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2 Corinthians

...to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and* not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. 2 Corinthians 10:16

The words, "...to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" are given in connection to the words of the previous verse which said, "...as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere." It is likely that Paul is saying that as the Corinthians grow in their faith, his ministry will benefit as it stretches out into other areas. There are a couple possibilities concerning what he means.

The first is that Paul will be less burdened in dealing with Corinth as they assume a greater role in the conduct of their own church. Or, it may be that Paul is hoping they will assist him in that ministry through prayer or some other means. These conditions though are based on their increased faith, something Paul is working on in his letter of instruction.

Even though he wasn't present with them, his words would be valuable to them for right doctrine. And surely this is the case because even to this day those same words are being read by churches all around the world as a part of the Holy Bible.

In Paul's preaching of the gospel in the regions beyond Corinth, he would be able to start new mission fields "and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment." This is actually a continued response to the charge that he previously addressed. Verses 13 and 14 seem to imply that he was accused of

over-extending his sphere of influence, which he refuted. In this verse he goes beyond that and shows that where he intends to go is certainly not in anyone else's sphere of accomplishment.

Where he intended to travel is not totally certain, but it is likely that he is mentally referring to his comments in Romans 15:19-24. There he specifically mentions his desire to go first to Rome and then on to Spain.

Life application: It is so easy to take credit for things which we did not accomplish. Politicians are often caught lying about their past, claiming deeds they did not do. Pastors have been caught up in such things as well. Any of us can fall prey to this temptation, so let us always stand guard against it. Even if we haven't done great things, we are still accepted by God because of Christ. If God has accepted us, then why should we worry about what mere men think of us!

But “he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” 2 Corinthians 10:17

As the chapter prepares to close, Paul gives this verse. It is a citation which he draws from Jeremiah 9:23, 24 -

"Thus says the LORD:

'Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,
Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;
But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight,' says the LORD.'"

It is to be in Christ alone where our boasting should lie. Whatever our accomplishments, they were possible only because of the Lord's hand upon us. Therefore, no man should receive our boastings, including us as individuals:

- 1) Churches shouldn't be divided based on allegiances to individual men, i.e. "I am of Paul" or "I am of Cephas," etc.
- 2) Our intellectual attainments or knowledge of the Bible shouldn't be credited to either self or to another, such as a great teacher, i.e. "I follow Aristotle," or "I follow John Calvin," or "I follow Albert Einstein," or "I follow Billy Graham."
- 3) There should be no desire to emulate the mighty, despite the power they possess.
- 4) Our goal shouldn't be to seek after a wealthy person, a politician, or a movie star.

Rather than these things, or any other such division in our allegiance concerning our worldly abilities or spiritual life in Christ, we should direct our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our attention to what God has done in Him through us or to us. In all ways and at all times, "...he who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Christ is the head of the church; Christ demonstrates and reveals to us the wisdom of God; in Christ are found the otherwise unsearchable riches of knowledge and understanding - both in creation and in Scripture; from Christ is all power and strength; and in Christ all the greatness and majesty of the Godhead is revealed to us. Surely then let us boast and glory in Him alone.

And as a final point, the citation from Jeremiah is speaking of the LORD, or Yehovah. However, Paul uses the citation and applies it to Jesus. The implication is clear - Yehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus in the New. Let us never attempt to diminish the glory of who Christ is. He is our God.

Life application: Be sure to never trade your allegiances for something less than what is the greatest of all. Jesus Christ is the epitome of perfection. In Him is all that is good and wonderful, and so let Him alone be your hope, desire, aspiration, and love.

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

This chapter closes out with words that are alluded to throughout his writings and even throughout the Bible itself. He just said that "...he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." The reason for this is that it is "not he who commends himself" who is approved. One can glory in himself all day long and it doesn't mean that the Lord has accepted him. In fact, it could be a good indication that He hasn't.

Rather, Paul says that it is "whom the Lord commends." In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul even gave an explicit example of this, showing that it is the Lord who will judge our works -

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 3, he shows that commending oneself is pointless. One's works, as attested to by the Spirit, are what makes a person's commendation knowable. As Christ is the judge of such things, whether they are truly Spirit-led or not, self-commendation is excluded -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? ² You are

our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart." 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

Life application: In the book of Proverbs, we are given wise counsel concerning self-praise -

"Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips." Proverbs 27:2

Instead of praising ourselves, let us walk in humility. Should we look for praise, let it be from the Lord. It is from Him that it truly matters.

Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 2 Corinthians 11:1

Charles Ellicott's commentary on this verse is very insightful. He notes that -

"There are two catch-words, as it were, which characterise the section of the Epistle on which we are now entering: one is of 'bearing with,' or 'tolerating,' which occurs five times ... and 'folly,' which, with its kindred 'fool,'" is repeated not less than eight times. ... It is impossible to resist the inference that here also we have the echo of something which Titus had reported to him as said by his opponents at Corinth. Their words, we must believe, had taken some such form as this: 'We really can bear with him no longer; his folly is becoming altogether intolerable.'"

This makes great sense because Paul seems to have been under great duress concerning his relationship with the Corinthians. By using their own words back at them, he places the responsibility for their belligerence back on them where it

belongs, but by doing it this way he cannot be accused of speaking inappropriately towards them as he is using their own words.

Whether this analysis is correct or not, it still sums up the content of this verse very well. Paul is asking for them to bear with him in a little folly as he writes, knowing that there is already a sort of wall between them which necessitated his words.

Life application: Human interaction, either verbally or in writing, is a learned skill. Refining this skill so that one can anticipate the words of another and then using their words to redefine the interaction is a brilliant way of maintaining the upper hand while keeping harmony within the conversation. It is most difficult to argue against one's own words without looking like the belligerent in the conversation.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2

The "little folly" that Paul spoke of in the preceding verse begins to be revealed here. He tells his beloved church at Corinth that he is "jealous for you with godly jealousy." The word "jealous" is *zelo*. It is derived from the word *zeo* which means "to boil or be fervent." The action comes from the sound. When water boils, it makes the sound *zeo zeo zeo*. Likewise, the boiling water is fervent. This then corresponds to the emotion.

In this case, it is a positive fervency which he feels, even to the point that he stresses it with the words *Theo zelo*, or literally, "with a jealousy of God." There was nothing earthy and sensual in his jealousy, rather it was a heavenly, spiritual feeling which surpassed any earthy state. And he says his zeal is because "I have betrothed you to one husband."

The word for "betrothed" is found only here in the New Testament. It is *harmozó*. It gives the idea of betrothing a daughter to another. The word, though not found

elsewhere in the NT, is found in Greek literature when speaking of the carpenter's work of joining boards together. It is also used in a musical sense, such as arranging music, tuning instruments, and even fitting together clothes or armor.

There is a harmony being brought together, one thing to another. In this case, it is to be as a bride to her bridegroom. Paul looked at himself as a father in their faith, having told them about Christ Jesus and having been there when they received Him. He is calling to remembrance his words of 1 Corinthians 4:15 -

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

It is he who will present his daughters in the faith to Christ. But more than just giving away a daughter, he desires her to be one who is pure and undefiled. His words show us this. He wanted their lives to be holy and their doctrine to be pure. As he says, "...so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ." Albert Barnes, citing another scholar, explains the concept here -

"The allusion here, according to Doddridge, is, to the custom among the Greeks 'of having an officer whose business it was to educate and form young women, especially those of rank and figure, designed for marriage, and then to present them to those who were to be their husbands, and if this officer through negligence permitted them to be corrupted between the espousals and the consummation of the marriage, great blame would fall upon him.' Such a responsibility Paul felt. So anxious was he for the entire purity of that church which was to constitute 'the bride, the Lamb's wife;' so anxious that all who were connected with that church should be presented pure in heaven."

Paul felt the burden of ensuring that those in Corinth were properly trained in doctrine and that they would carry through with that training so that their lives would be dedicated to Christ and not to the things of the world. He uses similar terminology toward those in Ephesus as well -

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."
Ephesians 5:25-27

Life application: From a biblical perspective, it is not enough to simply get people saved and on the path to heaven, but to mold them into purity as they continue on that path. Doctrine matters and its application matters as well. Let us consider where we will spend our time. Will it be in God's word or in pulp fiction? Will we go to a church that excludes doctrine in order to please, or to a church that holds the word of God in the highest esteem? It all matters and it bears on what our presentation to Christ will be like.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3

Following Paul's words to the Corinthians that he had "betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ," come almost anguished words. He begins with, "But I fear..." It is a future fear, meaning that what he is afraid of has not happened yet, but it looks like things are heading in that direction.

The words "lest somehow" give the idea that any possible means would be used to effect what Paul worries might come about. It may be a direct attack, or it might be a subtle flanking maneuver, or by some other means. However, what he is fearful about could come to pass. And the fear is that "as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted."

This is Paul's only direct allusion to the story of the serpent in Eden. It comes from Genesis 3 and he undoubtedly understood the serpent to be the devil, just as John so poignantly reveals in his writings. There in the garden, the serpent deceived

Eve. She was prepared as a bride for Adam and yet she was corrupted through the devil's guile.

The analogy then is that the church is prepared as a bride for Christ, the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). But just as Eve was corrupted by the serpent, so the church could be "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Adam and Eve were given one command, and yet through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, they were drawn away into disobedience. In Christ we have also been given a means of remaining faithful which is simplicity itself. We are to believe the gospel. We are, in fact, saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

However, that simple message is so easily corrupted through the same three pressure points - the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Any of these, or a combination of them, will draw us away from the truth. Paul will continue to explain this in the verses ahead. He also explains it in a myriad of ways in his other letters. We are not to add to the gospel in any way. Instead, we are to understand that salvation is by grace through faith.

How easily our minds can be corrupted from this message though! Faith becomes a stumbling block because it seems too easy. And so we add in works, we add in precepts, we add in a false Jesus.... whatever! The devil deceives us and pulls us away from Christ Jesus, misdirecting us to a false gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Life application: How silly we are to add to what being a true Christian is! Some say that if we don't support the nation of Israel, we are false Christians. That may be a point of sound doctrine, but it is not a point of salvation. Some say that we must observe the Sabbath or we are false Christians. That is reintroducing the law which was fulfilled in Christ. Thus it sets aside the work of Christ. Whatever someone adds in to the gospel, reject it. We are saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Christ - period!

For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! 2 Corinthians 11:4

"For if he" is singular. It is speaking of any individual who would come and proclaim a false Jesus. This gives illumination to Paul's words of Galatians 1 -

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-8

A false Jesus is one not presented by the apostles, and the message of a false Jesus diverts from the truth of what God did in Christ. Even by this early date, there were countless heresies already springing up. Throughout the epistles, the truth of Christ is given to counter these falsities. With the Bible complete, we have the true and only source for doctrine concerning Christ. Any other, according to Paul, is "another Jesus whom we have not preached." There is orthodoxy, and then there is heresy. Doctrine matters.

Continuing on, he writes, "...or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received." This is a separate thought from the one who preaches a false Jesus. It is speaking of a false inspiration. An example of such a false spirit is given by John -

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." 1 John 4:2, 3

Christian circles are literally filled to the brim with false spirits of inspiration. People claim all kinds of revelations from God which are untrue. The Bible is

written and further revelation would only confuse, not help, the message. Such claims should be rejected right away lest a seed of false teaching turn into a field of it.

In these first two clauses, "another Jesus" denies the identity of Christ, whereas a "different spirit" denies any similarity in nature. It is of the utmost importance that both are held to in matters concerning Christ.

Paul's words are poignant and direct, but he has yet more for us to consider. Not only are there false presentations of Jesus and false claims of inspiration, but there is also "a different gospel." The Corinthians had accepted Paul's words, but along comes another gospel which they had not accepted, and yet Paul was concerned that they "may well put up with it!"

There is one gospel which Paul consistently presents. We are saved by grace through faith; no works added. And yet at every turn people re-impose works of the law or add in externals, claiming that they are necessary in order to be saved. The gospel is a total and complete reliance on the work of Jesus Christ in fulfilling the law for us. In Him, it is finished; let us not attempt to tarnish His marvelous work through "a different gospel" which is no gospel at all.

Further, let us never even consider putting up with it. In his final words of the verse, the adverb translated as "well" is emphatic. Paul's words drip with irony. They were willing to follow a false gospel, but they were resistant to continue in the message which they had first received from him. It shows a confusion of mind and a sense of self-pride that had replaced a total dependence on Christ. Instead, they were ready to accept a false Christ whose works were incomplete, a false spirit which was sensational and exciting to listen to, and a false gospel which says, "I have helped out in my own salvation."

Life application: Let us learn the lesson of Paul's words here and hold fast to the truth of the Person of Jesus Christ, the reliability and surety of God's word as our source of inspiration, and to the sound and reasonable gospel which says that

Christ has done it all for us. His work is a gift from God. Let us not taint the gift in any way.

For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

2 Corinthians 11:5

This verse from Paul almost exudes anger at having to defend his apostleship to those whom he introduced to Christ. In Galatians 1, he had been given the right hand of fellowship by James, Cephas, and John - the chief apostles at Jerusalem. When Peter came to Antioch, Paul had actually rebuked him for straying from the truth of the gospel. In Acts 15, Paul was granted full support for his ministry by the Council at Jerusalem both in writing and with accompanied witnesses to travel with him.

His apostleship was fully attested to and yet it was being challenged by "the most eminent apostles." Here he is not speaking of the true apostles, but by those who claimed to be apostles, but were false. He speaks of them again in verse 13, describing them in a most negative light.

The word he uses, which is translated here as "most eminent apostles," is unique and strange. One scholar translates this as "extra super apostles" to show the almost laughable way that Paul viewed them. His words show the depth of his emotion over this matter. Those in Corinth had compared his true apostleship to that of a false one, and they had found the false one more appealing.

For him to have to say "I consider that I am not at all inferior" to them was obviously something deeply hurtful.

Life application: Having sound doctrine is obviously important. If Paul had to face challenges to his apostolic authority because others were coming and polluting the simplicity of the gospel, how much more should we be careful and attentive to this now that we have the entire Bible to learn and apply? Do we suppose that we

can have a right relationship with the Lord apart from the very word He has given? Watch out for false teachings that come as people twist and manipulate the word for their own vile purposes.

Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. 2 Corinthians 11:6

In the previous verse, he said that he was "not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles." This was a jab at those false apostles, not the real ones. From this verse, we can deduce that they were those who came and spoke with great eloquence. On the contrary, Paul admits that he is "untrained in speech." The word for "untrained" is *idiótés*. It is a word which has morphed into our own language as "idiot." However, at the time and according to Helps Word Studies, it meant "properly, of one's *own self*; used of a person who *conspicuously* lacks education or status – hence, easily misunderstood as being uninstructed (unrefined, 'unlettered in speech')."

Paul admits that his speech is lacking the grace of those who came to woo the Corinthians away from him. He was born and raised in Tarsus and it may be that the Greek he learned was less refined than it could have been. Or it could be that he simply lacked eloquence through a stutter or a slow mental process which was more concerned about precision than oration. Whatever the reason, he notes that though this might be the case with his speech, "yet *I am* not in knowledge."

Paul was well trained in the law, having studied under Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees and had all of the knowledge of the law to be considered the most schooled of Jews. Further, he had personal revelation from Jesus Christ concerning the church and the calling of the Gentiles. In no way was his knowledge lacking. It is a point which was of far more value than a highly eloquent and polished tongue.

From this verse, we can see that these false apostles were of the same breed as those who stood and listened to Peter and John speak in Acts 4. A similar thought is mentioned about them -

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

History has borne this assessment of Paul out. Studying his writings seems to show that His Greek was less-cultured than one might expect of such a great mind. As Albert Barnes notes -

"Critics profoundly acquainted with the Greek language remark, that while there is great energy of thought and of diction in the writings of Paul; while he chooses or coins most expressive words, yet that there is everywhere a lack of Attic elegance of manner, and of the smoothness and beauty which were so grateful to a Grecian ear."

Regardless of this lack of smoothness and beauty, it is the substance behind his words which truly matters. With his great knowledge he notes that "we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things." Those in Corinth had received Christ through him and his fellow apostles. They had received training in Christ after that. The questions which had been raised had been fully answered. In all ways, the effort and work of Paul was made manifest to the fullest measure in them. The humble tent maker sewed more into his disciples than he did into linen or leather.

Life application: A lack of eloquence doesn't necessarily mean a lack of knowledge. In fact, one who has precision of thought may actually lack in smooth speech, being more concerned about being correct than being graceful to the ear.