

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS FOR 1/17/09 2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-18

In the previous passage Paul engaged in rhetoric for the purpose of establishing his rightful place among the Corinthians and the true source of his ministerial authority, which is Christ. In this next section Paul will continue on in the same rhetorical form, boasting of his authority, yet in a manner much different from that of his opponents. Boasting/commendation is a primary theme (mentioned 8 times in 12 verses) as Paul uses the social conventions of the day to boast not in his power or his position, but to boast in the God ordained and empowered relationship between himself and the Corinthians. While the traditional use of this rhetorical style would be to build the speaker up by parading his strengths, Paul builds up his position by appealing to God's undeniable activity in Corinth since his original visit. Paul will boast in order to build up the Corinthians view and understanding of the work that God has done among them, through Paul.

In the first part of this passage, 2 Cor. 10:7-11, Paul confronts the Corinthians' perspective as one that is focused on externals. 2 Cor. 10:7 is a command and Paul tells them to LOOK! at those things around them, to open up their eyes to the truth of what is in front of them. What is in their sight and experience is a church, founded by Paul that has evidenced the power of the Spirit working in their midst. What some of the Corinthians have chosen to focus on are the accusations that have been made against Paul. Paul continues his train of thought by calling out those who oppose him (anyone who claims to belong to Christ). Paul writes that if his detractors are claiming that they belong to Christ, the Corinthians need to take a second look and consider again the two ministries set before them. The accusers say they belong to Christ, so does Paul. The Corinthians need to reflect upon the results and the character of the two opposing ministries and decide which one is authentic.

In 2 Cor. 10:8, Paul brings up the subject again of his authority. What he boasts about is that his authority over the church in Corinth is a derivative of God's calling on his life and that it is for the purpose of loving, encouraging, and building up this group of believers. In contrast to the ministry of those opposing Paul, he gives the Corinthians a diagnostic question to test his authority. In light of both ministries, are they being built up or torn down? Paul will accuse his opposition of tearing down the Corinthians later in the letter (11:20-21). Paul is not ashamed of this building aspect of his ministry. On the contrary it is what God has uniquely empowered him to do. In 10:9-11, Paul defends his letters (whether harsh or gentle) as having been written for the purpose of building up this church. In his defense of his letters he answers two accusations: 1) that they were meant to terrify and not encourage, and 2) that Paul's demeanor in absence is woefully detached from the way he presents himself when present. He is accused of being strong in absentia but weak and inarticulate in person. Paul counters these charges with a strong assertion that his words and his actions toward the Corinthians are one and the same. His ministry is not based on a persona of charisma and charm, rather it is one that is rooted in the Spirit and the outflow of his ministry runs counter to

the expectations of some in the congregation. It is Paul's hope that these particular matters will be ironed out before his next visit.

In the next section, 2 Cor. 10:12-18, Paul answers the challenge that he overstepped geographical and spiritual boundaries by beginning this ministry in Corinth. In answering this charge, Paul obliquely accuses his opponents of the same thing, treading upon his territory and stirring up problems in this congregation. In 10:12, Paul returns to an idea already expressed in 2 Cor. 3 where he defends his position that he does not need letters of commendation as others do, because the church of Corinth is what commends the authenticity of his ministry among them. With a tone of sarcasm Paul writes, "We would not dare compare ourselves with those who commend themselves." With this statement Paul both condemns the means by which they do commend themselves (by comparing themselves with one another) and offers his own comparison to them. Rather than appealing to those in his own peer group, Paul writes in 10:18 that it is the Lord who commends him and it is the work of the Spirit who offers proof by infusing the Corinthian believers with life. Paul describes his opponents as "without understanding" because they have failed to see the way in which God worked in the midst of this church through Paul. Paul then goes from defending his ministry to defending the extent of his ministry. Paul's challengers, in addition to questioning the lack of accompanying letters of commendation, took it further in accusing him of not having the right to be in Corinth in the first place. Paul answers them in stating that he will not boast more than is necessary but he has been divinely appointed in his mission to the Gentiles (going back to his conversion experience in Acts 9). Additionally, Paul has submitted his ministry to the Jerusalem church and is operating in Gentile territory with the blessing of these church leaders. The false teachers can make neither claim regarding their ministry. In 10:14 Paul brings up the fact that he was in Corinth before they were, the first to come to them, so in effect he turns their own accusations against them. It is not Paul who is trespassing in Corinth rather it is these false teachers who have usurped Paul's authority and territory. Paul is fighting for the hearts of the Corinthians and he takes the opportunity to remind them that the issue at hand is the gospel of Christ. That is the true measuring rod.

In 2 Cor. 10:15-16 Paul again brings up the theme of boasting by assuring the Corinthians that it is not his intent to boast beyond what has been assigned to him or to tread upon the missionary territories of others. In his defense, Paul accuses his challengers of doing just such a thing. Rather than reaching even beyond Corinth, these opponents are limiting the spread of the gospel by taking Paul's attention away from evangelism and forcing him to defend his ministry to this congregation. Paul's desire is to leave behind a healthy, vibrant church in Corinth and use this church as a base to continue forth in the ministry God has given him. These false teachers have exerted their influence on this congregation by diverting their attention away from the gospel.

Paul concludes his thoughts in 2 Cor. 10:17-18 by stating that the only viable object of boasting is the Lord. In 10:17 Paul appeals to a passage in Jeremiah 9:24 in which the Lord instructs His people to boast only in that they know and trust in His

proven character. This passage in Jeremiah occurs in the midst of God's indictment against all Israel for failing to trust God, for failing to have listened to His voice. It is the prophet Jeremiah who also foretells the coming new covenant which will be written on the hearts of God's people. With this citation Paul makes the claim that he is dependent upon God alone, not eloquence of speech, not letters of commendation, but God working in and through him in Corinth as proof of his ministry. He also makes the claim that he stands in this long line of prophets declaring God's new covenant ministry which is at work in this present day. Paul's final word to his detractors is that God alone has the ability to establish his authority. He does not appeal to himself (as his opponents do), he only appeals to the Lord and lays his ministry bare for the Corinthians to judge whether or not it is of the Lord. God's approval of Paul's work in Corinth was already evident among them. Chapter 11 will take Paul's defense to another level as he moves from an indirect defense to a direct appeal to the Corinthians based on his deep affection for them.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS 2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-18

Read 2 Corinthians 10:7-11

2 Corinthians 10:7-11 ⁷ You are looking at things as they are outwardly. 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. ⁸ For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, ⁹ for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. ¹⁰ For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." 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.

1. If you were told to LOOK! at the church in an objective way, what things would you see that point to the reality of Christ's presence?

2. Have you ever been let down because a pastor or Christian leader did not meet your expectations? Do you think your expectations were Scriptural or based on personal preferences?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12-18

2 Corinthians 10:12-18 ¹² For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. 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. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵ not boasting beyond *our* measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, ¹⁶ so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, *and* not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. ¹⁷ But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. ¹⁸ For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

3. What do you think is Paul's point in 2 Cor. 10:12? Do you think it means that it is wrong to compare ourselves to other believers in order to measure what God is doing in our lives?

4. In 2 Cor. 10:13-16, Paul speaks of a specific territory that God has granted him in his ministry. Do you feel like God has given you a specific sphere of influence in your Christian life? What do you think it might be? If you are not sure, how would you like to be used in your giftedness?

5. What do you think it means to boast in the Lord? How can that look in a person's life?

6. Do you think there is ever a time for self-commendation?

7. How do we know when the Lord commends us to a particular ministry or in a particular area? Can you give specific examples from your life (either when you felt approved or if you were not sure if God was involved)?