

CHAPTER 10

There was no place in which the apostle Paul met with more opposition from false apostles than at Corinth; he had many enemies there. Let not any of the ministers of Christ think it strange if they meet with perils, not only from enemies, but from false brethren; for blessed Paul himself did so. Though he was so blameless and inoffensive in all his carriage, so condescending and useful to all, yet there were those who bore him ill-will, who envied him, and did all they could to undermine him, and lessen his interest and reputation. Therefore he vindicates himself from their imputation, and arms the Corinthians against their insinuations. In this chapter the apostle, in a mild and humble manner, asserts the power of his preaching, and to punish offenders (v. 1-6). He then proceeds to reason the case with the Corinthians, asserting his relation to Christ, and his authority as an apostle of Christ (v. 7-11), and refuses to justify himself, or to act by such rules as the false teachers did, but according to the better rules he had fixed for himself (v. 12 to the end).

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6

THE APOSTLE'S SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Here we may observe,

I. The mild and humble manner in which the blessed apostle addresses the Corinthians, and how desirous he is that no occasion may be given him to use severity.

1. He addresses them in a very mild and humble manner: *I Paul myself beseech you*, v. 1. We find, in the introduction to this epistle, he joined Timothy with himself; but now he speaks only for himself, against whom the false apostles had particularly levelled their reproaches; yet in the midst of the greatest provocations he shows humility and mildness, from the consideration of the *meekness and gentleness of Christ*, and desires this great example may have the same influence on the Corinthians. Note,

When we find ourselves tempted or inclined to be rough and severe towards any body, we should think of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that appeared in him in the days of his flesh, in the design of his undertaking, and in all the acts of his grace towards poor souls. How humbly also does this great apostle speak of himself, as *one in presence base among them!* So his enemies spoke of him with contempt, and he seems to acknowledge it; while others thought meanly, and spoke scornfully of him, he had low thoughts of himself, and spoke humbly of himself. Note, We should be sensible of our own infirmities, and think humbly of ourselves, even when men reproach us for them.

2. He is desirous that no occasion may be given to use severity, v. 2. *He beseeches them* to give no occasion for him to be bold, or to exercise his authority against them in general, as he had resolved to do against some who unjustly charged him as *walking according to the flesh*, that is, regulating his conduct, even in his ministerial actions, according to carnal policy or with worldly views. This was what the apostle had renounced, and this is contrary to the spirit and design of the gospel, and was far from being the aim and design of the apostle. Hereupon,

II. He asserts the power of his preaching and his power to punish offenders.

1. The power of his preaching, v. 3, 5. Here observe,

(1.) The work of the ministry is a warfare, not *after the flesh* indeed, for it is a spiritual warfare, with spiritual enemies and for spiritual purposes. And though ministers walk in the flesh, or live in the body, and in the common affairs of life act as other men, yet in their work and warfare they must not go by the maxims of the flesh, nor should they design to please the flesh: this must be crucified with its affections and lusts; it must be mortified and kept under.

(2.) The doctrines of the gospel and discipline of the church are the weapons of this warfare; and these are not carnal: outward force, therefore, is not the method of the gospel, but strong persuasions, by the power of truth and the meekness of wisdom. A good argument this is against persecution for conscience' sake: conscience is accountable to God only; and people must be persuaded to God and their duty, not driven by force of arms. And so the weapons of our warfare are mighty, or very powerful; the evidence of truth is convincing and cogent. This indeed is through

God, or owing to him, because they are his institutions, and accompanied with his blessing, which makes all opposition to fall before his victorious gospel. We may here observe,

[1.] What opposition is made against the gospel by the powers of sin and Satan in the hearts of men. Ignorance, prejudices, beloved lusts, are Satan's strong-holds in the souls of some; vain imaginations, carnal reasonings, and high thoughts, or proud conceits, in others, *exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*, that is, by these ways the devil endeavours to keep men from faith and obedience to the gospel, and secures his possession of the hearts of men, as his own house or property. But then observe,

[2.] The conquest which the word of God gains. These strong-holds are pulled down by the gospel as the means, through the grace and power of God accompanying it as the principal efficient cause. Note, The conversion of the soul is the conquest of Satan in that soul.

2. The apostle's power to punish offenders (and that in an extraordinary manner) is asserted in v. 6. The apostle was a prime-minister in the kingdom of Christ, and chief officer in his army, and *had in readiness* (that is, he had power and authority at hand) *to revenge all disobedience*, or to punish offenders in a most exemplary and extraordinary manner. The apostle speaks not of personal revenge, but of punishing disobedience to the gospel, and disorderly walking among church-members, by inflicting church-censures. Note, Though the apostle showed meekness and gentleness, yet he would not betray his authority; and therefore intimates that when he would commend those whose obedience was fulfilled or manifested others would fall under severe censures.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-11

THE APOSTLE'S SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

In these verses the apostle proceeds to reason the case with the Corinthians, in opposition to those who despised him, judged him, and spoke hardly of him: “*Do you,*” says he, “*look on things after the outward appearance?*” v. 7. Is this a fit measure or rule to make an estimate of things or persons by, and to judge between me and my adversaries?” In outward appearance, Paul was mean and despicable with some; he did not

make a figure, as perhaps some of his competitors might do: but this was a false rule to make a judgment by. It should seem that some boasted mighty things of themselves, and made a fair show. But there are often false appearances. A man may seem to be learned who has not learned Christ, and appear virtuous when he has not a principle of grace in his heart. However, the apostle asserts two things of himself:

I. His relation to Christ: *If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's*, v. 7. It would seem by this that Paul's adversaries boasted of their relation to Christ as his ministers and servants. Now the apostle reasons thus with the Corinthians: "Suppose it to be so, allowing what they say to be true (and let us observe that, in fair arguing, we should allow all that may be reasonably granted, and should not think it impossible but those who differ from us very much may yet belong to Christ, as well as we), allowing them," might the apostle say, "what they boast of, yet they ought also to allow this to us, that *we also are Christ's*." Note,

1. We must not, by the most charitable allowances we make to others who differ from us, cut ourselves off from Christ, nor deny our relation to him. For,

2. There is room in Christ for many; and those who differ much from one another may yet be one in him. It would help to heal the differences that are among us if we would remember that, how confident soever we may be that we belong to Christ, yet, at the same time, we must allow that those who differ from us may belong to Christ too, and therefore should be treated accordingly. We must not think that we are the people, and that none belong to Christ but ourselves. This we may plead for ourselves, against those who judge us and despise us that, how weak soever we are, yet, as they are Christ's, so are we: we profess the same faith, we walk by the same rule, we build upon the same foundation, and hope for the same inheritance.

II. His authority from Christ as an apostle. This he had mentioned before (v. 6), and now he tells them that he might speak of it again, and that with some sort of boasting, seeing it was a truth, that the *Lord had given it to him*, and it was more than his adversaries could justly pretend to. It was certainly what he should not be ashamed of, v. 8. Concerning this observe,

1. The nature of his authority: it was for *edification, and not for destruction*. This indeed is the end of all authority, civil and ecclesiastical, and was the end of that extraordinary authority which the apostles had, and of all church-discipline.

2. The caution with which he speaks of his authority, professing that his design was not to terrify them with big words, nor by angry letters, v. 9. Thus he seems to obviate an objection that might have been formed against him, v. 10. But the apostle declares he did not intend to frighten those who were obedient, nor did he write any thing in his letters that he was not able to make good by deeds against the disobedient; and he would have his adversaries *know this* (v. 11), that he would, by the exercise of his apostolical power committed to him, make it appear to have a real efficacy.

~~AND~~ 2 CORINTHIANS 10:12-18

THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

In these verses observe,

I. The apostle refuses to justify himself, or to act by such rules as the false apostles did, v. 12. He plainly intimates that they took a wrong method to commend themselves, in *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*, which was *not wise*. They were pleased, and did pride themselves, in their own attainments, and never considered those who far exceeded them in gifts and graces, in power and authority; and this made them haughty and insolent. Note, If we would compare ourselves with others who excel us, this would be a good method to keep us humble; we should be pleased and thankful for what we have of gifts or graces, but never pride ourselves therein, as if there were none to be compared with us or that did excel us. The apostle would not be of the number of such vain men: let us resolve that we will not make ourselves of that number.

II. He fixes a better rule for his conduct, namely, *not to boast of things without his measure*, which was the measure *God had distributed* to him, v. 13. His meaning is, either that he would not boast of more gifts or graces, or power and authority, than God had really bestowed on him; or,

rather, that he would not act beyond his commission as to persons or things, nor go beyond the line prescribed to him, which he plainly intimates the false apostles did, while they *boasted of other men's labors*. The apostle's resolution was to keep within his own province, and that compass of ground which God had marked out for him. His commission as an apostle was to preach the gospel every where, especially among the Gentiles, and he was not confined to one place; yet he observed the directions of Providence, and the Holy Spirit, as to the particular places whither he went or where he did abide.

III. He acted according to this rule: *We stretch not ourselves beyond our measure*, v. 14. And, particularly, he acted according to this rule in preaching at Corinth, and in the exercise of his apostolical authority there; for he came thither by divine direction, and there he converted many to Christianity; and, therefore, in boasting of them as his charge, he acted not contrary to his rule, he boasted not of *other men's labours*, v. 15.

IV. He declares his success in observing this rule. His hope was that their faith was increased, and that others beyond them, even in the remoter parts of Achaia, would embrace the gospel also; and in all this he exceeded not his commission, nor acted in another man's line.

V. He seems to check himself in this matter, as if he had spoken too much in his own praise. The unjust accusations and reflections of his enemies had made it needful he should justify himself; and the wrong methods they took gave him good occasion to mention the better rule he had observed: yet he is afraid of boasting, or taking any praise to himself, and therefore he mentions two things which ought to be regarded

1. *He that glorieth should glory in the Lord*, v. 17. If we are able to fix good rules for our conduct, or act by them, or have any good success in so doing, the praise and glory of all are owing unto God. Ministers in particular must be careful not to glory in their performances, but must give God the glory of their work, and the success thereof.

2. *Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth*, v. 18. Of all flattery, self-flattery is the worst, and self-applause is seldom any better than self-flattery and self-deceit. At the best, self-commendation is no praise, and it is oftentimes as foolish and vain as it is proud; therefore, instead of praising or commending ourselves, we

should strive to approve ourselves to God, and his approbation will be our best commendation.