

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS FOR 1/10/10 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6

This next section of Paul's letter, chapters 10-13, returns to the subject of his authority as an apostle, as the founder of the Corinthian church, and as one who has the right to confront and correct false teaching that has infiltrated the church at Corinth. Up to this point in the letter Paul has dealt primarily with internal matters among the Corinthians (although the internal matters had been exacerbated by the presence and whisperings of the false apostles) but in these remaining chapters Paul now explicitly addresses those external forces that threaten this young church. In so doing Paul will resort to a form of rhetoric that includes sarcasm, parody, irony, and other verbal forms that were in wide use among rhetoricians of his time. Some scholars have seen chapters 10-13 as being so different from chapters 1-9 they believe it was a separate letter later appended to the end of chapter 9. Other scholars have compared Paul's work to the leading rhetorical works of his day and concluded that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is written in a similar tradition that owes its style to its specific rhetorical form. The point of Paul's rhetoric in 10-13 is to firmly contrast his divinely appointed apostleship with that of the self-appointed false apostles. The way in which Paul approaches this task is mirrored by other classical writers who also faced the challenge of defending their own position by humbly asserting their own strengths, values, and rights, while at the same time attacking those of their opponents. In chapters 10-13 Paul alluded to his detractors as "peddlers of the word of God," as "those of the ministry of Moses." Now the references made earlier are brought into frank detail as Paul takes his challengers head on.

Chapter 10 opens with the words, "Now I, Paul, myself," a very strong assertion of Paul's authority. With this introduction Paul now begins addressing those accusations that have been levied against him. Although Paul answers criticism from those on the outside, his defense is directed towards the Corinthians. It is up to the Corinthians to weigh the arguments and to make a wise choice as to whose voice they will heed. This brings to the foreground a relevant issue that faces the modern Christian: on what do we base our evaluation of Christian leaders? From 1 Corinthians we have already seen that the church of Corinth tends to be fractious in its leanings toward certain personalities, and particularly in their penchant for leaders who are charismatic and eloquent. The relationship between Paul and the Corinthians was troubled because he did not fit the mold that was built on their expectations of what a Christian leader should be. Some of their expectations were scriptural (1 Cor. 12 and 13 gives a large catalog of spiritual gifts) and some of their expectations were cultural (to be a leader is to be eloquent, versed in rhetoric, to accept money from the wealthy leaders in the community). A problem that Paul faces is that the model for Christian leadership was still being composed. Roughly two thousand years later we have the complete canon of Scripture, we have history, we have a plethora of books, seminars, and examples of what Christian leadership should look like. Paul, the Corinthians, and all the other early churches were still trying to discern what God was doing. What they did have though was a model for Christian living, which was the life of Christ. Paul turns to Christ as his example of leadership, and particularly the "meekness and gentleness

of Christ.” In doing so, Paul turns the allegations of his opponents around. In chapters 10-13 we discover these accusations against Paul as he answers them by putting his own spin on the charges against him. In 10:1 we learn that Paul is accused of being meek when present with the Corinthians (a charge likely against both his physical appearance and his verbal style) yet bold in their absence, particularly in writing the severe letter. In the Corinthian culture meekness and gentleness were hardly revered. In fact in our own culture we would be hard pressed to find an action hero who wins the fight based on this Christ-like attribute. Paul however accepts this charge against him by making his appeal to the character of Christ. The Corinthians might not see humility as a virtue, but if it were not for the humility of Christ, they would not have a savior. In His earthly ministry, Christ modeled a life of servanthood. In His Kingly and Priestly ministry He modeled this as well. If the false apostles are going to accuse Paul of being Christ-like, then he is more than willing to accept the charge.

In 10:2 Paul further elaborates on his decision to exhibit humility in their presence. It is his desire that when he returns to them (and he will) that his letters will have had the intended effect and that he will not have to act in boldness among them. He would rather reserve that for those who are making accusations against him. Again in this verse Paul turns the accusations made against him toward those who make them. The word that is translated “I propose” is the same word used when Paul says “those who regard,” and will be used again in 10:7, and 11.¹ The word *logizomai* means to regard or to reckon, so Paul “reckons” on being bold toward those who “reckon” that he walks according to the flesh. Paul confronts their “reckonings,” or considerations, of the false teachers with his own reckoning, which will be a major theme for this chapter. At this point Paul, while referring to those who are speaking out against them, is still speaking to the Corinthians. It is up to them to respond in such a manner that Paul does not have to come and address a situation that would require his boldness. This specific charge against Paul is that he walks in a fleshly way. The Greek word used for “walk” is regularly used in the New Testament to describe one’s manner of life meaning that they are accusing Paul of having an overall fleshly, or worldly perspective, as opposed to a life that is characterized by the outflow of the gifts of the Spirit.² Paul taught explicitly concerning spiritual gifts but he consistently runs up against this expectation that believers should be expressing the showier gifts in order to be considered spiritual. Paul continues this thought in v. 3 and offers his rebuttal by rearranging the categories of flesh and spirit. Paul accepts that he walks according to the flesh, but he does this by acknowledging that yes, he is a human minister who is limited by his own physical mind and body in accomplishing this ministry. In contrast to claims of some in Corinth that they were super-spiritual, Paul does not make this claim. It is clear that any glory, any godly ministry that is displayed through him does not come from his own strength but from the Spirit of God at work in him. Paul does not parade his spiritual gifts (as the Corinthians are guilty of doing), but he does not hide them either. So Paul answers them by saying that he is fleshly, but he is not governed by the

¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 460.

² Paul Barnett, 460.

flesh as his spiritual activity is focused in another direction. His ministerial goal is to present Christ and to dismantle those teachings that are contrary.

In 10:4, Paul goes on to apply military metaphors to his ministry. He likens his situation to a war that is being waged, one requiring weapons that are divinely powered and not of the flesh. Paul is ready to fight, he is more than capable of expressing boldness but he will do so in the spiritual realm. In speaking of the fortresses that need to be destroyed, or pulled down, Paul alludes to the Septuagint version of Prov. 21:22 which says, "A wise man assaults strong cities, and demolishes the fortress in which the ungodly trusted." 10:4 leaves the metaphor unexplained, but in 10:5 we find that the structural support of these fortresses are the speculations (or reckonings, again the Greek word *logizomai*) and lofty things that are raised up against the knowledge of God. Paul's job then is to pull down those things that have been raised up against God and to take them as prisoners of war. Paul takes the accusations against him seriously, but only because if Paul's relationship to the Corinthians is in jeopardy, the gospel message is in jeopardy. Paul valiantly defends the gospel with the stance of a soldier who shoots down and takes captive all of those words, thoughts, and speculations that oppose Christ and prevent the Corinthians from believing and experience the fullness of what is promised in Christ. What are the speculations and lofty things that are raised up against the knowledge of God? This will mean different things to different people and cultures, but certainly in Corinth some of those lofty ideas were that eloquence, material success, and spiritual charisma were the mark of a Christian. There was also not a clear division between the religious cults of Corinth and the way in which some of them were living their lives. Paul chips away at these beliefs, tearing them down under the authority of Christ. V. 5 is often understood as referring to the inner life of the believer, that we need to evaluate what goes on in our own head and submit it to the scrutiny of Christ. While this can be inferred, Paul is primarily referring to those external strongholds, those thoughts, teachings, and beliefs that come at us from the outside. Paul says that it is his job to pull down these speculations. He does this in all of his New Testament writings leaving the 21st century believer with the means to do the same thing. All that comes our way must be submitted to the teaching of Scripture, for that is the measuring rod that has been granted to us today. Along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the words of the Old and New Testament, God promises to enlighten us as we navigate through this life.

In 10:6 Paul stands up tall and makes it clear that although there may be those who regard him as timid and weak in personal appearance, he will be anything but if things are not put right when he comes to Corinth again. Paul is not speaking of punishing the false apostles, but of those within the congregation who fail to follow through on the contents of this letter. Paul has instructed the Corinthians specifically regarding their behavior and their belief system, and Paul hopes that this is the last corrective letter that he has to write. It is his hope to return to them and find them to be obedient to Christ. As Paul writes to defend himself and his gospel, he also writes to remind the Corinthians that despite the opposition that is speaking harshly against them, and has gained influence among them, he is still their pastor and will still act as their pastor when he comes to see them again. Although to end this passage at v. 6

leaves us hanging on a negative note, the overall arch of these last few chapters is not to threaten the Corinthians but to establish the necessity of adhering to the message preached by Paul and of rejecting every thought, every false teaching that presents itself as contrary. Paul is very aware of how subtly Satan can detract from Christ through arguments, through false teaching, through cultural values, and it is his hope and desire to strip all of that away so the Corinthians can see and believe the pure, unadulterated gospel. The point of this verse is that Paul is the head of this church and although there might be an attitude running through their minds that Paul is ineffective or somehow incomplete, Paul asserts himself as the one who founded this church on Christ and as the one whom God will use to guide them in the right direction. Paul acts as a parent who will risk offending their child in order to keep him or her out of danger. He is more than capable of meting out any necessary punishment (as has already been demonstrated) and he will do so again if the situation demands it. It is Paul's hope though to visit a church that is responsive and obedient to the Spirit within them. He will continue this discussion in the following verses.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS
2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 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. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

- 1. Can you list some situations in Christ's life when he deliberately chose to be meek instead of bold? Can you think of some situations when he did act boldly?**

- 2. Have you seen Christian leaders (or had the opportunity to do so yourself) exhibit this type of humility when you might have expected boldness? What was the result?**

- 3. How do you evaluate the validity of what is taught in the church and in the broader Christian community?**

- 4. What do you think some of the weapons of our warfare are?**

- 5. What are some thoughts in our own culture that are raised up against the knowledge of God?**

- 6. How do we practically take thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ? How often do we have to do this?**