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# 2 Corinthians

## Lesson 12

### “2 Corinthians 10”

**Objective:** To explore the ancient text of 2 Corinthians in order to understand more fully and completely the call of God for us today as we seek to live out our lives in service to the Kingdom of God, to His glory, His Honor and His will. These ancient texts can challenge us, and inspire us, to live life more fully as participants in God’s story of redemption and love. At the core, the hope and desire for doing this study is that we will be continually transformed more fully and completely into useful instruments in the hands of God for bringing His message of love and compassion, and life to every creature.

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**Materials:** The Bible, Commentaries, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet and other resources as may be appropriate. It is also our hope that each person will bring to the discussion and class times the things that God has placed upon their heart through their unique journey as people seeking the face of God and the life He seeks to bring.

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#### Procedures

1. To explore biblically and logically what matters most to God in order to understand how we are to live. This will entail exploring the background of these texts in order to understand more fully their intended meaning for their original target audience.
2. We will also seek to explore how these ancient texts, addressed to ancient peoples, should, and must challenge us today in our walk of faith and obedience to the will of God.

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  - 3.** We intend in each instance to offer some practical suggestions as to how the call of God, through His Apostle, Paul, calls us to live our lives in such a way as to reflect our confident hope and expectation in the power of God. We seek the face of God.

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In the defense/argument section of 2 Corinthians Paul began with a masterful comparison of his ministry with that of Moses (chapter 3), and now Paul closes it with a comparison between his ministry and that of his opponents.<sup>1</sup> The tone here changes considerably from what we have seen in the previous section and in this section it will be much more directed toward a change in attitude and behavior on the part of the believers at Corinth and in Achaia as well as that of Paul's opponents. There is perhaps nothing that distracts, detracts and destroys ministry as much as prideful attitude. It certainly appears that this attitude was very much alive and well among the believers that Paul addressed and he knows that if it is not dealt with it will ultimately destroy the good ministry that is being done and what is possible for the future.

In dealing with this attitude, Paul is going to continue in his manner of being very frank, straightforward, and direct. For many, especially those us from the southern United States this may seem harsh, or even rude. In this context, it is neither rude, nor harsh, it is merciful, and actually a mark of friendship and

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 429-430.

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respect. Paul loves and respects his audience too much to play games, or pretend that things will be okay without change. They will not be okay without marked change. What Paul is explaining to his audience is a matter of life and death, literally. He does not wish for them to run their race in vain (i.e. Philippians 2:6). Such a possibility truly existed for them, as indeed it does for all of us. The whole reason that Paul devoted so much ink, time, and effort to the church of Corinth was in order to avoid this possibility.

In verse 1, Paul uses irony and sarcasm in order to let them know that their words and thoughts have indeed reached him and that he is aware of things that they had been saying in his absence. They had been accusing Paul of being a big man, bold when not there looking them in the eye, while when he was present he was meek and gentle. Paul addresses them expressing that he wants to appeal to them very personally with a “meekness and gentleness.” He pleads with them that they will spare him the necessity (verse 2) of being bold with them when he comes face to face with them. In this verse, there is very much a threat that he will indeed boldly face those who are making these accusations of “acting according to human standards.” So often people are really

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brave until coming face to face with someone they are in conflict with over an issue. Paul wants them to understand that he will indeed face them and address this issue. A part of being what God has called us to be is not avoiding the difficult things, even when they are very awkward and uncomfortable. The easy way out is just to pretend it will go away or to talk to someone else and get them to do the hard work of confronting that which is difficult.

In verse 3, Paul indicates that they indeed live as “human beings” (σὰρκι) as it is translated by many translations. It is my feeling that this way of translating this word which literally means something like “as flesh” narrows the focus too much here. I believe this excludes a major tenet of Paul’s argument as in verse 4, the contrast appears to me to be more related to the contrast between fleshly and spiritual, or divine warfare. Paul sees this backbiting and creation of dissension as a spiritual conflict and thus he will bring to bear spiritual weapons to deal with this attack. Satan seeks to sow discord, dissatisfaction, and the picking of favorites as means of destroying progress and good work in the kingdom. These are powerful tools that do great damage and cause massive destruction. What seems petty and small is actually

huge, sucking the life out of much that could be not just good ministry, but great ministry.

Paul indicates at the end of verse 3 that he and his companions do not wage war according to “flesh” (σάρκα). The contrast given in our English translations seems far weaker and along a different trajectory than Paul’s actual words here. His threat is one (verse 4) of bringing to bear in such a conflict “the power, or strength of God” (δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ). This is a powerful and provocative threat that will certainly have given the recipients of this letter pause for thought. Perhaps for us today, living in a time when we do not really seem to appreciate either the good will, or the threat of ill will from God, this does not have the same impact that it will have likely had for the original audience. We live in a time so heavily reliant upon our technology, our hope for greater and better technology, what we can see feel, taste and touch that so often we have chosen to sideline God from our everyday lives altogether. For the audience of Paul in Corinth, such a perspective will not have existed. Paul and his companions do not conduct ministry in the power of their own strength, in

their own cleverness, nor with the arguments of flesh and blood.

They have access to, and they use, power that comes from God.

So often today as we consider what direction, or action we should take in ministry we are hampered because we only consider our own strength, our own resources, our own power.

Paul and his companions on the other hand minister knowing that they have available to them the power of God. This power can lay waste obstacles, destroy arguments, and even take “every thought captive” (verse 5). The threat that Paul makes here is that he and his companions have access to an unseen, unstoppable source of power, and that they can, and will, use it to “destroy arguments,” (λογισμοὺς καθαιροῦντες). Again, I am not extremely happy with the translation given here in many of our English Bibles as it, though perhaps technically correct, changes the nuance and weakens what is said here. Paul indicates that they have the power to destroy “thought,” “reason” or even “logic.”

Verse 4 continues as a sentence into verse 5 and Paul destroys, using the power from God, “every high thing” that is raised up against God. Again our English versions seek to clarify too much and in doing so they significantly limit the meaning,

narrowing it down. Certainly arrogance is one of the things destroyed, but so is every high and mighty thought. The maker of the universe is more than a match for whatever logic is being thrown up by Paul's opponents and this is the power that is available to Paul and his companions. This is an extraordinarily powerful threat that I believe is intended to be intimidating and threatening to those who oppose Paul and his companions in their ministry. Paul, it appears is dealing with those that prize themselves as the intelligencia. They are proud of how intelligent and educated they are. If there was any doubt that Paul is being extremely aggressive here verse 6 removes that doubt when he informs them that he will "avenge," or "punish" (ἐκδικῆσαι) any and all "disobedience" (παρακοήν). This word translated as "disobedience" carries the meaning of a person who is "unwilling to hear." These people and maybe even some in Corinth are likely "unwilling" to hear.

Paul is neither politically correct nor gentle in this part of his epistle. He is very serious and direct in indicating that any, and all, opposition will be dealt with using the power of God. Verse 6 is idiomatic and indicates that Paul recognizes that there is a

faction that are the instigators of the problems at Corinth. When that faction is separated out from the whole Paul intends for them to understand that there will be punishment for their actions. Paul is not an advocate for leniency here, he clearly believes that punishment is a tool that is useful for altering bad behavior and he is perfectly willing to use it. In this section Paul borrows heavily from Roman military imagery. His weapons, which are made powerful by God are to be used for the destruction of strongholds, bulwarks and fortresses. These are targets that militaries seek to destroy. He clarifies that the strongholds are their logic, their philosophical reasoning, and their high ideals, or speech that reflect a sense of superiority and arrogance. The arguments that Paul will bring crashing down are the arrogant reasonings of those who have rationalizations that are raised up against God.<sup>2</sup>

In all of this, Paul still expresses the hope and even the expectation that the people of Achaia and Corinth will come back to a state of obedience. He will then drive out the “visiting apostles” who have been causing the problems there. Paul considers these apostles to be standing in a place of disobedience

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<sup>2</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2009), pp. 193-194.

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to God that makes them enemies of God and His kingdom. In the actions described by Paul here of “demolish, drive out and lead captive,” he follows the very well-known pattern of practice that was followed by the Roman army. With such imagery in place, Paul seems a long way from the traditional view that so many have of Christ as being meek and mild.<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps the case that our perceptions of Christ are often tainted somewhat. I am fairly certain that the perception that was held by the money-changers in the Jerusalem temple was not of Jesus all meek and mild as he turned over their tables and chased them from the temple courts. Paul sees the church as the temple of God and perhaps it is the case that he sees it as not only appropriate, but necessary to chase out those who are destroying the fabric of the temple by perverting the gospel and fragmenting the people of the church.

At verse 7, Paul challenges his audience to “see what is right in front of them.” He challenges them to see and acknowledge that in the same way they are Christ’s so are Paul and his companions. So often the last place we look when there is actually a problem is the first place that we should look, at ourselves. Are we truly

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<sup>3</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 194.

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doing, acting, and believing as we should? Are we truly reflecting Christ in our nature, in our attitudes, in our reasoning? Notice that he talks about “belonging” to Christ. He uses here the possessive form, “of Christ.” How can we, as human beings, claim to be “of Christ” and act the way we so often do? What does it mean to be “of Christ?” Surely it means here that we are to “reason” like Christ, to see things from His perspective the way He would. Perhaps it is the case that if we were always very much aware of the presence of Christ, our actions, our words, and even our thoughts, would be different. Paul wants to remind his audience just as they are “of Christ” so also are he and his companions. Therefore, to criticize Paul is to criticize in a sense Christ unless their accusation is that somehow Paul and his companions are not accurately and correctly representing Christ.

At verse 8, Paul even allows for the possibility that they may boast a little too much in their authority, but there is no shame in this because God gave them that authority in order to allow them to build up the believers and that is what they are striving to do. This apparently addressed one more accusation that his critics have been leveling against them. Notice that he will even concede

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this point and yet powerfully connects it not only with his mission, but also with his hope of building up the believers. This authority is in reality a constructive authority intended for building and not intended for destroying. Several scholars have noted a similarity between what Paul writes here and the writing of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, at 1:10 delivers a call from God to “pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jeremiah then looked forward to a day when God would restore the exiles and “build them up and not tear them down” (24:6).

Jeremiah also looked ahead to the coming of the new covenant people upon whose heart God would write on the hearts of the people so that they would know God (31:31-34).<sup>4</sup>

This would link in well with what Paul has previously emphasized about the new covenant being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That then makes Paul’s ministry a reversal of the ministry of Jeremiah, as this ministry is for building up, not for tearing down. This relates to why he boasts in his authority, because his authority is for this building up.<sup>5</sup> Paul then moves into verse 9 where he states that he is indeed not trying to frighten the readers

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<sup>4</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>5</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 195.

by his letters. This seems to be in some sense then intended to counter one of the accusations made against Paul that his letters are weighty, but when he comes in person he is a lightweight. The word used here for “frighten” (ἐκφοβεῖν) might more properly be translated as “to terrify.” Paul further clarify that he is answering an accusation made against him in verse 10 even describing their perception of his actual speech “contemptible.” Their assessment was that they despised the speech of Paul. How much worse could an assessment be for one that is called to proclaim the Gospel message. Notice that this is the assessment of people, for the chosen instrument of God, chosen for exactly this role. God does not see as man sees, nor choose as man chooses. This should serve as a stark reminder to us all as we critique those that God has called into His service as proclaimers of His Gospel message.

Paul wants to make it very clear to his audience that indeed they can expect the same weighty response in person that is in his letters (verse 11). Paul is giving them every opportunity to make amends and act in the right way before he arrives on the scene. Clearly in the words they have spoken against Paul they have stung him and rather than taking personal offense Paul has tried

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to respond gently, but as that has not been effective he is now going to come in and powerfully address the issue face to face as he has in his letters that even his opponents have had to admit were weighty. Often it is the case that people can be more bold in their writing than they are in person, but make no mistake, Paul is telling them that he is more than capable of being just as bold in person as his letters have been. Even in this terse portion of the letter Paul seems to be trying to take every opportunity to give them the chance to repent and turn away from the direction they have been going.

Verse 12, begins a new section of his correspondence; in this section we have reached what is often considered the central portion of this section where Paul will defend himself against his rivals. In 10:1-11, he has laid out the criterion by which his apostolic ministry is guided: i.e. his threats made to his audience. In doing this Paul directly challenges the claims of those other visiting would-be apostles. The further into the letter we come the more we are beginning to be able to see the specifics of the conflict that these people have created with Paul and his

companions by challenging them.<sup>6</sup> As Paul begins this section, he indicates that he is not going to undertake to “dare” (τολμῶμεν) to “compare” themselves to these traveling apostles. There is in the words of Paul here a stinging criticism that they are measuring things in a different way, on a different scale than he and his companions. Their scale is clearly “fleshly” and not something that demonstrates good “reasoning” (συνιᾶσιν).

In contrast, Paul indicates (verse 13) that instead they will confine their boasting to limits that are defined by God. The ministry of Paul and his companions has been given to them by God and as such, they will stay within the limits given by God. In verse 14 Paul indicates clearly they were staying within their limits and that within those limits they were the first to reach out to the people of Corinth and Achaia. Those limits were set by God and so they were doing what God wanted when they delivered the Gospel message to the believers there. The implication here, and on into verse 15, is that the opponents of Paul are boasting in a manner that is beyond the limits of what God has assigned to them. Paul was the apostle who was assigned the task of founding

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<sup>6</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 199.

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the church in Corinth. Paul wants the work that they began in Corinth to grow and prosper so that the Gospel spreads because of their increase in faith. They also want their faith to increase so that they can move to lands beyond Corinth and Achaia, lands as yet unreached by the Gospel message.

As energy is consumed helping the church in Corinth to stabilize and grow in faith, the energies and time of Paul and his companions is used up, and the expansion of the kingdom is slowed. If they (the believers at Corinth and in Achaia) would actually grow in their faith and understanding so that Paul did not have to keep writing to them, visiting them, and sending his fellow-workers to counsel and check on them, then the kingdom could grow more effectively and efficiently into new areas that had, as of yet, not been reached by the Gospel message. This issue was then, and still is, a plague on the church eating resources and time that might more properly be spent on kingdom expansion rather than upon tedious, petty, and infantile matters that show a lack of faith and a lack of understanding regarding God's kingdom. So often churches, even today, are consumed in trivia, and minutiae consuming valuable resources and wasting them on

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selfish human endeavors rather than on spiritual things guided by a deep and passionate desire to please God and join Him in expanding the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Paul, once again in verse 17, returns to a central issue as he continues in his efforts to reorient his audience toward a new perspective on the world; one that focuses on things of kingdom value rather than upon earthy things. It is so easy for the earthy to swallow the heavenly in our sphere of perspective. He challenges them to “boast” in the Lord. In this way, he changes the focus to that of seeking commendation from the Lord rather than seeking the commendation and accolades of men. Paul makes this really clear as we close with verse 18 where his focus is clearly on the commendation and approval of the Lord.

# Synopsis

In this section, Paul begins a new phase of his letter by comparing his ministry to that of his adversaries who have settled in among the believers at Corinth and in Achaia. He addresses a number of issues that clearly are accusations that have been made by his opponents against him and his companions. He makes a sharp contrast between “fleshly” standards and those that he uses which are linked to divine power. In doing this Paul is making more than veiled threat to unleash this power upon his opponents. Another aspect of these opponents is clearly the fact that they fancy themselves as intellectually superior to Paul. It is Paul’s intent to punish those who persist in a resistance of God’s power.

He reminds the believers there that they belong to Christ, as do Paul and his companions. This fact should affect their perception of Paul and links their belief with the ministry of Paul and his companions as they were the ones who first brought them the Gospel. In the midst of this, Paul reveals another accusation made against him. This accusation is that his letters are bold and weighty while in person he is meek and lightweight. He informs

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them that he will be just as bold as his letters when he meets with them face to face in the future.

In the final paragraph of this section, Paul talks about measures and links his ministry and his very being with God's measurement, and not with some lesser human measure. The ministry of Paul is commended, commissioned, and empowered by God and as such is beyond their judgment and does not require their approval. He also indicates that if they would get their act together and allow Paul to do so, he would move on to proclaiming the Gospel to others who had not yet heard. They need to grow up and mature in their faith. They are damaging the progress of the kingdom because of their immature faith.

# Questions

1. What are some situations in life where you have felt the need to defend yourself?
2. What are some things that you consider petty and unimportant? Why?
3. What does it mean for a person to be meek and humble?
4. Why do you think it often so difficult to confront someone?
5. What are some standards that you live by? Why?
6. Do you believe that God punishes people today? Why, or why not?
7. When you think of obstacles of pride, what are some things that come to mind?
8. When you think of pride in general what are some of the images that come to your mind?
9. Do you think punishment changes behavior? Why, or why not?
10. What are some ways that we might take our thoughts captive in order to obey Christ?
11. If the church is the bride of Christ why are we often so critical of the church?
12. What are some things that you are frightened of, and why?

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13. How do you think it might be a service to God to confront another person?
  14. What are some things that you think it is good and proper to boast about?
  15. How are we to ascertain what the Lord wants us to do and what he is pleased with in our lives?