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**A1404 – January 26, 2014 – 2 Corinthians 10:7-18**  
**Ministering For God's Approval**

Last time we started the third section of 2 Corinthians. In this section Paul gives Evidence of His Apostleship. As such it is intensely interested in the branch of theology known as apologetics or “defending the faith.” Paul is defending here that he is indeed an apostle against the claims of the false apostles who were vying for the hearts of the Corinthians. A rejection of Paul’s apostleship and acceptance of the apostleship of these false brethren would be detrimental spiritually since a rejection of Paul would constitute a rejection of Paul’s inspired writings which are the very word of God.

Therefore in verse 1 Paul urged them and in verse 2 he asked them that when he was present at his next visit he did not have to exercise boldness but he also warned that he would be very courageous if necessary. His opponents accused him of walking according to the flesh but Paul would refute them powerfully if necessary. We found that this accusation was a judgment based on the standards of Greek philosophy. His opponents, though Jewish, were thoroughly Hellenized or infected with strains of Greek thought and culture. Therefore they exalted certain characteristics such as a strong public appearance, excellent rhetorical ability, etc... Paul in verse 1 exalts two qualities that were deprecated by the Greeks; he urged them with meekness and gentleness. He hoped that his opponents at Corinth would realize that though these characteristics were deprecated by the Greeks they were embodied in their savior, Jesus Christ. Paul was not walking according to the flesh; Paul was walking according to Christ.

But he threatened that even though meek and gentle he would exercise a very powerful presence if need be when he arrived. Brandishing his weapons beforehand, in verse 3 he says that although he is in the flesh, he does not wage war according to the flesh. The weapons of the flesh are one’s pedigree, being from the right family, one’s education, attending the proper educational

institutions and one's social and political associations, being a part of the right organizations. Though Paul could have put confidence in these fleshly weapons he rejected them for something far superior. In verse 4 his weapons were divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses, namely, the word of God which is able to destroy all human reasoning. In verse 5 these human reasonings arrogantly raise themselves up against the knowledge of God but the word of God totally destroys them. Paul thus sought to take every intellectual thought a prisoner of war to the obedience of Christ. This way, no matter the topic of conversation Paul was able to put his opponents to the task of giving a philosophical justification for that topic of discussion from within their own worldview. When this failed he was ready to give the answer from within the Christian worldview. That's how Paul did apologetics. It has a negative side; demolishing the opposition; and it has a positive side; giving the answer. In verse 6, Paul was ready to come and use these weapons if need be. But he didn't want to. In any case first they should make a clean cut with the false teachers; then Paul would come and if any remained in disobedience Paul would punish them.

I want to point out that Paul would not give up on the Corinthians. He wanted them so much to be in love with Christ that he continued to hound them to accept his apostleship. This is what Paul is getting at in 11:2, his desire for them to be so in love with Jesus Christ. To be in love with Christ is to be in subjection to the apostolic writings. It is impossible to belittle the apostolic writings and love Jesus. To belittle the apostolic writings is to hate Jesus. How flawed and weak it is today to hear people say they love Jesus but belittle the apostolic writings. To deprecate the word of God is a strategy of an anti-Christ. These are the ones Christ, Paul and John warn us against, those who appear as sheep on the outside but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. They instruct us to stand on alert and watch for them. We do this by taking every thought captive so we can detect lies and deceit and demolish strongholds. Paul was so concerned that the Corinthians would be swept aside by false teachers. As you can tell Paul had a high concern for the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians and in order to remain in a state of readiness it was vital that they accept Paul as an apostle and his writings as having apostolic authority.

Today we'd say it is just as important for believers to accept the apostle's writings as the authority in order to detect and reject false teaching and be

conformed to the image of Christ.

A question we all have to ask is “What is my authority?” Is it a special experience I had in my religious past? Is it my human reasoning abilities? Or is it the Scripture which instructs me how to interpret my experience and how to use my reason? Ultimately there is only one authority. It is The Scriptures alone. The Reformers cried “Sola scriptura” because any other authority brought in alongside the Scripture ultimately deprecates the Scripture and becomes ultimate. Scripture alone speaks with authority because it is the voice of God almighty. So it is vital to accept the authority of the Scriptures.

Now in verses 7ff Paul is going to do something a little bit strange. He’s going to engage in a little foolishness. What I mean is what Paul says in 11:1, that he is going to and has been already engaging in a little foolishness. What he means is the defense of his apostleship that he is giving here is stooping to the level of foolishness in a sense. I take it that what he means is that he is putting himself on the same level as his opponents and arguing on their basis. I think the reason Paul does this is to say that even on their terms I’m equal to if not superior to my opponents, so follow me, not them. By doing this he’s not endorsing their basis of argument. Instead he’s saying that even on their foolish basis he’s equal if not superior to his opponents. So even accepting his opponent’s terms of the argument Paul gets the better of them. And throughout this section he will subtly make jabs at them while defending himself. So he’s in a conflict, so to speak, and it’s a conflict that is in a sense foolishness, so bear with Paul while he engages in this foolishness.

Now, in verse 7 he begins by leveling a judgment on the Corinthians who have aligned themselves with Paul’s opponents. **You are looking at things as they are outwardly.** The word **outwardly** refers to the things on the surface. You are looking at things only as they are “on the surface.” How many times have you bought something because it looked good on the surface? Maybe it was a car? It looked good but once you got into the guts of the thing it was a lemon? Maybe it was the person you married? They looked good on the outside but then the inside came out? Maybe it was a theory? It sounded good on the surface but later it turned out to be full of holes. That’s looking at things on the surface. That’s how some of these Corinthians were looking at things. They were impressed with the surface appearance of Paul’s opponents. This was a Greek way of looking at things. The Greeks prided

themselves in looking good on the surface. They were impressed with a public appearance of boldness; they were impressed with rhetorical technique and charm. Things of substance, actual content they were not impressed with. Their evaluation of things was according to popular culture and not the things that really mattered. That's how many in the church today look at things. They look at how many people attend a church; they look at how the people dress; they look at the building; they look at the band; they look at whether the pastor dresses hip or not; they are concerned whether there are pews or stadium seating; etc...etc...etc...Paul is condemning that outlook right here. **You are looking at things as they are** on the surface. Grow up. Get some depth.

But Paul, nevertheless, as we said, is going to evaluate things on this shallow level for just a moment. And he's saying in 11:1, bear with me for a moment. He says in verse 7, **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.** The expression **that he is Christ's** is a technical phrase for one that belongs to Christ in a special sense. Contextually this sense is as an apostle. He was boasting about being Christ's apostle. This is a significant boast because an apostle is "one sent on behalf of and in the authority of the sender." If, for example, a king sent a messenger then the messenger delivered the message in the authority of the king. To disobey the messenger would be to disobey the king. To strike down a king's messenger was an act of war against the king himself! So to claim to be an apostle of Christ is to claim to be sent on behalf of Christ and in the authority of Christ. One of Paul's opponents was exerting this apostolic authority over the Corinthians. And it sounds as if he was over-exerting his authority. We may imagine that he claimed apostleship every other sentence. This would be like a member of the law enforcement always using his full authority to get people to conform. After a while it gets quite old and he could be much more effective if he just used some tact. This man was like those types of law enforcement officers. He was over-exerting his authority in order to get them to obey him. Paul did not do that; he exercised much more tact. Even in this letter, when he had opportunity to exert his apostolic authority and command the Corinthians to fulfill their pledge to give to the saints at Jerusalem, instead he motivated them to give by reminding them of the Macedonians and Christ as examples of grace giving. So Paul had the apostolic authority to command them to give but he very tactfully used other methods. His argument here is simply that,

**just as his opponent is an apostle of Christ, so also is he.** So he was not in any way inferior to this opponent. As far as apostolic authority goes Paul had authority.

Now I do find it interesting that Paul does not reject that this man is an apostle. Paul may have been hesitant to because he did not know all the apostles. There were literally hundreds of apostles during the early church time. The reason was because there were two categories of apostles; the Twelve and the Others. The Others were those who had only seen the resurrected Christ. Paul was of this second category when he said in 1 Cor 9:1, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" He had seen him on the Damascus Road. So Paul was an apostle of the second category. Others were also apostles of the second category. 1 Cor 15 highlights that Christ appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time. Since these 500 brethren saw the resurrected Lord then they too were apostles of the second category. Certainly Paul did not know them all, perhaps this man was one of the 500 and was therefore an apostle. To be of the category of the Twelve one had stricter requirements. Acts 1 says that he had to have been with the Lord Jesus from His baptism by John until the day of His ascension. That requirement was apparently met by more than twelve men but in order to be one of the Twelve the men had to be chosen to fill the office. When Judas departed from that office they filled it with Matthias. So Paul was not one of the Twelve but neither was his opponent. But in any case they had equal authority if indeed the other man was truly an apostle. Paul doesn't challenge the claim. He simply says, he has no advantage over me because I'm an apostle too!

Verse 8, **For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority,** that is, the authority of an apostle. 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition, maybe I will boast more, maybe I won't. But if I do the end of the verse 8 he says, **I will not be put to shame.** That is, I won't be embarrassed. In other words, he could boast more than his opponent if he decided to boast further but if he decided to he would not go so far in his boastings that he would have to later recant some of his claims; that is, he would not overdo it. Paul had room to boast within a certain sphere about his authority and verse 13 seems to confirm that approach. It was the idea that God had apportioned to him a realm of ministry and within that realm he had worked and he could take credit for the work in that area, humanly speaking. He did not really boast as some

might and so he had more room to boast if he wanted to stoop to that level and play that game. And if he decided too, verse 8 is saying that the boasting would not be so out of touch with reality that he would be ashamed later.

Now sandwiched between the beginning and end of verse 8 we find him commenting about his **authority** and how he used his **authority**. He says it was given to him by **the Lord** and for the purpose of **building them up** and **not for destroying them**. I take it Paul is slipping a jab at his opponents here when he says **and not for destroying you**. His opponent had used his claim of apostolic authority to tear down the church at Corinth but Paul had used his apostolic authority to build up the church at Corinth. These were very different ways of wielding their authority. Paul already warned in 1 Cor 3:17 that if any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.” The reference to the “temple of God” in that passage is plural and refers to the church at Corinth. Each local church is a spiritual temple and the one who tries to tear down that spiritual temple by corrupting it God will discipline. This was what his opponent was doing with his authority; he was using it to tear down the local church at Corinth. Paul did not wield his authority in this fashion. Christ gave him authority for the purpose of building up the local church at Corinth. If his opponent used it to tear them down then his opponent was wielding the authority wrongly. It should be obvious who they should follow. Of those who claimed apostolic authority only Paul used his authority for the purpose **the Lord** intended it to be used; for the **building...up** of the church.

Verse 9, **for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters**. Paul’s authority in his **letters** could seem **terrifying**. Some of the things Paul says are terrifying. Imagine if Paul wrote to this church what he wrote to the church at Corinth in 1 Cor 4, “Some of you have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power...What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” Those are strong words. Paul threatens to come spank our little behind if we don’t repent. Of a believer that got out of line Paul says in 1 Cor 5, “I have delivered such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh...” How would you like Paul to deliver you over to Satan because you were out of line? He had apostolic authority to do so and you couldn’t do anything about it! And certainly the words of the severe letter

Paul wrote must have been in some sense terrifying. Though we don't have the letter itself we do have record of the effect it had on the Corinthians. We are told in 2 Cor 7 that it caused them great sorrow. Paul is gearing up here in verse 9 for saying, these are not mere verbal threats, he's going to back them up when he comes.

Verse 10, **For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."**

Paul already knew the criticism of his opponents. These are the shallow things of verse 7, the outward appearances in presence and speech.

Essentially Paul's letters were **weighty**, meaning they contained many difficult things. Even Peter attests that his letters are weighty; containing many things difficult to understand (2 Pet 3:16); and **strong**, meaning his letters were full of force in his calls for repentance. But in opposition to these things he was, according to their standards, lacking in the area of **personal presence**. They criticized him as being **unimpressive**. This refers to his lack of assertiveness and not his bodily appearance. When Paul spoke he did not assert himself strongly. He did not have powerful personal bearing. The Greeks considered a powerful presence as very important. Paul was lacking so they considered this a strike against Paul. They also criticized **his speech** as **contemptible**. While contempt in our language means to arouse scorn in an audience this is not what it meant to them. The intent is to say that his speech was deplorable in the sense that it lacked the proper rhetorical flair. Paul did not have a professional way of speaking. Locally, the sophists travelled and spoke with wit and charm. They could make an argument sound good on the surface. They drew a crowd, it was entertaining. Paul did not speak like them. He was more concerned with substance and content. They were more concerned with things as they are on the surface and in verse 7 Paul has dealt a blow to that shallow approach. What really matters is not the external things like the way a church building looks or the way people dress or whether the pastor is hip or not. What matters is content and acting on that content!

His response to their shallow criticism is verse 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.** Paul claimed to be no different in person than he was in letter. In **letter** he could only give words telling them what he would do if he were there, but in person he could do

deeds that confirmed what he said he would do. This is a bold threat. Paul is warning them that when he comes he will do as he warned in verse 2, he will be very courageous. They will feel the power of his authority. So he refutes their criticism.

Verse 12 contains further explanation. **For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves;** Paul was not **bold** enough or “daring” enough to do either of these two things; **class** himself along with **those who commend themselves** which is to put himself in the same category as them, to be grouped with them, lower himself to their level, or **compare** himself with those **who commend themselves**, have a contest among men who judge according to other men. Paul was not interested in being in their group or comparing himself with them. On one hand they were a self-congratulatory group, “Look what we did at Corinth. Look at all the accomplishments of our labors.” Paul didn’t do this. He had the right too but he didn’t do that. He didn’t go around sharing his bragimony. He was more concerned about the end of verse 15, their faith growing.

Now he implies, at the end of verse 12, that they were foolish for doing this. **But when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.** To not have **understanding** is to not have an intelligent grasp of the real issues. In other words the little braggarts had their own little circle of friends and they all just compared themselves with one another. That way the bar could be so low that everyone could stand out in some area. That’s the way people do, they compare themselves with some measly human being just to make themselves feel better about themselves. People who do this don’t grasp what’s important. They don’t have any understanding because other people aren’t the standard by which they are being measured. God gives the standards. In the end a Christian is to do all his work to the glory of God and what is in the end...remains, everything else is burned up. That was Paul’s mentality. They were always competing with one another. The Christian is to aim to please God; to run the race so as to win, not trying to defeat other Christians to the finish line. We each have our own race to run and we can each win the prize! That is running with understanding, looking toward the upward call in Christ Jesus. But comparing yourself with others is **without understanding**.



Verse 13, **But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.** Apparently, by **sphere** Paul means the realm of his ministry. Paul had been given a sphere of ministry which mainly involved Gentiles. At this time he had gone **as far as Corinth**. Paul could boast in his ministry as far as Corinth. That was a legitimate sphere of boasting because Paul actually was the first to evangelize in Corinth and follow up quickly by training the new believers. Cumulatively he had put in several years of labor at Corinth with his journeys and writings. Corinth was a legitimate sphere of boasting for Paul. He mentions also that God had **apportioned** Corinth to him as a place of ministry. He may be referring to Galatians 2 and the decision made in Jerusalem between him and Peter that Peter would go to the Jews and Paul would go to the Gentiles. Corinth was undoubtedly primarily Gentile. But his opponents, whoever they were, had stepped into Paul's territory and were now claiming some of the results. The problem is not that they were in Paul's territory. Others had come into Paul's territory, like Apollos and built up the church. Paul didn't mind someone watering what he had planted. The problem was that they were taking credit for Paul's ministry. They were boasting in it. Paul is saying he would not boast beyond his measure; beyond what is due. Paul was different. Paul, for example, would not boast about the gospel progress in Rome because he had not gone to minister the gospel in Rome! But these opponents were coming in and boasting that the work done by Paul had been done by them. Paul says, we boast only insofar as what God has apportioned to us and no further. We're not going to take credit for other people's work! That's essentially what verses 13-16 are all about.

Verses 14-16 kind of go on and on explaining this point so I won't belabor it, I'll just make a couple of additional points. Paul says, **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; <sup>15</sup>not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, <sup>16</sup>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.** What we've already said is that Paul would not boast about his work beyond the sphere that had been apportioned to him.

Corinth was apportioned to him in the discussion with Peter at Jerusalem. Thus Paul was the first to come as far west as Corinth with the gospel. He had the first converts and he trained the first disciples there. He would not boast beyond this; that would be taking credit for someone else's labors. Instead, Paul's hope, at the end of verse 15, is merely that their **faith grow**. This is the central issue in the Christian life; learning to live by faith. You're already justified by faith, now the issue is being sanctified by faith. The only way to live is by faith. Every other way of living is an experience of temporal death or being out of fellowship with God. Therefore in order to really live we have to learn to live by faith over greater and greater areas of life. In thought, word and deed our response is always to be one of faith in the word of God. This takes training; training, training, training to think God's thoughts after Him in every area of life. The more we think like God the greater our faith has grown and the greater our tendency to trust. Paul was not confident the Corinthians had grown sufficiently in their faith yet and he was not going to run off and go beyond Corinth to evangelize more people and train them. Before he could justifiably move on in his ministry he had to get the Corinthians faith stabilized. He considered it a matter of spiritual responsibility to get them stabilized before pressing on. In a very real sense, the Corinthians were hindering Paul's ministry.

In any case, verse 17, Paul quotes Jer 9:24 which he quoted in 1 Cor 1:31. **But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD.** In other words, I've engaged in a bit of foolishness, boasting in my ministry as far as Corinth. But really guys, the real issue is the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's boast in Him because his evaluation is the only one that really matters. It doesn't really matter what other men think.

Verse 18 explains, **For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.** Paul sought to please the Lord and have His approval at the judgment seat of Christ. What other men thought about his ministry, how he carried himself, how he spoke, all that didn't matter to the apostle Paul. He was not a man of his times trying to impress according to the cultural standards. He was more concerned about what the Lord Jesus Christ thought. He's the only one that matters. If the ministry here, for example, is not keeping up with the popular church growth model like the seeker friendly movement or the emergent church, who cares? It's not what people think we should be doing that defines what we are to be

doing. It's Jesus Christ. Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season! Reprove, rebuke, exhort. Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks for the hope that is in you! Teach the entire counsel of God! Equip the saints! These are the things the Scriptures instruct us to do. These are the standards the Lord will judge us and our ministries on, not whether we followed the latest greatest fad in church growth, wore hip clothes, had the most up to date technology or sat in stadium seating!

In conclusion, in verse 7 Paul chided them for judging things as they were on the surface. Popular sentiments are a mile wide and an inch deep. They needed to get their evaluator re-calibrated. Even if one of his opponents did claim to be an apostle, Paul was too, he just didn't bring it up every other sentence like his arrogant opponent did. In verse 8, if he were to boast more than his opponent about his authority he would not be put to shame because he used the authority to build them up and not tear them down, contrary to his opponent. Verse 9 Paul says that he did not wish to terrify them by his letters. In verse 10 his opponents charged that only his letters were weighty and strong, but when he appeared in public he did not have a strong presence and he did not speak with rhetorical flair. Paul warns in verse 11, let a person that thinks of me this way consider that we are the same in word as we are in deed. His next visit would prove that. In verse 12 Paul would not dare stoop to the level of his opponents by grouping himself with them or comparing himself with others; the whole purview of comparing yourself with other people shows a lack of intelligence in things that really matter. In verse 13 Paul would not boast beyond the measure allotted to him by God in his mission to the Gentiles. In verse 14 he was not overextending himself in his boasting, as if he did not reach Corinth. In fact he was the first to come to preach the gospel in Corinth. In verse 15 he did not boast beyond what he had accomplished at Corinth, he did not boast in other men's labors, but his hope was that their faith would grow and through that Paul's ministry could expand. In verse 16, so that they could preach the gospel beyond Corinth in other regions and not boast in the work others had done. In conclusion, in verse 17 Paul says if we're going to boast in anyone or anything let us boast in the Lord. Verse 18, because it's not he who commends himself that is approved, but our judge is the Lord. He is the one we are here to please. We will all stand before Him at the judgment seat. What men think is irrelevant.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, not judging things on the surface. Probably the greatest criticism of this church is that we're not keeping up with the times. We're not following the church marketing schemes, we're not following the seeker friendly model, we're not doing the emergent church thing. We're just teaching the old fashioned word of God. Those things are changing fads. They are not the issue. The word of God and pleasing Christ is the issue. Second, seeking only to be approved by the Lord. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be recompensed for the things done in the body, whether good or bad. It's His evaluation that matters, not what other people think. Other people put pressure on you to perform a certain way. What they think is irrelevant. What Christ thinks is the only thing that matters. You won't answer to them ultimately; you will answer to Christ. Don't be a man-pleaser, be a God-pleaser; seek to be approved by Him and hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

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