

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Introduction

1. As we learned at the end of last year when we studied the first 9 chapters of 2nd Corinthians, this letter is quite different than most of Paul's letters:
 - a. Most of Paul's letters were written to address a specific (or multiple) theological, doctrinal or behavioral issues so they generally open with a theological discussion followed by a practical section
 - b. 2nd Corinthians has two very different purposes, however:
 - 1) Paul's first purpose is to defend himself against the false charges of so-called super apostles (which is the primary focus of chapters 1-9)
 - 2) His second purpose is to prepare them for his upcoming visit (which is the primary focus of chapters 10-13)
2. This second purpose is extremely important because of some trouble Paul faced on his previous (2nd visit):
 - a. His second visit is referred to as the "painful" visit
 - b. Paul made the unexpected trip to deal with some grave sin issues within the church, but when he arrived he faced significant opposition
 - c. Apparently, some false apostles had infiltrated the church, began to lead the Corinthians astray, and drove a wedge between Paul and the Corinthians through their false accusations against Paul
 - d. Rather than face another painful visit, Paul sent a letter—referred to as the "severe"—to address some of the lingering issues, but that letter appears to have caused further opposition and hurt feelings among the Corinthians (it caused "sorrow" as Paul stated)
3. Now that Paul is preparing for his third trip to Corinth, he calls on them to be ready for his arrival so the events of the last trip are not repeated
4. As we examine Paul's words today we will focus on what Paul can teach us about the traits of true leadership

A. The first trait is that leaders lead with grace and humility (READ 10:1-6)

1. The first thing we notice about this section is the way in which Paul pleads with the Corinthians to be ready for his visit (1): **"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."**
 - a. The NASB uses the word "**urge**"; other translations use words like "**appeal**", "**entreat**" and "**plead**"
 - b. The Greek word means to make an earnest appeal for something
 - c. Rather than demand something, Paul appeals to them and does so like Jesus Christ Himself would... "**by the meekness and gentleness of Christ**"
 - 1) The first word refers to gentleness in attitude and behavior
 - 2) The second implies a quality of gracious forbearance
2. The second thing we notice is that the mood of the visit will be determined specifically by the Corinthians:

- a. Paul's hope is that when he arrived, he would not be forced to deal with them harshly as he expected he might have to do with some (2): **"I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh."**
 - 1) Paul suspected that he was going to have to confront the false apostles who were accusing him of **"walking according to the flesh"** (2b)—possibly that Paul was operating under worldly motivations or authority rather than in Christ
 - 2) Paul was prepared to deal with...and punish...such people (READ 3-6):
 - a) They accused Paul of walking **"according"** to the flesh (e.g. driven, motivated by)
 - b) However, while Paul walked **"in"** the flesh (e.g. he was human), he didn't **"war according to the flesh"** (3; e.g. rely upon human or worldly means) when confronting such men
 - c) Instead, Paul relied upon **"divinely powerful"** weapons which can bring down **"fortresses"** and destroy false **"speculations"** and any other **"lofty thing"** that is contrary to the **"knowledge of God"** (4)
 - d) These weapons **"take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"** (5)
 - e) Paul doesn't specifically state what these weapons are but the context clearly suggest that Paul is referring to spiritual arguments based on sound doctrine and a true knowledge of God
 - f) And, Paul was more than ready to exercise his authority in punishing the false apostles (the word for punish here means to give one what he rightly deserves)

- b. So, while Paul expected...and was fully prepared...to have to confront the false apostles, he was hoping for better things when it came to the rest of his readers:
 - 1) On his last visit, some were controlled by **"strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances"** (12:20)
 - 2) Some were engaged in sexual immorality and had refused to repent (12:21)
 - 3) Paul was giving them an opportunity to correct these things before his upcoming visit so they might avoid another painful visit
 - 4) Look at 13:10: **"For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down."**

- c. Two things we can take away from this ourselves:
 - 1) First, disobedience and sin should always be addressed first by appealing with the **"meekness and gentleness of Christ"**, rather than punishment
 - a) The goal, as Paul wrote above, should be to build up not tear down
 - b) The goal should be restoration (Galatians 6:1)
 - c) This is exactly how Paul instructed Timothy in handling the false teachers in Ephesus (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

 - 2) Second, when confronting such things we should rely on spiritual weapons—like spiritual arguments, prayer and reliance upon God—rather than worldly authority, power, influence or schemes

B. A second trait is that leaders understand the true nature of authority (READ 10:7-11)

1. There are two ways to translate the beginning of v. 7:

- a. As an indicative or statement of fact: **“You are looking at things as they are outwardly”** (NASB, NET) or **“You are judging by appearances”** (NIV)—if this is Paul’s intent then he is rebuking them for evaluating him and his authority based on worldly or outward appearances and ultimately determining that he is unworthy of their respect (something the false apostles were apparently suggesting)
 - b. As an imperative or a command: **“Look at what is before your eyes”** (ESV) or **“Look at what is obvious”** (CSB17)—if this is Paul’s intent, then he is calling on them to open their eyes and recognize the obvious, that he is indeed a true apostles and has the authority of Christ
 - c. Both fit the context, and it’s not critical to determine which is most likely, because both result in a stiff rebuke and call to recognize Paul’s authority in Christ
2. Paul defends the authority he has in Christ and there are some nuggets of truth here for anyone who desires to be a leader in the body of Christ (7b-11):
- a. Paul recognized the SOURCE of authority—his relationship in Jesus Christ (7b) **“If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.”** – in other words, we have no authority when it comes to the Church or it’s people aside from our relationship with Jesus Christ
 - b. Paul recognized the PLURALITY of authority: (8): **“For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority...”**
 - 1) Did you notice that Paul refers to **“our”** authority and not **“my”** authority?
 - 2) In this letter, **“our”** refers to Paul, Timothy and Titus who also ministered to the Corinthians
 - 3) Paul understood the authority the Lord had granted to him as an apostle (13:10), but he also recognized this authority wasn’t exclusive, but shared with others
 - 4) This is why Paul and his companions established elders (plural) in every church, and not a single church leader
 - 5) There are far too many voices in the church today who establish themselves as
 - c. Paul recognized the PURPOSE of authority (8b): **“which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you...”**
 - 1) False leaders are always presented in the Bible as arrogant, proud, self-serving, divisive deceivers who destroy the body for their own personal gain
 - 2) However, God grants authority to leaders for one purpose—the building up of the body of Christ—in other words, it’s never about the individual leader or his personal power or gain, but always about serving and building up the Body of Christ
 - d. Paul understood the true nature of authority and exercised his authority in line with these principles; for that reason he refused to allow anyone to put him to shame (8c): **“I will not be put to shame,”**:
 - 1) Apparently, the false apostles had claimed that Paul was trying to bully the Corinthians through fear-mongering (9): **“For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.”**
 - 2) They claimed that Paul relied on letters because in person he was weak and unimpressive (10): **“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”**
 - 3) Paul assured them, however, that there was no disparity between who he was in his letters and who he was in person (11): **“Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”**

- e. In the past few years we've seen some stark examples of Christian leaders who didn't live by these principles, and had a very different public persona to their private one (Marc Driscoll and James MacDonald are just two recent examples of leaders who seriously abused the authority granted to them by the Lord and ultimately experienced discipline and shame)

C. A third trait is that leaders do not boast beyond the measure to which God has given them (READ 10:12-18)

- 1. Many leaders are not content to minister within the measure or sphere to which God has assigned them:
 - a. They are always searching for something bigger and better
 - b. They want more authority, more influence, more popularity, etc. and when they get it they boast about what they've accomplished—this is one of the problems I see with the current mega-church, multi-campus movement in America
 - c. This was the case with the false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian churches:
 - 1) They had no former association with or ministry to the Corinthians; they were outsiders
 - 2) They built their so-called ministries on the labor of others like Paul (in the famous words or Barack Obama, "You didn't build that!")
 - 3) They were able to infiltrate the churches because they came with recommendations from others
 - 4) However, these recommendations were worthless (12): **"For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding."** (notice how many times "themselves" appears)
- 2. Paul refers to what they were doing as **"boasting beyond measure"** and it was something he refused to do himself:
 - a. He was content to boast only within the sphere to which God had apportioned him, which in this context is the Corinthian churches (13) **"within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you"**
 - b. He wasn't interested in boasting in or encroaching upon someone else's sphere or taking credit for another man's work (14-15a): **"For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors,"**
 - c. Rather, he was interested in only one thing—that as the Corinthians grew in their faith so would his ministry to preach the Gospel beyond Corinth (15b-16): **"but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, 16 so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another."**

D. A fourth trait is that leaders do not boast not in themselves, but in the Lord (17-18)

- 1. Paul concludes this section with a simple yet profound statement (17): **"But He who boasts is to boast in the Lord."**

- a. This is the second time Paul uses this exact statement and it's a reference to Jeremiah 9:23-24 where God warned the Israelites not to boast in their own wisdom, might or riches, but only in their understanding and knowledge of God
 - b. The first time he used it was in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and the context is similar because he was dealing with the Corinthian's propensity to elevate their favorite teachers above others and follow them in an almost cult-like fashion
 - c. Here, Paul is dealing with false apostles who are boasting in themselves to build their followings
2. On the other hand, the only thing we ever see Paul boast about is his weaknesses and what God did through them! (that will come later in chapters 11-12)
 3. The reason is because Paul understood a very simple truth (18): **"For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends."**
 4. Leaders boast only in the Lord because they understand that self-approval is meaningless and that it is only the Lord that commends.