

“OUR AUTHORITY”

For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed-- lest I seem to terrify you by letters. (2 Corinthians 10:8-9 NKJV)

This whole chapter is a contrast between authority and boasting. Paul contrasts the authority which he has from God with the boastful false teachers who were causing trouble in the church, trying to discredit Paul and usurp positions of power for themselves.

One way in which authority is differentiated from boasting is by volume. Remember Hitler screamed and F.D.R. had “fireside chats.” Watch dog owners. Some are outside with their dog; when they want it to do something or to stop what the dog is doing, they speak quietly, the dog obeys immediately, and wags its tail. Others are screaming at their dog constantly to no affect. The dog does what it pleases, ignoring the shouts, screams, or pleading of its owner.

There have been a number of demonstrations lately. They are loud and noisy. Unfortunately, a lot of Christians get caught up in these demonstrations protesting abortion, gay marriage, transgender restrooms, immigration policies, and more.

That isn't the Christian way. Some in Corinth mistook Paul's quiet exercise of authority as meekness. How are we to change our society? Not by loud protest rallies. We quietly tell of the love of God in Christ Jesus and invite people repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. We read our Bibles regularly so that we can “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:” (1Peter 3:15) We offer prayers and supplications for all people. We do this in quiet confidence that no matter the media screams, Jesus Christ is always leading in triumph.

1.) Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:1-6 NKJV)

Paul begins by referring to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. When Elijah went up on Mount Horeb, there was a strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but God was in none of these. He came to Elijah and spoke in a still, small voice. When God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden, to the people from Mount Sinai, through the prophets and apostles, and through Jesus Christ, the voice was meek and kind, but the words brought fear. He knows the heart of man. No secrets are hidden from Him. The Good News is that as many as believe in Jesus Christ will not perish but have eternal life. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The word that brings fear is that whoever does not believe is condemned already. The wages of sin is death. Satan, his angels, and all human beings who have followed him in rejecting and rebelling against God will be cast into Hell and everlasting torment.

The enemies of God are the enemies of all who love God and are His children. They war against us with the weapons of the flesh – influence, persecution, oppression, mockery, slander. We do not use the same weapons. We don't organize marches and wave the Christian flag. We don't form political action groups, petition drives. Our weapons are faith, prayer, the Bible, acts of love in Jesus' name.

2.) Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's. For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed-- lest I seem to terrify you by letters. "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present. For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Corinthians 10:7-12 NKJV)

Paul sets up two sets of comparison here. He challenges them to ask themselves if they are Christian. If they are in Christ, Paul also is in Christ. He is like them in faith. After all, he is the one who brought them to faith in Christ.

Paul says that he will not be compared in the same class with those who commend themselves. They brag and boast that they are superior to Paul, that their knowledge is more sophisticated than his. They are measuring themselves by themselves. Paul says he would not dare to compare himself with them. Compare me with true believers in Christ he asks.

One criticism of Paul was "His letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." The Corinthians put much value on the eloquence of scholars. It was not only the ideas and reasons but the literary excellence in which they were presented. Paul spoke the language of the common people, even though he was learned in the literature of the Greeks. He lets them know that the boasters will get a sample of his boldness when he comes. "I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh." (verse 2)

3.) We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us--a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. (2 Corinthians 10:13-18 NKJV)

These boastful false teachers claimed that Paul was overreaching his authority, that he was trespassing the boundaries of their parish. In the first epistle to the Corinthians some of the problems he addressed suggest that there was a group of rich and powerful citizens of Corinth in that church – they were suing each other in civil court, there was a member who was sexually involved with his father's wife and apparently others who were visiting prostitutes. On communion Sundays, the well-to-do ate their food separately instead of sharing it.

These members of privilege were drawn to hiring a preacher or preachers who sold themselves by boasting of the great knowledge. Apparently, they were appointed by someone, perhaps an apostle, as the bishop of Corinth. In their minds Paul had violated the boundaries of their bishopric by writing a pastoral letter and planning to visit their members without asking their permission. Paul replies: For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;

As for the proud boasts and self-aggrandizement of these false prophets Paul says, But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.