

Paul's Warfare on Behalf of His Apostolic Authority
2 Corinthians 10:1-2
Part One

How did Paul go about defending his apostolic authority to the unrepentant within the Corinthian Church?

Paul began the defense of his apostolic authority to the unrepentant within the Corinthian Church by focusing on his activities (2 Corinthians 10:1-6). Why did Paul feel that he needed to do this? He felt that he needed to do this because his opponents were using his activities to attack him. So as Paul in his defense focused on his activities, what did he do first?

Paul, in focusing on his activities, initially sought to address questions involving his demeanor (2 Corinthians 10:1-2). And why would he do this? He did this because his opponents, based on the way he was conducting his activities, were attacking his demeanor. They were attacking his demeanor because they had incorrectly concluded that his demeanor was incompatible with the conduct of a true and thus authoritative apostle of Christ.

In other words, they had a certain expectation of how a true and thus authoritative apostle of Christ should act, and Paul from their perspective had failed to live up to those expectations in respect to his interactions with the Corinthians. And therefore, in their minds, he was not a true and thus authoritative apostle of Christ.

Paul now, in addressing these unrepentant opponents in Corinth, will seek to correct this particular way of thinking.

So let us now read **2 Corinthians 10:1-2** and see if this is not so. **“Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! (2) I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”** So does it appear from these verses that Paul is seeking to correct a flawed way of thinking concerning his demeanor? Absolutely!

So, what is my hope for this message as we begin to explore Paul's response to his accusers and their criticism of his demeanor in **2 Corinthians 10:1-2**? My hope is that as we explore Paul's response to his accusers and their criticism of his demeanor that we might come to have a better understanding of Christ's demeanor and how it should manifest itself through us in all our interactions with the brethren in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves.

So how did Paul begin his defense? Paul began his defense by declaring that his demeanor was characterized by the qualities of Christ. And why would this be such an appropriate response by Paul? It is very simple. If Paul's demeanor while conducting his activities on behalf of the Corinthians was not a reflection of his own fleshly impulses but rather a reflection of Christ himself, then the accusation of his accusers within Corinth, that his demeanor was incompatible with being a true apostle of Christ, would of course be baseless. So, what was the first quality of Christ that Paul highlighted as characterizing his interactions with the Corinthians?

The first quality that Paul highlighted as characterizing his demeanor was the quality of humility (2 Corinthians 10:1). This quality was captured by the words "**meekness**" and "**gentleness**" in **2 Corinthians 10:1**.

Let me now read this verse for you and see if this is not so. **"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!"**

The unrepentant opponents of Paul in Corinth were saying that his "**meekness**" when he was present with them, coupled with the boldness of his letters when absent from them, was inconsistent with a true and thus authoritative apostle of Christ.

It was inconsistent because they believed that if Paul were in fact a true and thus authoritative apostle of Christ, he would simply be blasting away at any sign of weakness or rebellion within their ranks, whether that was in his face-to-face meetings with them or through his letters when he was absent from them.

But they were wrong. This was not the way a true and thus authoritative apostle would act, for this was not the way of Christ as we will now see in our closer examination of this verse.

So let us begin by looking at the very first word of **2 Corinthians 10:1**, the word “**now**.” The word “now” transitions us from what Paul has been saying to the repentant in 2 Corinthians 8-9 to what he is about to say to the unrepentant in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

So after Paul alerted his readers to this break in our text, what did he say next? “**Now I, Paul, myself .**”

Now this is a very interesting expression. Clearly Paul, by this expression, is seeking to make some kind of point. So, what is the point that Paul is seeking to make when he referred to himself as, “**I, Paul, myself?**”

It is really quite simple. Paul’s apostolic authority had been questioned. His ability to speak for God had been questioned. His message, his gospel, and his apostleship had been questioned. But even in spite of all of this, Paul’s apostolic authority was reaffirmed through the repentance of the majority, and Paul is seeking to draw attention to that reaffirmed authority when he referred to himself as “I, Paul, myself.” In other words, he wanted his unrepentant Corinthian opponents to understand that the person that is now speaking to them is not simply a “schmuck.” He is a true and authentic apostle of Christ, as now recognized by most of the Corinthians, and as such he carries a big stick, and if they are not careful he may have to wield it against them when he finally arrives, if certain people within the church at Corinth, do not quickly fall into line.

So therefore in light of this possibility Paul urges the unrepentant within the church at Corinth, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to do something? Isn’t that exactly what we see in **2 Corinthians 10:1** when he says, “**I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness of and gentleness of Christ?**” Absolutely! This is exactly what he is doing. So, what would he be urging them to do? If it is not obvious now, it will become obvious to us as we continue on in our study of this chapter.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:1** is urging the unrepentant in the church at Corinth, in light of the fact he is an authoritative apostle of Christ who

carries a big stick, to end their rebellion against him and thus against God Himself.

Now notice the demeanor of Paul as He urges them to end their rebellion against God and against Himself as God's apostle. He is urging them to end their rebellion **“by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”**

What an amazing thing! He has no desire to wield the big stick that he, as an apostle of Christ, carries. He has no desire for an open conflict. He gets no satisfaction out of carnage. He is patiently compassionate. And this certainly has been demonstrated in respect to how he has dealt with the Corinthians, and this is especially true in respect to how he has dealt with his opponents within Corinth.

He has been incredibly patient toward them. In fact, in appealing to them to end their rebellion here in this letter, he is in effect giving to his Corinthian opponents approximately two more months to repent before he wields the big stick that he carries, if that unfortunately proves to be necessary.

Praise God! What a glorious thing! It is a glorious thing because this is the way of Christ, or in other words a manifestation of the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Paul is not vicious. He is not full of venom and vitriol and hate. He is not full of anger. He is not full of rage. He is not full of revenge. He is first and foremost, like Christ Himself, a man of humility, or in other words a man of “meekness” and “gentleness.”

So, what is “meekness?” Meekness (PRAUTES) is mild and gentle friendliness that patiently endures mistreatment.

And what is “gentleness?” Gentleness (EPIEIKEIA), when applied to someone in authority such as Paul, refers to leniency. Obviously we can see that these two qualities are very similar to each other, qualities that Paul himself identifies as being associated Christ.

Hopefully these qualities will be present in each of us in abundance for these, as Paul indicates, are the qualities of Christ. In other words, if we are mistreated or abused within the body of Christ, we hopefully will patiently

endure, or in other words we will hopefully by the grace of God, in spite of the abuse, continue to serve those who are abusing us with gentle friendliness and with leniency. And why would we do this? We would do this because this is the way of Christ.

Unfortunately however the way of Christ, or in other words the way of **“meekness”** and **“gentleness”** can be perceived negatively and this is exactly what happened among his opponents in Corinth. Rather than seeing his expressions of meekness and the gentleness as the expressions of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, they saw them simply as expressions of weakness and timidity. This becomes apparent at the end of **verse 1** when Paul, using sarcasm, sums up their thoughts.

So let us continue to read **2 Corinthians 10:1** and see if this is not so. **“Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ [Now here comes the sarcasm] –I who am meek when face-to-face with you, but bold toward you when absent!** To understand the sarcasm of this statement we must understand how Paul was using the word “meek.”

Typically the word “meek” (TAPEINOS) would be translated “humble,” but here in this context it would be best translated “timid” as it is in the NIV translation. So if we have this understanding of the word “meek” we certainly can see Paul’s sarcasm.

Paul knows that his various interactions with the Corinthians had largely been characterized by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And in fact it is upon this basis that he has just urged his opponents in Corinth to repent, but he knows even as he is pleading with them to do this, that these kind of pleadings have been and continue to be interpreted by them as expressions of weakness and timidity rather than as expressions of the “meekness and gentleness of Christ.” And this is why he concludes **verse one** with this sarcastic statement. He is once again trying to get their attention. He is once again attempting to get them in line.

The first quality of Christ that Paul highlighted as characterizing his interactions with the Corinthians was the quality of humility. This quality was captured by the words **“the meekness and gentleness of Christ”** in **2 Corinthians 10:1**.

So, what was the second quality of Christ that Paul highlighted as characterizing his demeanor? The second quality of Christ that Paul highlighted as characterizing his demeanor was the quality of boldness (2 Corinthians 10:2).

So let us now read **2 Corinthians 10:2** and see if this is not so. **“I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”**

Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:1** was urging the unrepentant by the meekness and gentleness of Christ to end their rebellion. But he is not done pleading with them.

The word “ask” (DEOMAI) can be translated “pray.” Paul is unrelenting. He is continuing “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” to pursue their repentance. And why is he continuing to pursue their repentance? He is continuing to pursue their repentance because, though he is ready to be bold toward them, he does not want to be bold toward them if at all possible.

The word “bold” (THARREO) literally means courageous. In other words, Paul is saying to them if you want to see my confrontational courage, then don't repent. I don't want to display it but I will display it if it proves necessary.

In other words, Paul is saying when all his attempts at compassion are exhausted, when all efforts at patience are eliminated, when the only thing left to protect the truth from unrepentant unrelenting rebels is to attack them, then he will, and he will do so courageously.

May God give us the grace to persevere in manifesting the humility of Christ even when being attacked and the discernment to know when it must yield to the confrontational boldness of Christ.