

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 10

Paul's Defense of His Ministry

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. ⁷ You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. ⁸ For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” ¹¹ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. ¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. ¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. ¹⁴ We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, ¹⁶ so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory. ¹⁷ But, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Chs 10–13 A dark cloud now descends on 2Co. Some bad news from Corinth likely arrived as Paul was dictating the Letter (contradicting Titus’s joyful report, 7:6–7). Intruders have exacerbated tensions within the Church. These outsiders called Paul’s credentials into question, impugned his motives, and undermined his ministry among his own converts. Paul wants all glory to go to Christ, with every minister (including himself) standing humbly as the Lord’s messenger and instrument (cf 1Co 3:5–6). But the intruders blow their own trumpets (and obscure Christ from view in the process) and cast malicious aspersions on Paul’s person. Paul must set the record straight by “boasting” about his office (10:8) and what he has been given to

achieve through its exercise (10:13–16). Boasting of this kind diminishes the intruders and actually gives all glory to Christ! (TLSB)

10:1 *the meekness and gentleness of Christ.* Some Corinthians dismiss Paul’s meekness as weakness, not realizing that he is deliberately Christ-like when in their midst. Paul seems aware of Jesus’ saying recorded in Mt 11:29. (TLSB)

“timid” when face to face ... “bold” when away. From the mild tone of the first nine chapters of Paul’s letter, it appears that the majority of the Corinthian believers had been won over to Paul (cf. 7:6–13), after having been alienated by his Corinthian opponents. In this final section (chs. 10–13), however, Paul deals firmly with the slanders that have been spread against him in Corinth by the remaining opposition. Those who wish to discredit him have been saying that he is bold at a distance, threatening to take severe disciplinary action, especially in his letters (cf., e.g., his warning that, if necessary, he will come “with a whip” in 1Co 4:18–21). But they say that he will not dare to be anything but weak and indecisive if he is present with them in person—in short, that he does not have the apostolic authority he claims to have. Paul is ready to prove otherwise, should the occasion demand, when he comes to Corinth again (see vv. 6, 10–11). His appeal to the meekness and gentleness of Christ is an indication of his own affectionate desire to show these same qualities when present with them. In any case, though weak in himself, Paul is strong in the Lord—as this whole letter explains—and those who are rebellious can expect to feel the force of his divinely given authority. (CSB)

Paul’s antagonists attacked him for his gentleness and his firmness. (TLSB)

10:2 To the Corinthian dissidents, Paul is a charlatan, a religious huckster. (TLSB)

walking according to the flesh. Pursuing an ungodly lifestyle welling up from deep-down unbelief. (TLSB)

10:3 *flesh.* Used in a morally neutral sense here, meaning the body. Like all other mortals, Paul lives in a frail “tent” that will one day collapse (cf 5:1–4). (TLSB)

waging war. Paul’s whole ministry, like that of Christ before him, is an all-out conflict with Satan’s realm, aiming to deliver people through the Gospel from the grip of the evil one (Col 1:13–14). Every Christian is a frontline soldier, exposed to attack and never off duty (cf 2Tm 2:3–4). (TLSB)

10:4 *weapons we fight with.* Paul is prepared for warfare; his weapons, however, are not the weapons prized by this fallen world and fashioned by human pride and arrogance. (CSB)

The tools with which Paul does ministry—Word, Sacraments, prayer, merciful kindness, etc.—are not of the flesh, i.e., not means for Paul’s sinful self-aggrandizement (cf 4:2). “The Church’s authority and the State’s authority must not be confused. The Church’s authority has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments” (AC XXVIII 12). See note, 1:24. “What has stopped or quelled the counsels, purposes, murder, and riot of our enemies, by

which the devil thought he would crush us, together with the Gospel? It was the prayer of a few godly people standing in the middle like an iron wall for our side” (LC III 31) (TLSB)

strongholds. Of “arguments” and “every pretension” (v. 5) defiantly raised “against the knowledge of God” (cf. Ro 1:18–23), among which are the faulty reasonings by which the false apostles have been trying to shake the faith of the Christians in Corinth (see 1Co 2:13–14). (CSB)

The Holy Spirit’s power is at work through the Word. Here esp, Paul considers the accusations of the Law, which tear down the unbeliever’s wall of self-defense. Hardened unbelievers might appear impervious to evangelization, but God’s almighty power encourages us to keep hoping, praying, and bearing witness. (TLSB)

10:5 *every thought ... obedient to Christ.* The center of man’s being thus becomes fully subject to the lordship of Christ. (CSB)

Jesus explains the First Table of the Law as demanding that you love God “with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). So Paul must not simply gather a crowd or win hearts, but he must also win minds (such as those of the scholars on the Areopagus, Ac 17). “Human senses and reason do not comprehend. But, as in all other articles of faith, our reason is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (FC Ep VII 42). “Since in the Holy Scriptures Christ is called a mystery upon which all heretics dash their heads, we admonish all Christians not to arrogantly indulge their reason in crafty investigations about such mysteries. With the beloved apostles, they should simply believe. They should close the eyes of their reason and bring their understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ [2 Corinthians 10:5], and rejoice without ceasing in the fact that our flesh and blood is placed so high at the right hand of God’s majesty and almighty power. In this way we will certainly find constant consolation in every difficulty and remain well guarded against deadly error” (FC SD VIII 96). (TLSB)

10:6 *disobedience.* Once Paul is sure of the Corinthians’ obedience to Christ, he will go after the third party described in chs 10–12, the troublemakers. (TLSB)

10:7 *before your eyes.* The problems and solution seem obvious to Paul. (TLSB)

he belongs to Christ. Probably echoes the claim to superior spirituality by the Christ party (1Co 1:12) and the false teachers in Corinth. Paul, who had dramatically encountered and been commissioned by the risen Lord (see Ac 9:3–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–18) and who received the gospel he preached “by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11; cf. 2Co 12:2–7), asserts that he belongs to Christ just as much. (CSB)

Perhaps a reference to the “Christ party” of 1Co 1:12, whose members did not consider themselves bound to the Gospel as proclaimed by Paul. (TLSB)

we. Paul and his ministerial co-workers, whom the intruders are accusing of being fake. (TLSB)

10:8 *authority ... for building you up.* The primary purpose of Paul’s apostolic authority is constructive, for building up, not destructive, for pulling down (the same statement is made again in 13:10). The demands he makes in his letters are written so that they may

put right what is amiss and so that things may be in order for his arrival, thus removing the need for severe action (pulling down) and preparing the way for edification (building up). (CSB)

The apostles and Paul's co-workers are not just private persons, but ambassadors of Christ. Christ authorized them to exercise pastoral care through the means of grace "in His stead and by His command" (cf Lk 10:16; Ap VII and VIII 47). "The Keys do not have the power to impose penalties or to institute rites of worship, but only the command to forgive sins [John 20:23] to those who are converted and to convict and excommunicate [1 Corinthians 5] those who are unwilling to be converted. For just as to *loose* means to forgive sins, so to *bind* means not to forgive sins. Christ speaks of a spiritual kingdom, and God's command is that ministers of the Gospel should absolve those who are converted" (Ap XIIB 79). (TLSB)

building you up. In the NT, edification always consolidates the community as a whole; it does not properly focus on the isolated individual. (TLSB)

destroying. Ministers may not act as regional warlords developing their own personal spheres of influence. All sheep belong first and foremost to the Good Shepherd. (TLSB)

10:9–11 The idea that proclaiming the Law to provoke repentance is "frightening" sounds like some modern, misguided views of psychology and shows how contemporary this Letter is. (TLSB)

10:9 *frighten you with my letters.* See 2:3–4; 7:8–9; chs. 10–13; 1Co 4:18–21. (CSB)

10:10 *they.* The intruders, and possibly also the "Christ party" (1Co 1:12) in alliance with them. (TLSB)

bodily ... weak. Physically unimpressive. "Paul" means "short" in Gk. Recurrent ill health also made him physically repulsive at times (cf Gal 4:13–14; 2Co 12:7) (TLSB)

his speaking amounts to nothing. See note on v. 1. Paul's adversaries used a professional type of oratory as their stock in trade, designed to extract money from their gullible audiences. But Paul's manner of speaking was quite different; it was plain, straightforward and free from artificiality—and it was also free of charge (see note on 11:7), which meant, if his slanderous opponents were to be believed, that what he said was worthless. But in coming to Corinth Paul had purposely disdained academic eloquence and wisdom and was determined to proclaim the message of Christ crucified, and the transformed lives of the Corinthian believers testified to the divine power with which he spoke (cf. 1Co 2:1–5). (CSB)

The false apostles may have surpassed Paul in oratory skills, which were highly respected in classical culture. The Corinthians seem to have had special interest in oratory rhetoric (cf 1Co 1:18–2:5). In the Letters to the Corinthians, Paul used a full range of rhetorical devices. Paul viewed himself as a "jar of clay" (4:7). His fervent focus on the crucified Christ (1Co 2:2) was guaranteed to alienate the proud. (TLSB)

10:11 Paul’s opponents are deriding his calls for repentance and discipline in 1Co and the tearful letter (2Co 2:4) as empty words. Both by letter and in person, he will see to it that the Law’s “alien work” of effecting repentance is done for the sake of God’s “proper” work of bestowing mercy through the Gospel (FC Ep V 10). Paul is consistently Christ-like as he applies Law and Gospel. (TLSB)

10:12 *they measure themselves by themselves.* The false teachers in Corinth behave as though there is no standard of comparison higher than themselves, but Paul boasts only in the Lord (see vv. 13–18; cf. 1Co 1:31). (CSB)

The intruders no longer stand in “fear and trembling” (7:15) but turn church leadership into a beauty contest judged by worldly standards. (TLSB)

10:13 *the field God has assigned to us.* The picture Paul has in mind may be that of an athletic contest in which lanes are marked out for the different runners. In that case “field” should be rendered “lane”—as also “area of activity” (v. 15) and “territory” (v. 16). In intruding themselves into Corinth, the false apostles had crossed into Paul’s lane, which was the lane that God had marked out and that had brought him to the Corinthians as their genuine apostle. He has no intention of invading the territory marked out for others and claiming their work as his own, as these false teachers were doing. Some understand the Greek word in question to refer to an assigned sphere of authority. (CSB)

The ascended Christ willed Paul to found the churches in the regions of Achaia and Macedonia (Ac 16:9–10). God gave him authority over these congregations (cf Ac 15:7, 36; 1Co 3:5–9; 4:1). Paul does not envision exercising such direct authority over the Roman Church that he did not found (Rm 15:14–29). (TLSB)

reach even to you. A forceful reminder that the Corinthians did not become Christians by their own reason or strength, but that the Lord in His mercy reached them precisely through Paul (cf Jn 15:16). (TLSB)

10:14 *come all the way.* A reminder that the Gentile believers in Corinth were without God before the Lord graciously sought them out (cf Lk 15:12–24). (TLSB)

10:15 *labors of others.* Paul contrasted his manner with the false apostles who claimed credit for his accomplishments. (TLSB)

faith increases. The number of believers in Achaia increased, and their confession became more widely known. *area of influence.* This is not Paul’s personal fiefdom, but it expresses the hope that Christ will extend His Church in geographical terms through the service of Paul and his colleagues. (TLSB)

10:16 *regions beyond.* Spain is probably in his thoughts (see Ro 15:24, 28). (CSB)

10:17 Jeremiah’s counsel, now perfectly realized in Christ (1Co 1:30–31), preaches salvation by grace alone from the heart of the OT, showing the unity of Scripture. (TLSB)

10:18 *approved.* As faithful servants “before the judgment seat of Christ” (5:10). (TLSB)

Ch 10 Paul's opponents cut him to ribbons and paint themselves in glowing colors, but he presses forward in spiritual warfare, winning souls for Christ against all odds rejoicing that the Lord prospers his work and opens doors for his ministry, giving all glory to Christ. Dear Christian, do not judge your ministers by the standards of secular business and entertainment, but go by whether they speak with the Shepherd's voice and give His care. As Christ endured the darts of the evil one to rescue the undeserving from his clutches, so Paul and faithful ministers submit to affliction in order to reach the lost and build up the flock. • Lord, grant us to die to self and live to You, and to be instruments of Your mission, not obstacles in its way. Amen. (TLSB)