II Corinthians 10:1

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Introduction:

1. This chapter begins more than three chapters dedicated to Paul defending himself from the accusations of false teachers.
2. False teachers are a certainty in the churches of Christ, as Paul soberly warned the Ephesus elders (Acts 20:28-32).
3. The only details we can gather about the false teachers at Corinth are implied in this epistle without direct identification.
   a. The false teachers, some claiming to be apostles, were Jews bringing legalism with them (II Cor 3:1-16; 11:13,22).
   b. Paul speaks against their doctrine as a Satanic perversion of Jesus, the gospel, and the Spirit (II Cor 11:3-4,12-15).
   c. Because Paul had to defend his apostolic authority, it was being attacked (I Cor 4:3; II Cor 3:1-6; 10:2,8-11; 13:3-4).
   d. These men judged after the flesh and their own rules of excellence, not Christ's (II Cor 5:12-16; 10:12-18; 11:18).
   e. There was a spirit of rebellion promoted by these false teachers that Paul would not judge them (I Cor 4:18-21).
   f. There are other shorter and more indirect statements or implications made about the false teachers in both epistles.

Outline of Chapter 10

1-2 Paul threatened boldness against opponents.

3-6 Paul's ministry was a spiritual war against error.

7-11 Paul would prove in person the terror of his letters.

12-16 The false teachers were Paul's moral inferiors.

17-18 Only God's glory and approval matters to saints.

10:1 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

A. Here is a change: Paul ended two chapters on giving and began three chapters defending himself.
B. Paul had generally used a plural pronoun for himself and Timothy and/or other apostles or ministers.
C. But he now addressed the Corinthian church very personally himself to defend against false teachers.
D. To beseech someone is to beg or implore them earnestly to do something for you (Philemon 1:8-9).

E. Paul approached the Corinthians as meekly and gently as Jesus Christ would have approached them.
   1. His enemies or opponents at Corinth accused him of being too authoritative and overbearing.
   2. Jesus Christ was perfectly meek and gentle, though perfectly just and severe with His enemies.
   3. Meekness is a spirit of humility that results in kindness and gentleness and patience under insult.
   4. Paul wisely told the Corinthians that he was approaching them in a humble and gentle spirit.

F. Paul had been gentle, mild, and patient when among them; but his first epistle had been quite severe.
   1. From the first experience, the false teachers presumed that he was a pushover and short of power.
   2. From the second experience, they accused him of being a paper tiger – threatening with words!
   3. From the combination, they exhorted Corinth not to worry about him, for he would not judge.

10:2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

A. He begged and implored them not to push him too far, or they would soon find him bold in person!

B. He begged and implored in meekness and gentleness, lest they force him to show a different side.

C. He had told them in the first epistle that he could visit with meekness or with a rod (I Cor 4:17-21).

D. These strange children in the church at Corinth were accusing Paul of walking according to the flesh.
   1. Impugning his methods, they slandered Paul as making decisions by personal choice or opinion.
   2. Rather than serving Christ and His kingdom, they accused Paul of seeking his own personal gain.
   3. The flesh is that set of sinful motives and methods that exist by nature in our depraved hearts, by which we make sinful choices in obedience to Satan and the world (Gal 5:17-21; Eph 2:1-3).
   4. There is no limit to the depraved cruelty of those who rebel against God, His word, and His men, which is proven by such a profane accusation, for Paul had not even take a dime from them.

E. The perfect minister of Jesus Christ is a gentle man as far as possible, but then he can be quite confident and severe, just as every perfect father has the same combination is ruling his family.

10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

A. The flesh is that set of sinful motives and methods that exist by nature in our depraved hearts, by which we make sinful choices in obedience to Satan and the world (Galatians 5:17-21; Eph 2:1-3).

B. Dealing directly with the charge of walking according to the flesh, Paul made a crucial distinction.

C. It is true that Paul, and his ministerial colleagues, and all Christian men, walk in the flesh.
   1. That is, all Christian men have fleshly bodies and remaining lusts and sins while on this earth.
   2. That is, all Christian men have a never-ending struggle between the flesh and spirit (Gal 5:17).
   3. Paul himself confessed to the Romans that his fleshly body still served sin (Romans 7:14-24).
   4. There has never been a minister, but our Lord Himself, that was not corrupt in theory and reality, in nature and practice, in public and private, to some degree. None are without sin (I Jn 1:8,10).

D. Paul did not war after the flesh: he did not engage in his apostolic ministry according to the flesh.

1. When engaged in his ministerial activities, Paul operated by the Spirit of God, not the flesh.
2. Paul did not preach, either in style or content, by the flesh, but by the Spirit (I Cor 2:1-5).
3. The mysteries he taught were by revelation of the Spirit of God (I Cor 2:6-16; Gal 1:10-24).
4. The Holy Spirit of God chose all his doctrine, practice, circumstances, and judgment.
5. Consider! In one place he sought to go both north and south, but God chose west (Acts 16:6-12)!

E. Every minister must be tried ministerially by the word of God, regardless of his personal conduct.
1. Though a God-called minister walks in the flesh, he is to be obeyed as the messenger of God.
2. The Lord Jesus Christ even endorsed the Pharisees, for they sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:1-3).
3. The measure of any minister is his fruit as compared to the word of God (Matthew 7:15-20).
4. When his sinful flesh rears its ugly head too far, he should be excluded like any other member.
5. When he has repented for his folly, he should be restored to membership like any other member.
6. If a church can and will submit to him as pastor, he can be restored to his full office and work.

10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

A. The warfare here is Paul's ministerial warfare as an apostle, and the weapons are ministerial tools.
1. Preaching and pastoring are war – a battle between speaker and hearers about thoughts and lives.
2. The "strong holds" are hearts and minds of hearers, which ministers penetrate by God's methods.
3. Paul did not use the carnal inventions of the world to move men (I Cor 2:1-5; Gal 6:14).

B. Paul's ministerial weapons were not after the flesh, or carnal in nature, but powerful spiritually!
1. The written word of God is like a hammer and a fire, two mighty weapons of war (Jer 23:27-29).
2. Jesus shut the mouths of Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees with Scripture (Matt 22:15-46).
3. The word of God, preached faithfully, works effectually in those that believe (I Thess 2:13).
4. Paul rejected the carnal appeal of Jewish ceremonial and Greek intellectual weapons of war.
5. When God's prophets hew hearers, they do it with the sword of the Spirit – the Bible (Hos 6:5).
6. How much power is in the gospel of Jesus Christ? The people were astonished (Matt 7:28-29)!
7. Consider the call of Jeremiah to the ministry (Jer 1:10,18; 5:14). They are not used today!
8. How much power did Paul have as an apostle? He cursed anything else (I Cor 16:22; Gal 1:6-9).

C. Most ministers today use carnal methods that are fleshly, worldly, devilish, and against the Spirit.
1. Contemporary worship, mega-church, and seeker sensitive movements are carnal by definition.
2. Casual worship objectives are to relax any standards for worship to please the flesh and world.
3. Because fleshly hearers want fables, they turn from preaching sound doctrine (II Tim 4:1-4).
4. Because women are easy prey to their carnal doctrine, they pursue silly women (II Tim 3:6-7).
5. For an extensive review of contemporary Christianity in this light, see "Contemporary Christianity."

D. Preaching and pastoring is war – a battle between speaker and hearers about their thoughts and lives.

10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

A. The purpose of the ministry is to "seek and destroy" any imagination or thoughts contrary to Christ.
   1. Jesus had stated this rule of gospel preaching when commissioning them (Matthew 28:19-20).
   2. As Paul wrote to Rome, he besought their conformation to the perfect will of God (Rom 12:1-2).
   3. God's saints cannot allow or defend any thoughts contrary to Scripture (Psalm 119:113,128).
   4. There is no room in Christianity for self-will or opinions – God has settled all truth (Isaiah 66:2).
   5. They do not allow additions or deletions, nor turning to the right or the left (Deut 5:32; 12:32).
   6. Paul did not tolerate any variations to his gospel at all (Rom 16:17-18; I Cor 5:1-13; II Cor 11:1-4; Gal 1:6-9; Eph 4:5; II Thess 3:6,14-15; I Tim 6:3-5; II Tim 3:1-5; Titus 3:10-11).

B. Godly ministers despise rationalization; they esteem revelation (Ps 119:128; Is 8:20; II Tim 4:1-2).
   1. The Age of Reason means nothing to them but idol worship of false science (I Tim 6:20-21).
   2. God said it; that settles it! It does not matter whether you or anyone else actually believes it!
   3. Scientists have contradicted one another and lied for personal advantage since man was created!
   4. What the Bible says is all that should matter, for God has revealed His will for us (Deut 29:29).

10:6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

A. Paul was ready and willing to do what he could by gentleness and meekness to convert the church at Corinth to gospel orderliness, but he was ready to revenge any that would not submit to Jesus Christ.
   1. It would have been very difficult to discipline severely while most of the church was disorderly.
   2. But when the majority of the church was obedient, he was ready to punish the wicked minority.

B. There should be no fear, reluctance, or shame for a minister of Jesus Christ to revenge disobedience.

C. Just as a father must love and chasten, so ministers must be gentle and also ferocious in crushing sin.

10:7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

A. The question is asked in disbelief and criticism, for looking on the outward appearance is worthless.
   1. It is asked of the church members in light of the efforts of the false teachers at self-promotion.
   2. These Judaizers should have remembered the story of David's anointing (I Samuel 16:6-13).
   3. In Corinth, just a short distance from Athens, there was much emphasis on outward appearance.
   4. The appearance, pulpit style, and bedside manner of ministers are more important today than correct doctrine, holy zeal, and ministerial authority, and the results prove the error.

B. Paul appealed to the whole church and the false teachers to at least admit he must also be Christ's.
   1. Ignoring the outward appearance, surely they had to admit that Paul was an apostle of Christ.
   2. The very thought of arrogant teachers thinking themselves to be apostles of Christ but rejecting Paul

is hard to imagine, but if you mix a true minister of Jesus Christ with seminary graduates, you will see the violent hatred against him.

3. For any man at Corinth to think he was Christ's apostle, by whatever measure he used, he should also know that Paul was certainly Christ's apostle.
4. Our brother Paul will use chapter 11 to prove that he was superior to them by any measure.

10:8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

A. If Paul were to boast further of his ministerial authority, there would be no shame in the matter, for he could marshal numerous and sound reasons to prove his superiority to these pompous pretenders.

B. Paul will boast somewhat more of his authority over the rest of this chapter and those of 11-13, and when you get done reading his resume and arguments, his opponents will be in the dust! Glory!

C. It is an axiom of the Christian religion that ministerial authority is only for building up, for ministers are not lords over God's heritage, but rather ensamples to the flock (I Pet 5:1-3).
   1. Though Paul had the greatest extent of knowledge and authority, he never used it to destroy any.
   2. He governed his entire ministry for the furtherance of the gospel, including going without pay!

10:9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

A. The false apostles at Corinth slandered Paul for writing terrifying letters without the power to perform his threats, which they used to justify their rebellion against his memory and epistles.

B. Paul detailed their slanderous accusation and rebellious sedition in the next verses (II Cor 10:10-11).

C. Since this false accusation had arisen in Corinth, Paul saw the value of defending his authority for the confirmation of his epistles and the warning of those who were daring him to come with a rod.

D. Paul had not written them just to vainly intimidate or threaten them, for he was fully committed to using his apostolic authority to correct any errors in the church upon his personal arrival.

10:10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

A. The false apostles admitted that Paul wrote weighty and powerful letters, especially the first epistle.
   1. The first epistle had rebuked the church for numerous errors, including foolish preacher factions.
   2. And he had severely rebuked the church for harboring the incestuous fornicator (I Cor 5:1-13).
   3. He had identified faults and threatened judgment in several places in the first epistle (I Cor 3:11-23; 4:18-21; 9:1-11; 11:16,34; 14:36-38; 15:35-36; 16:1,22).

B. But they ridiculed him as fearful and not persuasive in presence, in order to justify church rebellion.
   1. Paul was not impressive physically, which profane rebels foolishly despised (Gal 4:13-14).
   2. Remember, his "contemptible" speech was by choice to prove God's power (I Cor 2:1-5).
   3. In winning the church, being made all things to all men, Paul had abased himself to win them.

10:11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.

A. Without naming his enemies, Paul told them that his presence would match his terrifying letters!

B. Paul and the church knew those he described, who thought Paul a weak man in bodily presence.

C. Because Paul had been humble and meek among them, the false teachers presumed that he would not enforce his threats, and they sought to convince the rest of the church of this weakness.

10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

A. Paul admitted he and his colleagues had no interest in joining or comparing themselves with the illustrious false apostles, who foolishly commended themselves by abilities and accomplishments.
   1. The "number" must be a clique of false teachers dedicated to vainglory and self-aggrandizement.
   2. Some understand the "dare not" as sarcastic irony, but it is rather Paul's condemnation of folly.
   3. As then, most ministers today commend themselves by their family pedigree, IQ, educational attainments, seminary, grades, mentor, eloquence, memory, numbers of converts, speaking engagements, honorary doctorates, church growth, books written, books read, etc., etc.
   4. And it is a horrible shame when God's saints also compare ministers and build preacher factions.
   5. The listening public is just about the worst judge of preaching that can be imagined, for they will naturally be attracted to those ministers that entertain and comfort them, not war against them.
   6. It is absurd to compare yourself with others, especially the arrogant, and especially for ministers!
   7. Ministerial associations are generally a professional fellowship for envy, pride, and self-praise.

B. There is only one standard and one judge that should matter to any minister, the Lord and His word (I Sam 12:5; Job 16:19; I Cor 3:5-17; 4:3-4; II Tim 2:14-18; 3:16-17; 4:6-8).
   1. Measuring against yourself and others is to promote human pride and miss God's measurement.
   2. We shall give an account to God, not other men; and we shall be judged by the perfect law of liberty (II Cor 5:10-11; Judges 2:12).
   3. Every minister should judge himself by spiritual, Scriptural fruits (Matt 7:15-20; I Cor 3:5-17).
   4. It is folly to think you can judge yourself or commend yourself (Pr 21:2; 25:27; 26:12; 27:2; Jer 17:9; Rom 12:3; I Cor 4:1-5; III John 1:9).

10:13 But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.

A. Paul would not boast "without our measure," meaning outside the appointed labors assigned by God, and meaning also laying claim to labors done by other men, which he will describe shortly (10:15).

B. The "measure of the rule" in this text is the specific appointment by God to Paul and his ministerial colleagues of the offices, roles, results, and geographical locations of their ministering.
   1. Paul, though boasting legitimately, refused to boast of any appointment God had not given him or of

any accomplishments he had not personally obtained by his own diligence and obedience.

2. The implication is that the clique of false teachers boasted of labors not assigned to them and not earned by their own labors and blessings.
3. God's appointment of Paul to the ministry was obviously a dramatic and irrefutable proof of His divine calling and his building of a church in Corinth from scratch was also by God's direction.
4. Paul turned the world upside down, according to his enemies, by the will of God in sending him from Antioch to numerous places that had not heard the gospel before.

C. Consider the similar and helpful statement that Paul made to the Romans (Romans 15:15-24).

10:14 For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ:

A. Paul's work in Corinth was clearly a work of God, and he was not extending himself beyond his God-given assignment and labors in claiming them as his work, for he had reached unto them.

B. "As though we reached not unto you," are words confirming the legitimacy of Paul's boasting, for he had indeed come to Corinth and done much; his boasting would only be like the pretensions of the false teachers, if he had not so labored in Corinth; but he had labored, so his boasting was right.

C. Paul had started his apostolic and evangelistic work in Antioch of Syria, from where he had worked himself through Asia and Greece to the great city of Corinth, which was indeed far from Antioch.

D. The false apostles had no such divine authority for entering Corinth, but they had come to take advantage of this rich and prosperous church.

10:15 Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly,

A. Not only did Paul have divine authority for being at Corinth, he never boasted in other men's labors.

1. The false teachers had come from Jerusalem and taken advantage of the church Paul started, the beginnings of which we can read about in detail in Acts 18:1-18, and which Apollos furthered (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1). The labors were Paul's, but the reward was taken by the false teachers.
2. These devilish imposters had done none of Paul's work of starting a church in such a pagan city.
3. Yet they had presumed upon the people as important apostles and turned the church against Paul.

B. Paul and his colleagues hoped for the soon support of the church to engage in further evangelism.

1. Paul was never content, but ever hoping to do more, when he might be free from Corinth's care.
2. The church needed to grow in faith, so Paul would not be so occupied with babysitting them.
3. Paul's measure and ministry would be enlarged, when he could stop worrying about Corinth.
4. Paul hoped for financial support to extend their evangelistic work to new areas (Rom 15:18-29).
5. Paul and the other true ministers would work abundantly in their labors, if they had the support.
6. There would be an abundant increase in Paul's ministry and measure when Corinth was settled.

10:16 To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

A. Paul hoped for Corinth's assistance to preach the gospel as far as Spain and other distant regions.
   1. Again, there is profit in reading Paul's similar statement to the church at Rome (Rom 15:15-29).
   2. Instead of settling in Corinth and retiring on the job, Paul had ambitions far beyond Corinth.
   3. Paul was driven to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, by fulfilling the office of apostle, as far as he could in his lifetime, by which we Gentiles have greatly benefited, especially if Pudens and Claudia brought the gospel from him to Wales (II Tim 4:21).

B. Paul gloried in the hardest work of the ministry – preaching the gospel to those who had never heard.
   1. The false teachers had come to Corinth and taken advantage of Paul's conversion of those saints.
   2. Paul discreetly slammed the false teachers by refusing to boast himself of other men's labors.
   3. The church at Corinth was easy picking for the false teachers, a line of things made ready to their hand, because Paul had converted them, and now these pompous men could use the established church for their own advantage.
   4. But Paul was willing to labor with traditionalized Jews and pagan Gentiles to turn sinners to Jesus Christ, who had not believed on Him before.
   5. Paul had not taken any support to help the gospel, but they took it presumptuously (I Cor 9:12).

C. The modern "evangelist" is definitely a fulfillment of this condemnation of false teachers as thieves.
   1. The modern concept of an "evangelist" is entirely unknown and contrary to the word of God.
   2. These hucksters, no matter how sincere, travel from church to church like fabled gunslingers.
   3. But they are more like traveling salesmen, who make a presentation and go to the next market!
   4. They have 5-10 sermons that they repeat week after week at different churches for excitement!
   5. They do not know the members, cannot illustrate a godly life, and never deal with any problems!
   6. They suck in the offerings of excited hearers and church members served daily by their pastor!
   7. The evangelists in the Bible were apostle-like men who preached to those who had never heard, like Philip the evangelist, who preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert!

10:17 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

A. All men, but especially ministers, must glory in the Lord, for all ministerial successes are by Him.
   1. Even when Paul spoke of laboring more diligently than the other apostles, he still ascribed the whole matter to the grace of God in him, without which he was a stubborn rebel (I Cor 15:10).
   2. Whether Paul planting or Apollos watering, it was God that gave the increase (I Cor 3:5-10).
   3. Even when a minister does a perfect job, the success is by God's peradventure (II Tim 2:24-26).
   4. Paul could preach the gospel to Lydia, but the Lord had to open her heart to him (Acts 16:14).

B. All men, but especially ministers, must glory in the Lord, for all glory belongs unto Him, not men.
   1. The Lord made all things for himself, and this axiom should never be lost (Pr 16:4; Rev 4:11).
   2. There is nothing in the three great pursuits of men for glory, as there is in God (Jer 9:23-24).

3. Paul, more than any man, emphasized the glory of God over the glory of man (I Cor 1:29-31).
4. Paul had chosen to glory only in the cross of Jesus Christ at any cost to himself (Gal 6:14).

10:18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

A. Having rebuked some that commended themselves (3:1; 10:12), Paul now showed its worthlessness.
   1. It does not matter what you think of yourself: you are deceived, biased, and without a standard.
   2. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD ponders the hearts (Proverbs 21:2).
   3. The Pharisee thought to justify himself by measuring by sinners, but he failed (Luke 18:10-14).
   4. Self-praise is abominable, clearly condemned by Solomon, and entirely profitless (25:27; 27:2).
   5. Jesus condemned those receiving praise from men as precluding God's approval (John 5:42-44).
   6. Commendation by men, especially proud men, does not have a thing to do with God's approval.
   7. Giving it any room in your heart is highly dangerous as a temptation (Pr 29:25; John 12:42-43).

B. Paul only sought the approval of God, for that is the only approval or commendation that matters.
   1. God's men seek only His praise, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," (Matthew 25:21).
   2. There is great danger in seeking man's approval, for it is an abomination to God (Luke 16:15).
   3. God's approval and commendation is dependent on spiritual fruit (Matt 7:15-20; Rom 14:17-18).
   4. Until we meet God and hear His sentence upon our lives, we have the word of God to guide us.

Conclusion:

1. Appreciation for Paul and the others apostles and teachers should be increased by considering this chapter.
2. Wise saints desire their pastor to wage warfare against them from the pulpit and in private correspondence.
3. You should be totally content with whatever role God has given you in life, marriage, the church, and Him.
4. Is God's glory and approval the only two things that matter to you in life's choices and priorities and goals?

For Further Study:

1. The sermon outline, "Contemporary Christianity," which identifies numerous ministerial weapons that are truly carnal.
2. The sermon outline, "Rude Preachers," shows the nature of Bible preachers compared to today's pretenders.
3. The sermon outline, "Instant Preaching," shows the nature of Bible preaching compared to today's fables and stories.
4. The seminar notebook, "The Great Commission," provides further geographical details of the abundant

apostolic labors.