

The Purpose of Apostolic Authority
2 Corinthians 10:9-11
Part Two

This brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to our study of **2 Corinthians 10:7-11**. In this passage, as I mentioned to you last week, Paul will continue to defend his apostolic authority against the attacks of his opponents, who in addition to dismissing his claim that he was in fact a true and authoritative apostle of Christ, trumpeted their own claim that they themselves were the true apostles. So how did Paul go about defending himself from these false assertions?

Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:7-11 drew a contrast between the way his apostolic authority expressed itself and the way his opponents' so-called apostolic authority expressed itself. And why would this be important? Paul believed it would be important because it would reveal something to the Corinthians. And what did he hope that these contrasting expressions of apostolic authority would reveal to them?

Paul's expression of apostolic authority was consistent with its God-given purpose and his opponents' expression of their so-called apostolic authority was not consistent with that purpose. This is what Paul hoped this contrast would reveal.

So let me now read **2 Corinthians 10:7-11** and see if this is not so. **“You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. (8) For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, (9) for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. (10) For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’ (11) Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”** So again, what was Paul seeking to do in these verses? Paul, in **2 Corinthians 10:7-11**, was seeking to draw a contrast between the way his apostolic authority expressed itself and the way his opponents' so-called apostolic authority expressed itself, thus hoping that the Corinthians would see the difference.

So how did Paul go about drawing this contrast? Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:7-8 began by spelling out for the Corinthians the specific purpose for him having been given apostolic authority. So how did he go about doing this?

He began with these words, **“You are looking at things as they are outwardly.”** This is how the NAS translates the Greek. But as I pointed out to you last week it would be have been better if it had been translated as a command, or in other words it would have been better if it were translated, “Look at things as they are outwardly,” or in other words “look at the evidence.” This would have been, I believe, the better translation, which is in fact the way it is translated in the RSV and the ESV.

So after challenging the unrepentant Corinthians that still remained in Corinth to look at the evidence, Paul then went on to challenge the apostolic pretenders with these words, **“If anyone [referring, in a collective sense, to all his opponents] is confident in himself that he is Christ’s [or in other words Christ’s apostle], let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.”** So, what did Paul mean by this?

Paul, rather than choosing to immediately deny his opponents assertion that they were the apostles of Christ, chose to inform his opponents that he could make the very same claim about himself. And this why he challenged the unrepentant that still remained in Corinth to look at the evidence. And what was the evidence that he wanted them to look at? It was the evidence that he would go on to supply for them in **verse 8**.

So now let us read **verse 8** and see what Paul had to say about this evidence. **“For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame.”** So, what was the evidence that Paul provided in **verse 8**? He, unlike his opponents, in having received apostolic authority, had in fact fulfilled his God-given purpose in respect to the Corinthians. And what was that purpose?

Paul declared that the purpose for him having been given this apostolic authority by the Lord was to build the Corinthians up and not to destroy them. Or in other words, the purpose for him having been given apostolic authority was so that he, through the preaching of the new covenant

message, or in other words through the preaching of the gospel message, might be used to bring them salvation.

And did he believe that he had fulfilled that purpose? Or in other words, did he through the proclamation of gospel message believe that he had brought them salvation? And the answer is yes. He believed that he had! And He believed that the Corinthians knew this as well, and that is why he commanded them to look at the evidence. For if they looked at the evidence, he knew that the only conclusion that they could have possibly come to in light of the present conflict between him and his opponents was that he was the true apostle and his opponents were not.

So as we continue on in our study of **2 Corinthians 10:7-11**, what do we see next? Paul, after establishing the fact that he had been given authority for building them up and not for destroying them, then used this fact to respond to his opponents' charge that he was using his letters to make empty threats (2 Corinthians 10:9-11). And where do we see Paul doing this? We see him doing this in **2 Corinthians 10:9-11**.

So now let me now read these verses for you. **“For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. (10) For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’ (11) Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”**

So after reading these verses I would have to think that it should be clear to us that Paul's opponents were in fact charging him with using his letters to make empty threats. And it should also be clear to us that Paul in responding to that charge was now seeking to apply what he had just said in **verses 7-8** to counter it.

But before we consider the ins and outs of all these things, I would first of all like to give you my hope for this message. As we study these verses, I hope that we might not only grow in our appreciation of the important role that Paul's apostolic authority played in building up of the Corinthian church but that we might also grow in our appreciation of the important role that elder authority should play in the building up of our church, and that we in understanding that important role might pray for our elders that as they are

faithfully executing the office of elder might be as discerning and expeditious as Paul in the use of that authority.

So let us now begin to look at **verse 9**. And what is the very first word? The very first word is “for,” indicating that what Paul had just said about having received authority for their “building up” and not for their “destroying,” or in other words for their “salvation,” was now going to be applied to what he was about to say. So we can now clearly see that Paul was in fact seeking to apply what he had said to what he is about to say verifying what I have already said.

So how did Paul apply what he had just said to what he was about to say? Let us continue to read this verse. **“For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.”**

So, what is going on here? As we seek to answer this question let me first of all ask you this, had Paul made threats to the Corinthians in his various letters to them? Absolutely!

And if there is any doubt about this let me read for you a couple of them. And let us begin with **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**. **“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”** So how should we understand these words? Should we understand these words as a threat? Absolutely!

And what is that threat? If any so-called believer among the Corinthians through their own bad behavior destroys, or in other words becomes the instrument by which the local church is torn apart, or in other words is destroyed, God will destroy them. So was that a threat! Absolutely!

So now let me read for you another threat Paul made, but this time it will be from **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**. And what did he tell the Corinthians in this particular passage? Let me read it for you. **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”**

So how should we understand these words? Should we understand these words as a threat? Absolutely! Of course these words are a threat and these two passages containing these two threats are just two of the numerous threats that Paul made in various writings to the Corinthians.

But now let me ask you this. Why did Paul write these kinds of things to the Corinthians? Was it to terrify the Corinthians with empty threats? No!

Though his opponents would have wanted the Corinthians to believe that Paul's threats were empty and were simply meant to terrorize them, Paul in verse 9 wanted to make it clear based on what he had just said in verses 7-8 that this was not the case at all.

So again, if the threats that Paul had made were not empty threats given simply to terrorize them, why had Paul made these threats? They were made as I have already shared with you for their building up, for this was the reason why God had given Paul the authority that He had given him as an apostle.

And the same thing, I believe, could be said about the authority that has been given to our elders. For truly based on **Hebrews 13:17**, authority has also been given to our elders for similar reasons, not for terrorizing but for the building up of this church by faithfully watching over the souls of those who make up this fellowship.

And how might we expect the elders to go about doing that? I would expect that the elders would first and foremost go about doing it in a manner similar to Paul, by making sure that the true gospel is being proclaimed within this church and through this church and that the power of that gospel is being manifested in the lives of the people who make up this fellowship; while at the same time that the elders are not being timid about confronting any threat to that gospel or to the power of that gospel within our church just as Paul was not timid about confronting threats to the gospel or to the power of the gospel within the Corinthian church.

So after Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:9 made it clear to the Corinthians that the threats he had made in his letters had not been made to terrorize them but to build them, Paul then went on in **verse 10** to explain to the Corinthians why his opponents had been saying what they had been saying.

So now let me read for you **verse 10** and see if this is not so. **“For they [referring to his opponents] say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”**

So, what was Paul’s explanation for why his opponents had been saying what they had been saying about his threats?

Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:10 explained to the Corinthians why his opponents had been saying what they had been saying about his letters.

So now let me read this verse for you and see how Paul explained it. And this is what he said **“For they [referring to his opponents] say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”** So how did Paul explain to the Corinthians what his opponents had been saying about his letters?

Paul explained to the Corinthians that his opponents were saying what they were saying about his letters because they found his personal appearance unimpressive and his speech contemptible.

So let us first of all consider his personal appearance. We do not know a whole lot but there is one description that might have some validity that has come down to us from the first century and this is how he was described in that paragraph. “A man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting (or far part); and he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long.”

So if this description has any basis to it, certainly we would have to say that Paul’s appearance would not be considered by people in general to be very imposing and certainly we can say for a fact his opponents, based on Paul’s own words, considered his appearance unimpressive. But this was not the only problem that Paul’s opponents found with him.

They also found his speech to be contemptible. So was his speech as contemptible as they represented him? Obviously there were people in Lystra that certainly would have disagreed with them in light of the fact that they considered his eloquence to be on some level “godlike” according to **Acts 14:8-12**. But on the other hand he certainly was probably no match in terms of the eloquence of Apollos as described by Luke in **Acts 18:24-28**.

The fact of the matter was most likely that Paul was in fact a good speaker, perhaps even a very good speaker, but we must understand that when it comes to doing the work of God that it is not just about personal ability or skill but much more about what? It is much more about God than with us.

And certainly Paul had already made this point very clear in **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**. So even though Paul's opponents may have viewed Paul's appearance to be unimpressive and his speech contemptible, they certainly should not underestimate Paul. Why? Paul was a chosen vessel and had been sent to the Gentiles with apostolic authority, and if they did not get their act into line quickly they would be experiencing the full force of that authority shortly.

So let us now read **2 Corinthians 10:11**. **“Let such a person (or in other words his opponents stated in a collective sense) consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”**

The consistency that Paul's opponents purported to desire will become a reality when God's mercy expressed in Paul's patience gives way to judgment (2 Corinthians 10:11).

May God help our elders, as those who have received authority to oversee our church, to make sure that His gospel is boldly proclaimed and carefully protected.