

## **II Corinthians 10-13: Paul Vindicates Himself** (January 5, 2025)

### ***Introduction:***

Many Biblical scholars believe 2 Corinthians is at least the 4<sup>th</sup> in a series of letters from Paul to the church in Corinth. The 3<sup>rd</sup> letter (referred to in 2 Corinthians 7:8) apparently contained some severe admonishments to the church, but that separate letter has not been found. However, some scholars believe that some, or much, of it has been included as Chapters 10-13 of this “letter.”

Paul’s specific instructions may not be relevant so much today as in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but his approach to the problems may provide good guidance for our similar situations.

The opening salutation of 2 Corinthians is from Paul and Timothy (*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother*). But this part is directly from Paul: “*I, Paul, myself entreat you*”(10:1)

Paul’s antagonists seem to be a contingent of Judaizers, probably from Jerusalem, and a group of local Corinthians – apparently impressed/swayed by those Judaizers. Paul metaphorically rolls up his sleeves and jumps into a muddy, knock-down, drag-out fight. He lowers himself to the combative level of his critics. Paul first reminds the Corinthians that their “battle” is not earthly, but against spiritual evil and must be fought with divine powers.

### ***Dealing with Critics:***

The letters from Corinth have not been preserved. Paul’s written response in these chapters implies he was responding to the following charges:<sup>1</sup>

1. That Paul was only brave when writing letters; not face-to-face
2. His refusal to accept support implied he was inferior
3. He did not have the same kind of relationship to Christ that they had
4. They made fun of his appearance and speaking ability
5. His boasting was unbecoming of an apostle

### ***Local – Meek; Remote – Stern***

Paul’s response to this charge is in **2 Corinthians 10:7-11**.

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<sup>1</sup> Chafin, p. 273

## **Boasting**

Generally, we don't think it's proper to boast about our achievements, or to criticize others. And Paul freely admits that his words here do not carry the same humility that Jesus taught. But, that is exactly what is needed to respond to the charges against him. Apparently Paul felt that the soul of the Corinthian church was being jeopardized. He had to respond bluntly. He exposed these false prophets who exalted themselves, and lived in self-indulgence.

These other "apostles" impressed people with exaggerated claims of successes, as measured on scales that they developed for themselves.

*<sup>12</sup> Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*

*<sup>13</sup> But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, to reach even to you.*

Greatest recommendation: "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord. For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends." – 2Corinthians 10:17-18. Read **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

## **Humility**

Occasionally Paul had to resort to his profession (tent making) for his personal support, but more frequently he was supported by the generosity of the congregation he was visiting, or from supporters of his other church plants. But, not in Corinth! He makes several references to the fact that he did not seek any charitable support from them, and even said that this might have been his mistake.

And then he challenges any boast that the false prophets have claimed as credentials for their testimony: essentially saying, "Anything they have suffered, I have suffered more! So, if that's your criteria for truth, then I definitely have them bested!" (Refer to 2Corinthians 11:21b-28)

- Only some of this is recounted by Luke in *Acts*.
- Paul probably wouldn't have listed these sufferings if he had not been challenged.

## ***Sharing Personal Experiences***

Back to boasting: Some of the false prophets must have made claims of personal visions and revelations. Paul responded with an account in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, but scholars agree that he was describing his own vision. Read **2Corinthians 12:1-6**.

- Frequently what is special to one person seems quite ordinary to another.

Paul felt that his “thorn in the flesh” was a message from Satan and he prayed frequently for relief.

- Most Protestant interpreters: physical – epilepsy, malaria, tuberculosis, weak eyes, etc.
- Most Catholics: mental or spiritual – nagging doubt or a persistent temptation.
- Others: constant exposure to nagging criticism or persecution.<sup>2</sup>

Read **2Corinthians 12:7-10**.

## ***Paul’s Return to Corinth***

In closing, Paul says he is coming for a third visit, but is very concerned that he will not find the people as he would wish, and they might not find him as they would wish.

Paul challenges the people to test themselves: is Christ in you?

## ***Summary:***

How often do we accept credit for something we know full well that the Lord has done through us? Giving that credit where it is due is boasting in the Lord.

If we take all criticism personally and feel we must respond to it, then we will be controlled by our critics.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Closing benediction you have heard many times before: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (13:14)

Parting thought: Test yourselves - is Christ in you?

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<sup>2</sup> Chafin, p. 289.

## **References:**

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