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"As it was for Paul, so it will be for everyone who responds favorably to the superior knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, as taught and proclaimed by Paul. 'We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (v. 5). Whatever our mind comes up with, or whatever comes in from the outside, we will allow it space in our minds only if it is compatible with the Lordship of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and Savior."

PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS MINISTRY REVISITED

It is quite apparent, even to the casual reader, that chapter 10 reflects an abrupt change of mood and style on the part of the apostle Paul. Up to this point, Paul had written in a "kinder, gentler" fashion to the faithful in Corinth. He gave unrestrained expression *of* his deep affection for them, all of which had intensified since he had come so close to losing them to the false teachers. Apparently the apostle, guided by the Holy Spirit, felt that it would be helpful for these same beloved people if he would now take care of some "unfinished business." The nature of the "unfinished business" required a change of mood and style on the part of Paul. In this section, he put the spotlight on some of the "bad-mouthing" that was still being circulated in Corinth by his detractors.

ABOUT THE CHARGE THAT HE WAS "CHICKEN"

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1–11

One of the criticisms his antagonists liked to indulge in was the charge that he had the courage of a chicken. They said that Paul had used some pretty strong language in his letters, but when he was there in person, he was the proverbial timid "Mr. Milquetoast" (v. 10). With self-deprecating humor, Paul starts this portion of the letter not with boldness, but in the spirit of a humble supplicant. "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you" (v. 1). Paul uses an approach that is exactly the opposite of what his detractors had said was his usual style in letters. In verse two, he adds the thought that he hoped he wouldn't have to show them how

forceful and bold he could be when he was face-to-face with them.

Paul attributes the antagonism of his detractors to a total misunderstanding of the basis of Paul's ministry. He classifies them as "people who think that we live by the standards of this world" (v. 2). He goes on to say, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does" (v. 3). Here, Paul compares his ministry to a military campaign that is on the offensive to destroy the entrenched forces of evil and reclaim the world for God; something we pray for regularly in the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer, when we say "Thy Kingdom come!"

Paul explained that, since this "kingdom" is not of this world, its weapons, likewise, "are not of this world." It is reminiscent of what Jesus said to Pilate (John 18:37). The false teachers came to Corinth, flaunting their impressive Jewish pedigree like badges of authority intended to impress and intimidate the people. From comments that they made elsewhere, it appears that they put a great deal of confidence in their oratorical skills and psychological gimmickry. Many of the "neophyte converts" were "taken in" by the smooth-talking interlopers; to the point that they were persuaded to abandon the instruction they had received from Paul. The "learning" in all this is quite clear for us. It should be a "wake-up call" for church leaders who care about being true to their calling, as well as for those who are searching for a church home. Be cautious and discriminating!

In verse 4, Paul declares: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." The "strongholds" in this spiritual warfare are spelled out in verse 5. "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Only the truth from God has the power to penetrate the heart and deliver people from the misleading fallacies of human thought and wisdom. Only the Gospel of God can bring about a change of heart that leads to a genuine surrender to God. As it was for Paul, so it will be for everyone who responds favorably to the superior knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, as taught and proclaimed by Paul. "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (v. 5). Whatever our mind comes up with, or whatever comes in from the outside, we will allow it space in our minds only if it is compatible with the Lordship of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.

In the final verse of this section (v. 6), Paul picks up on the statement he made in verse two. He refers to the fact that he probably would have to be "bold" and deal harshly with some people in Corinth. "We will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete." Once Paul was confident that his people had "separated" themselves from the teachers who had usurped his authority, he assures them that he will go into action "to punish every act of disobedience" on the part of the false teachers. Paul would be "in their face," not timidly, but with bold pronouncements of judgment against these scoundrels. At the end of the section, he says it again: "What we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present" (v. 11). They could count on it! And it wouldn't be pretty to watch.

Apparently, at least one teacher set himself up against the apostle Paul. He claimed to have a special relationship with Christ, and disparaged Paul as someone who had joined the ranks of the followers of Christ in a roundabout way (1 Corinthians 15:8–9). Take a good look at the claim, he tells them, and you will discover that it has no merit. "We belong to Christ just as much as he" (v. 7). Paul here alludes to the very special way in which he had been

converted on the Damascus Road and had been commissioned by Jesus Himself to be His apostle to the Gentiles. Paul says (v. 8) that this was something he would never" be ashamed of," not because he was so great, but because it was such a dramatic example of the mercy and grace of God. He admits that he boasted "somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us." He explains that it really gave him pleasure, because it had been given to him for their benefit. It was not an "end unto itself." Paul said God gave him this authority, "for building you up rather than pulling you down."

Paul humbly apologizes to them about the "weighty and forceful" letters, for which his critics were citing him. "I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters" (v. 9). He knew that his antagonists were putting him down and saying: "In person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing" (v. 10). And they weren't the only ones. Another writing from that period describes Paul as "a man of small stature, with a bald head, and crooked legs...with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked." So, maybe his detractors had some basis for the charge that concerning his physical appearance, he wasn't too impressive!

Paul had told them "right up front" that they shouldn't expect him to sound like the popular orators of their culture. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). However, that he was a "wash out" as a public speaker simply was not true. Unlike the false teachers, he knew what he was talking about. The power in his speaking was the plain and simple Truth, which he had received from Christ Himself, and that was powerful! Just think of all the converts who responded to his Gospel preaching!

PAUL'S CRITIQUE OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

2 CORINTHIANS 10:12–18

Here, Paul takes on the claim of the false teachers that they were far superior to him and that they had more to offer. Evidently, there were still some among the members of the church in Corinth who were quite impressed by these false teachers. Paul uses the literary device of satire in his effort to get his friends in Corinth to see how gullible they had been in accepting at face value all of the credentials these smooth-talking interlopers were flashing before them. With satire, peppered with a sprinkle of sarcasm, Paul tells them that he wouldn't think of comparing himself with these people who obviously rated themselves so highly (v. 12). He was confident that his friends in Corinth would see where he was going with this, and would be led to "see through" these claims and evaluate them as invalid. So, he doesn't hesitate to say that when they "measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (literally, "foolish"). Paul hoped that his friends in Corinth would readily agree with his critique and in their minds pass judgment on the whole idea with the verdict: "How stupid of them! And how stupid of us to be so gullible."

In the remaining verses of this chapter, Paul takes another "swipe" at these teachers who claimed to be superior to him. He criticizes them, and their validity of the claim, that they were so much better than he. When he boasts about his ministry in Corinth and the effectiveness of his Gospel ministry in their midst, this has legitimacy because he had received a directive from God Himself to come to them. God had given him the assignment (Galatians 2:7–9). He had accepted the assignment and had given it his "best shot" (v. 13). The impostors had come on their own and were "taking credit" for whatever following they were able to swing their way. He leveled this charge of unethical behavior, first

for imposing themselves and their false Judaistic teaching upon these people whom Paul had recruited for the Christian faith. Paul had been the first to come to them "with the Gospel of Christ" (v. 14). He boldly stated that it was highly unethical of them to take credit and personal satisfaction for the following that had been stolen from Paul (v. 15). At this point, Paul was considering the boasting of the false teachers purely from a human point of view. He wanted the Corinthians to see for themselves, even at a human level, how "bogus" these men were.

Along the same line, Paul inserts here a thought which further reinforces his commitment to the principle which he had just enunciated. As the "Apostle to the Gentiles," he lets them know that he looked forward to the day when they would become a well-established congregation under capable pastoral leadership. He told them that he hoped to make Corinth the base from which he could reach out "in the regions beyond you" (v. 16). In Romans 15:24, Paul refers to his plan to eventually get as far as Spain with the Gospel. This was his deep passion, and he was good at it. He doesn't mind telling them that it gave him great satisfaction to bring the life-saving Gospel to people who hadn't heard it before.

Paul winds up this section by saying, in effect, "Let's get off this topic of boasting." He was very uncomfortable playing such a role. "But, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." He hoped that this would suffice to get them to really see through the preposterous claims of those self-appointed "super-apostles."

PAUL'S DEEP CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1–1.5

Having said what he did about "no more boasting," Paul now takes a different tack in his discussion about the untrustworthiness of his antagonists in Corinth. He begins with another veiled apology for continuing in this vein of thought. He wanted them to think about this situation and see it from Paul's viewpoint. Maybe that would help them to understand a little better why he was so concerned. He said that he was "jealous" for them "with a godly jealousy" (v. 2). The "godly jealousy" might be an allusion to the Words of God in Exodus 20:5, and in other places in the Old Testament, where God expressed His deep and abiding love for His people. God loves His people so much that He simply cannot tolerate the thought of them giving their heart to anyone else. It is not a sick or selfish jealousy, but an emotion that springs from his knowledge of what this will mean for those who turn their backs on Him.

Paul uses the analogy of something that was common in the culture of that day. He was like the traditional "matchmaker" who had been engaged by a father to handle all of the details of a betrothal on behalf of a son. One of the implications of the assignment for the agent was that he would guarantee the "virginity" of the bride-to-be. Paul hopes to engage the minds of the young converts to think of him as the agent of God the Father, through whom they had been "betrothed" to His Son, Jesus Christ. "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (v. 2). Their infidelity was not toward Paul, but to the Lord Jesus. Still, he would feel like a failure. Maybe they could begin to see why Paul was so emotionally involved in this venture.

As he focuses on what happened, he gently zeroes in on their gullibility. He refers to what happened, not as something they had deliberately done; but rather it was that they had allowed themselves to be seduced into misbelief. He points to the example of "Eve [who was] deceived by the serpent's cunning" (v. 3). He continues by

saying that somehow their "minds" had been "led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Their mistake, like Eve's, was that they gave an opening to the impostors and "listened" to them without evaluating and comparing what these people taught with what Paul had taught. There really was no excuse for doing that.

Another thing to consider, in this connection, that should make Paul's message more authentic and plausible, Paul says, was that he had nothing personal to gain from his preaching. Paul had leaned over backward, to make it as clear as possible, that he had no other motive for preaching the Gospel to the Corinthians than his deep love for them; people who needed to hear the Good News of God's forgiveness and love. So he preached the Gospel of God to them "free of charge," he says in verse 7. He explains that the Macedonians had come through to underwrite the mission work in Corinth and the surrounding area, "I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so" (v. 9).

Paul spent some time here trying to clear this up because his enemies made it a point of contention that he hadn't accepted any remuneration for his services. His enemies said derogatory things about this practice. It wasn't "politically correct," they said. As far as they were concerned, this should be enough for them to seriously question the integrity of Paul. That's why Paul begins this section with the question, "Was it a sin for me to lower myself" in this way? The "spin" that his opponents put on the policy that Paul had established while working in the area of Corinth, was that it showed Paul really didn't love these people since he wouldn't take their dollars.

Paul asks the rhetorical question about "why" he did it. Was it "Because I do not love you?" The answer: "God knows I do!" (v. 11), He explained that the criticism of the opposition would not get him to change this practice; it was to Paul's advantage to keep on doing business this way. It would keep the interlopers from putting themselves at the same level as the apostle because getting money for what they did was what it was all about for them. "I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want the opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about" (v. 12). The false prophets wished he would change his policy so that at least at this level he would be on the same footing as they were. There is the implication that these impostors, not only accepted money, they demanded it from their followers. In modem language, this greed "tipped their hand" and should have made it quite plain to everyone involved that their motive was not their love for the people, but strictly materialistic.

In the closing verses of this section (11:13–15), Paul "takes off the gloves" and declares in no uncertain terms his judgment against these men. He calls them "false prophets, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ" and (the ultimate condemnation), servants of Satan himself. Paul exposes the false apostles for what they really are, judging by what they were trying to do — destroying the faith in Christ which alone can save. They disguised themselves as servants of righteousness, but were in reality out to destroy God's work. This should not come as a surprise. Satan's attacks are seldom overt and frontal attacks. Satan himself paraded as a servant of "light" or representative of God Himself. They are often carried out by those within the church who misguidedly "play right into the hands of God's enemy." Paul's job was to expose them; God would take care of their destiny. They will get what they deserve when they stand before Him one day. With this, Paul rests his case against the false teachers.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–12:13

Lord of the Church, please open my mind and my heart to the many messages which You want to communicate through this portion of Scripture. Give me a new appreciation of the personal price that Paul and others paid, to make sure that the Gospel came through loud and clear. Help me to truly cherish the truth and to take a firm stand, resisting the tide of public opinion, which cannot tolerate the idea of "absolute truth." In the Name of Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Amen.

Review

1. Please re-read the first half of Chapter Eleven. How do you think Paul's harsh denunciation of the "bogus" teachers would come across to people of our generation who support the notion that "religious tolerance" is one of the greatest of virtues?

   How do you feel about Paul's intolerance of certain religious ideas?

   According to 11:3–4, why was it crucial for him to warn his people in Corinth about the false teachers and the false teachings?

   Was Jesus "tolerant" of other religions? (See John 14:6)

   How can we be tolerant of other people and still be true to Jesus?

2 Corinthians 11:16–21a

2. What does Paul call people who boast about themselves (11:16)?

   What excuse does Paul give for engaging in this questionable practice (11:18)?

3. What "disclaimer" does he also make in verse 17?

   Do you think this means that this section of his letter is of lesser quality than the rest of the letter? (2 Timothy 3:16)

4. In verse 20, Paul tells them why he thinks the people will go along with his unorthodox "boasting," and he also gives us some insight regarding the "leadership style" of the false teachers. How did these impostors treat Paul's good friends in Corinth?

What does it show about their understanding of the Gospel?

2 Corinthians 11:21b–29

5. When the renegade teachers first came, they tried to impress the members of the Corinthian congregation by introducing themselves as people who had the correct "bloodline." For the sake of his friends in Corinth, Paul makes the point that they "didn't have anything on him." What does Galatians 1:14 tell us about this in Paul's "pedigree"?

What does Philippians 3:4–6 say?

Or Acts 22:2–3?

6. How did Paul say he would "stack up" against their claim to be loyal "servants" of Christ (v. 23)?

List some of the things he actually endured as he carried out his service of ministry in the name of Christ (vv. 23b–25, 27).

What "dangers" did he have to deal with, according to verse 26?

What else does Paul say really sapped his energy and drained him emotionally (vv. 28–29)?

2 Corinthians 11:30–12:13

7. Which experience did Paul say really had an impact on him (11:30–33)? Why?

8. What very special event took place for Paul early in his ministry?

9. What does Paul call the debilitating ailment that he had to deal with from time to time (v. 7)?

What was the spiritual value of this for Paul (vv. 7, 9)?

How did he feel about it?

Can we apply this principle to our own life if God doesn't give favorable response to our prayers for deliverance from some problem or ailment? Explain your answer:

10. Whom does Paul implicate as he thinks about the "fool's speech," he had made (vv. 11– 13)?

What does he say they should have done?