry. It was not to stay longer and become a part of the church. If the church thrived and grew, it was up to God working through the members of the church. Paul did not want to babysit the church after he planted it. He wanted to share the Gospel with as many people as he could, it was purely evangelistic. Paul clearly does not want to take credit for work done by others. He is making a point of clarifying this issue because that is exactly what his critics are doing or what they are accusing him of.

¹⁷ But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

In the verse 17, Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:24. His ministry was all about praising God and how He changed Paul's life. After his encounter with Jesus, Paul's life was changed. He was humbled by it. He considered anything that he did insignificant compared to what God had done. He didn't preach the saving grace of Paul, he preached the saving grace of Jesus as the Messiah.

Verse 18 in the NLT says, "*When people commend themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them.*" or "*Well done, my good and faithful servant.*" (Matthew 25:21)

When it comes to being commended or praised by others, the Bible says:

- d. Proverbs 27:2 – *“Let someone else praise you, not your own mouth— a stranger, not your own lips.”*
- e. Colossians 3:23 – *“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”*
- f. John 5:44 – Jesus said, *“How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”*
- g. Matthew 6:1 – Jesus said, *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*
- h. *Matthew 6:19-21* – Jesus said, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*