

Paul had just written about the spiritual warfare that he was engaged in. He declared that his weapons were not physical but that they had divine power to destroy strongholds and arguments and every lofty opinion that was raised against the knowledge of God. What he was attacking is man's version of how you can be right with God without Jesus' atoning sacrifice. He was taking every thought captive and making them obedient to Christ and what He has accomplished on our behalf (10:4,5<sup>i</sup>).

*<sup>7</sup> Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.* 1 Corinthians 10:7 You can see the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Though we may differ on style or our particular calling, we should not criticize the difference. If there is fruit, we should acknowledge and encourage differences in ministry. There is too much criticism and nit picking going on in the body of Christ in the USA. You are bound to have some minor doctrinal differences and expectations with almost anyone. That should not cause division. Try to understand the Scriptures that led others to their conclusions and agree to disagree peacefully and with respect when you agree on the essentials.

A movement came through town that swept up many believers. I noticed some deception and was led not to be a part of it. Nevertheless, they preached the gospel (Philippians 1:18<sup>ii</sup>). I told our congregation that if they felt led to be a part of it, they should follow the Spirit's leading. It did cause division. The church that embraced it filled up with people from other churches that embraced the movement. The churches that did not found that their numbers dropped. But that was only for a season. Now that church has less attendees than it did before the movement began. Time has a way of clarifying issues. The law of sowing and reaping cannot be altered (Galatians 6:7<sup>iii</sup>).

Churches that are competing for members are going to find other churches compete for their members. If that is their main goal, they have missed their reason for existing. *Look at what is before your eyes.* If you see the fruit of the Spirit, it is most likely of God. If you see the fruit of the flesh, it most likely is not. But that takes discernment. Sometimes what looks good at first has an underlying agenda that is different. Ask yourself if someone is personally benefiting or is God being glorified.

Paul was telling the followers of the false teachers that if they were so certain they belonged to Christ while rejecting Paul and his team, they just needed to open their eyes and see what the false teachers were claiming about Paul was groundless. Paul and his team obviously belonged to Christ. Their sacrifices for Christ bore witness to that fact. The false teachers would say, "Don't believe your lying eyes." It is true that things are not always as they appear, but having witnessed the faithfulness of Paul and his team for a year and a half surely gave evidence to the depth of their faith.

*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.<sup>iv</sup>*

Eventually those who put on a good front will be seen for their real motives. And conversely, those who may be accused of wrong motives will be seen to be faithful and sacrificial over time. As Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7:20<sup>v</sup>

*<sup>8</sup> 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.* 2 Corinthians 10:8  
This dynamic that Paul is writing about is the conflict every servant of God has. Christ in us is the highest authority, and yet without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5<sup>vi</sup>). **In Christ we can be bold. In and of ourselves we should be humble.** And yet, the issue is whether our flesh is deceiving us into thinking we are in the Spirit when we are really in the flesh.

Paul’s authority was Jesus’ calling that made him the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15<sup>vii</sup>). He surrendered himself to the will of God and died every day to his own will and ways. He had every right to claim authority over the church of Corinth that Jesus had established through him. His message of grace as the means of faith and salvation was God’s message and not his own. It was the opposite of what he had grown up under. It was not pride that boasted of his authority, but rather being surrendered to the will of God and faith in Jesus. Paul declared himself to be the worst sinner (1 Timothy 1:15<sup>viii</sup>). He also claimed he died to that person and now Christ lived in him (Galatians 2:20<sup>ix</sup>). That is humility regarding self and boldness regarding Jesus’ life in him.

How can we be ashamed of what God does through us when we are living for Christ, manifesting the life of Christ in our mortal bodies (2 Corinthians 4:10<sup>x</sup>)? If that is the case, to be ashamed of what God does through us is to be ashamed of God. We live in this wonder of being a broken vessel with all its weaknesses but used by the God of all authority, while at the same time being careful that we are walking in the Spirit and not being deceived by our own flesh (Jeremiah 17:9<sup>xi</sup>). The best way to determine that is to see that we are manifesting the fruits of the Spirit. I have witnessed people expressing strong authority and claiming it was God, but they were anything but gentle. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23<sup>xii</sup>).

*<sup>9</sup> I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. <sup>10</sup> For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”* 2 Corinthians 10:9,10 Paul was addressing an attack on his character from the false teachers. Titus probably reported this expression about weighty letters but weak when present. He must have heard it after he delivered the harsh letter. They were attacking his gentle presence and humility. Humility was not something that culture honored. Gentleness was thought to be a weakness, but it is a manifestation of the Spirit and an attribute of Christ (Philippians 2:6-8<sup>xiii</sup>). If Paul was firm and authoritative in his letters, it was to build up the Corinthians.

The false teachers used their boldness to tell the Corinthians that they were stupidly following the wrong teacher, which was tearing them down and misleading them. They said Paul’s speech when he was present was of no account, when actually it was the gentle gospel that invites us to live in Christ and experience the wonder of His grace and love. We have seen the power of the Word of God to transform lives. While the false teachers are trying to say Paul was a hypocrite, Paul was showing the Corinthians that those teachers were out of the Spirit.

*<sup>11</sup> Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.* 2 Corinthians 10:11 Paul was warning the person who said this that he would indeed be the same person when confronting false teachers. He will walk his talk!

All of his team would. Paul is flatly denying that he is hypocritical. The Spirit leads in firmness against false shepherds and gentleness toward the young sheep (Ezekiel 34:10<sup>xiv</sup>). It is the same Spirit. Paul is the same person when away or when present. He is the ambassador of Christ building them up through correction and when he is proclaiming the grace of our Lord.

Remember that Paul confronted the demon in the woman at Philippi ordering it to leave (Acts 16:18<sup>xv</sup>). The demons that the sons of Pharisees tried to cast out said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” They were acknowledging spiritual authority of Jesus and Paul, but they tore the clothes off those men which exposed the fact that they had no authority (Acts 19:15,16<sup>xvi</sup>).

*<sup>12</sup> 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.* 2 Corinthians 10:12 Our standard of measurement is Jesus. If you want to compare yourself with someone, compare yourself with Him. Then you will be humbled instead puffed up. The false teachers were trying to compare their credentials and smooth rhetoric with Paul’s preaching. They commended themselves, which means they were boasting in their own perception of themselves. Paul wrote that if he boasts, he boasts in the Lord.

When you ask people if they think God will let them into heaven, they often compare themselves with others. But if you inform them that only a life like that of Jesus is worthy of heaven, they will get a reality check. These false teachers were trying to compare their flesh with Paul’s by pointing to outward appearances when the Scriptures tell us we should never do that (1 Samuel 16:7<sup>xvii</sup>). Comparing their flesh against Paul’s flesh misses the whole point. The flesh is of little profit. They were majoring on the insignificant and off base in what matters. It just revealed how ignorant they were.

*<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15a</sup> We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others.* 2 Corinthians 10:13-15a Paul is reinforcing the truth that his team founded this church. They traveled great distances at the leading of the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel of grace to Gentile cities. That was what God assigned Paul to do when Ananias prayed and prophesied over him (Acts 9:15). He was fulfilling his God given assignment. He was not claiming some self-conceived authority. It was given him by God. It was reinforced by the church of Antioch who sent him out at the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2<sup>xviii</sup>). The false teachers were neither sent out nor were they founders of the church. They were usurpers. When Paul asked the Jerusalem council about these teachers, the council said they were not sent by the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:24<sup>xix</sup>). Their claim over the Corinthian church was trying to usurp the labor of Paul’s team. Paul is saying that if God sent them to evangelize, they should go start their own churches.

This reminds me of some so-called pastors who come into a town and claim to want to evangelize, while siphoning off believers from other churches to make their own congregation. The Judaizers in Paul’s day were trying to take credit for his work and ingratiate themselves with the Jews by telling them that they got the Gentiles to obey the Laws of Moses. It was a denial of the finished work of Christ for their own vanity. No

wonder Paul's letter was harsh. The same kind of self-serving goes on today and must be firmly confronted with truth.

*<sup>15b</sup> But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup> so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.* 2 Corinthians 10:15b,16 Paul believed in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20<sup>xx</sup>). He was making disciples who would make disciples who would make disciples. That is the Lord's plan for growing the church and influencing a fallen world to step out of the darkness and into the light (1 John 2:7,8<sup>xxi</sup>; 1 Peter 2:9<sup>xxii</sup>). He expected the Corinthians to make converts which would expand the area that he was responsible to disciple. Like Jabez, he wanted the area of the commission God gave him to expand (1 Chronicles 4:10<sup>xxiii</sup>), not for his glory, but to preach where the gospel had not yet reached for the glory of God. He wanted spiritual grand-children and great-grandchildren (2 Timothy 2:2<sup>xxiv</sup>). He did not want to take credit for someone else's work.

That would take place as the faith of the Corinthians increased. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17<sup>xxv</sup>). Listen to God and obey. How do we listen? It is through the Word of Christ. Lives are touched and the kingdom expands. If you are in Christ your heart longs to hear on that day, *"Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!"* Matthew 25:21<sup>xxvi</sup>

*<sup>17</sup> "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."* 2 Corinthians 10:17 Paul rephrases Jeremiah 9:23,24, <sup>23</sup> *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."* This verse along with the next are another of those maxims that we underline or highlight and go back to so that our minds are renewed by the Word of God (Romans 12:2<sup>xxvii</sup>). Paul once asked, *<sup>7b</sup> What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?* 1 Corinthians 4:7b Did you do a good job? Who gave you the strength, a brain, the opportunity, breath, finances, ability, gifts, and on and on? It all came from God. Understand and know Him!

Because we have the tendency to think so highly of ourselves, the proverbs tell us, *<sup>2</sup> Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.* Proverbs 27:2 Corrie ten Boom said that she thanked people for their expressions of gratitude and praise for her life and message, but at the end of the day she would take all those expressions of thanks and present them like a bouquet to the One to Whom they belong. We should recognize what God has done through us with gratitude that He was willing to use even flawed creatures like us.

The false teachers wanted to boast in their heritage, their rhetorical ability, and other things that all came from God who is the One who deserves all the praise for anything good that comes from any of us. We should be boasting in the goodness of God, and yet the fallen nature tends to think we somehow did it on our own. It reminds me of the joke about Satan challenging God regarding ability. They each formed a man out of dust and made the man come alive. God said, "You cheated. You used my dirt." We think we came up with some invention, but it all came from things God made and the intelligence He gave us. We do a good deed, but it was done with this body God gave us

(Ephesians 2:10<sup>xxviii</sup>). Should that not be what we do with the gifts of God? Then how can we boast except in God who gave us the tools and ability and even the desire to do good.

*<sup>18</sup> For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.* 2 Corinthians 10:18 Man can boast in all kinds of accomplishments and pat himself on his back, but without the gifts God has given us we could do nothing. When people start bragging about what they have accomplished or who they know, it saddens me. That sometimes come from a lack of confidence in who we are in Christ, and in other cases it is the desire to impress people to gain their approval. The only approval we should be seeking is God's approval. Sure, we all want the approval of man, and if it is so that the ministry will not be blamed, that is not a bad thing (2 Corinthians 6:3<sup>xxix</sup>). But if it is for self, it is just foolish. The people who are praised by men one day can be scorned by them the next. If you do not agree with some nuance of their ideology or declare your faith in Jesus, the praise can instantly turn to disdain. The expression, "fame is fickle" is very true. It is only God's approval that matters.

It seems that God prefers to use broken people. Look at how Peter failed, how Paul behaved before he saw the Lord. Look at King David and his sins. In this same letter Paul wrote *<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul declared that Jesus had chosen him as one of the worst of sinners so that *<sup>16b</sup> Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* 1 Timothy 1:16b In other words, if you feel like you are too bad for Jesus, Paul says, look at me. God chose a Christian killer to be an apostle. If He has that kind of patience and power, have faith for what can he do in you!

So how do we find ourselves worthy of God's commendation? How do we broken vessels full of failures and scars become approved by God. It starts with asking for His mercy and inviting Him to take up residence in us, forgiving us of our sins. Then it is to be found in His Son and His Son in us. It is letting Jesus' life be seen in things we do and say. Jesus is the One worthy to be commended. May He be seen in our lives. May He receive all the glory. May we be approved simply because we are found in Him and yield to His life in us. And then it is to recognize all good things come from Him, and that He deserves the praise (James 1:17<sup>xxx</sup>).

Questions:

- 1 How do we apply "Look what is before your eyes"?
- 2 How does observation help us discern? Hinder?
- 3 What was the purpose of Paul's authority? Contrast with the Judaizers.
- 4 How should we be both humble and bold?
- 5 What was the warning and to whom was it given?
- 6 Who is our standard for comparison? Result?
- 7 What was Paul teaching about God given assignments?
- 8 Why did Paul want to see the Corinthians' faith increase?
- 9 In whom should we boast?
- 10 How do we find ourselves worthy of God's commendation?

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<sup>i</sup> **2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

<sup>ii</sup> **Philippians 1:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

<sup>iii</sup> **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

<sup>iv</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 189 citing D.A. Carson *From Triumphalism to Maturity* p.73

<sup>v</sup> **Matthew 7:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

<sup>vi</sup> **John 15:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

<sup>vii</sup> **Acts 9:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

<sup>viii</sup> **1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

<sup>ix</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

<sup>x</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

<sup>xi</sup> **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

<sup>xii</sup> **Galatians 5:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Ezekiel 34:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

<sup>xv</sup> **Acts 16:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Acts 19:15-16 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

<sup>xvii</sup> **1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

<sup>xviii</sup> **Acts 13:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

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<sup>xix</sup> **Acts 15:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,

<sup>xx</sup> **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

<sup>xxi</sup> **1 John 2:7-8 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. <sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

<sup>xxii</sup> **1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **1 Chronicles 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Matthew 25:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

<sup>xxix</sup> **2 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

<sup>xxx</sup> **James 1:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.