

Text: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18

Title: Avoiding Superficial Evaluation

Truth: Right evaluation of Christ's ministers can only be done by God, not by superficial criteria.

Date/Location: Sunday August 2, 2026 at FBC (rev. from 9/24/2006)

Introduction

Paul has some adversaries at the church in Corinth. They were self-promoting, attacking Paul personally, and undermining his apostleship and teaching. They accused Paul of operating in the flesh. They said that when Paul was at a safe distance, he was bold in his letters, but when he came face-to-face, he was completely unimpressive in presence and speech.

Paul responded in two ways. First, he asserts that his ministry was not done according to the flesh but rather made use of the spiritual weapons of righteousness empowered by God. These weapons are effective for taking down arguments and pretentious thoughts against the true knowledge of God. Second, he pleads with the Corinthians to come to full obedience and help him carry out the necessary discipline so that he would not have to come with a heavy hand.

In the remainder of chapter 10, Paul teaches us that the true evaluation of Christ's ministers can only be done properly by God, not by merely superficial criteria.

I. Paul's Apostolic Authority is for Edification, v. 7-11

A. Paul opens with a charge that the Corinthians—or certainly their false teachers—had a bad tendency to look at things from a superficial perspective. They were boasting in appearance. They did not have the real credentials to back up their claims. Paul could pull out quite a few credentials showing that he was legitimately God's servant (and he will do that in upcoming chapters).

People tend to look at the outward appearance. Even a man of God like Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7 did so. We can get wrapped up in outward things like our buildings and attire and "stuff." This can captivate us and distract us from our real mission. We make

externals our measuring stick instead of the qualities that should be the real measuring sticks.

- B. When he says, “he is Christ’s” and “we are Christ’s” he is talking not about the broader issue of being in Christ in terms of salvation, but belonging to Christ as a minister. Paul is Christ’s minister. Paul says that if anyone considers himself to be Christ’s servant or minister, Paul can lay just as much claim to that as they can. It is invalid for someone to come into Corinth and claim to be serving Christ while degrading Paul before them as if Paul is not also a minister of Christ. He has at least as much claim to it as they do!

Today, there are various bad attitudes about Paul that, like those in Corinth, provide a justification for ignoring his teaching. I sense that some people do not like his forcefulness and directness and dogmatism. “He’s misogynistic, promotes the patriarchy, he is too harsh, not loving like Jesus, he contradicts Jesus’s teaching, he embraced slavery, he is too rigid on sexual morals, and maybe even Paul did not write the letters that traditionally are associated with him.” Any of these attacks would set up someone to be able to dismiss what Paul says as not of God.

- C. Looking at things outwardly may lead one to believe that Paul’s ministry is carnal and not empowered by Christ (v. 2), but the fact is that Paul has God-given authority. If he “boasts” of this authority in verse 8, it is not from a perspective of self-aggrandizement, but because God gave it to him for the edification and protection of the church, not its destruction. His boasting would not prove false so that he could be ashamed or embarrassed—because he is really of God. But he wants to refrain from doing it (verse 9) so as not to “terrify them by letters.” This would just give them more evidence for their charge of his boldness while not in person (v. 10).

Authority is always to be used for building up and improving and protecting—never for destruction or damage. That is true in a church, and a home, marriage, workplace, etc.

- D. In verse 11, Paul reminds his readers that this authority will cause him to act boldly when he comes if it is necessary, in contradiction to the mantra of the false teachers that Paul is a wimp. They will be surprised when his in-person conduct is more like his letters!

E. The problem is that the Corinthians (or at least some of them) are looking at things from an outer or surface perspective and this caused them to miss important factors and misunderstand what Paul was doing. On their self-made criteria, they could not carry out a proper evaluation of Paul's ministry.

Compared to the great orators of the day, Paul may not seem like much because of his presence or elegance or eloquence (v. 10), but this is unimportant in apostleship. God uses the base things of the world to confound the mighty (1 Cor. 1:28).

Instead of being bold, he was asserting apostolic doctrine. Instead of being timid, he was being gracious. Instead of showing himself not to be Christ's minister because of carnal methods, he actually gave ample evidence that he was Christ's minister—not the least reason was the existence of the Corinthian church itself! Instead of using authority to destroy, he was using it to build up the church and protect it.

Outward appearances can be very misleading. According to superficial standards, some people are very impressive. For instance, they might have letters of reference (3:1), the right ethnic background (11:22), be a skilled and dynamic speaker (10:10), and have a strong leadership style (11:20). But this is not the real measure of a man! He may be experienced, older, and have a resume. But is he *godly*? Is he *humble*? Does he hold to sound doctrine? Does he honor *God* or *self*? Does he handle God's word accurately? Does he meet the qualifications of a minister of the gospel as given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Is he a good man—no matter his age?

II. A God-Measured Ministry, v. 12-18

In verses 12-18, Paul says there are really two ways to operate—one way is by human measurements, and the far better way has God as the focal point. Paul gives a head-to-head comparison between him and the false teachers. There are three problems with the false teachers, which correspond to three apostolic assets.

A. They are Unwise to Commend Themselves..., v. 12

There is a great circularity here. The group of “interlopers” as they are sometimes called, is “in-grown” and using themselves as a measure of themselves. Of course, they will look good when they make the standard—and they themselves are the standard! Even in churches this can happen—people compare themselves to themselves or to other churches and think they are so good and upright when in fact, as compared to the Scriptures, they fall well short of where they need to be. We need to be watchful of this attitude as a church! WE NEED HUMILITY!

B. ...But Paul Looks for the Lord’s Commendation, v. 18

Paul does not measure himself like they do. In fact, he cannot do so with full accuracy—1 Cor. 4:1-5. He does not belong to the same “type” of people as they are, nor does he want to be in their group. In addition, he does not compare himself to them. After all, the Word of God and God’s judgment are the only real standards. Would you rather please men or God? It is the Lord’s estimation of a man that counts in the end, not what everyone else says.

C. They are Not Working Within the Region God has Assigned..., v. 13-14

The false teachers were “muscling in” on Paul’s ministry territory and trying to take it over and kick him out of his own place!

D. ...But Paul is Doing Just What God Asked of Him, v. 13-14

Paul agreed with Peter and James that he would go to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9; cf. Acts 9:15), and this assignment was still ongoing. In particular, the Corinthians were within the bounds of Paul’s assigned duties.

He was not being territorial in the sense of “this is my space.” This was not merely a territorial or provincial dispute by Paul. God had assigned him as the apostle to the Gentiles, and as it turned out, God had ordained Paul to be the first to come to Corinth with the gospel. They were his spiritual children, the proof of his ministry. Rather, if there were an Apollos or another true minister of the gospel that could water the work (1 Cor. 3:5-6) he would be all for it (1 Cor. 16:12). But the false apostles were not helping matters.

E. They are Taking Credit for the Work of Others..., v. 15-16

This is a common phenomenon—people stealing the credit for work done by others or taking more credit than they should. Like group projects at school or work: sometimes there is one guy that does the work and all the others get the credit for it. Do not be a freeloader. Do your own work!

F. ...But Paul is Not Taking Credit for the Work of Others, v. 15-17

In fact, his practice is not to take credit for even his own work—he glories in the Lord not in self! What Paul has been saying when he speaks of boasting is not boasting about his own work, but about what the LORD has accomplished through him. He is boasting in Christ, because he realizes that he himself was not essential to the process (the Lord could have used another man); that he is not the issue (2 Cor. 12:11); and really the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who accomplished the good things through him, and so He deserves the credit (Rom. 15:17-18; see also 1 Cor. 1:29, 31 and Jer. 9:23-24).

Note that Paul's goal was to evangelize in those areas which did not have any previous gospel witness (Rom. 15:23). What he wants is for the church to be established, their faith to be increased, and then for them to be a launching pad for him to move to new areas. In this way, Paul's work will expand.

G. No boasting is good unless it is in God. If in anything you boast without God, you have forgotten who enabled you to do *anything* in the first place. And you are even more unwise to boast of someone else's accomplishments as if they were your own! Such boasting is automatically disqualifying.

Conclusion

God gave Paul apostleship (v. 8), he gave a place of ministry (v. 13), and He gives the only meaningful evaluation and commendation (v. 18). In contrast, these other people took so-called apostleship to themselves, they took their own place of ministry and commended themselves among themselves by their own standards. What they accuse Paul of (operating in the flesh) is actually what they themselves are doing!

There are two ways to live: 1) pride, arrogance, self-focused vs. 2) humility, a properly limited view of ones' accomplishment and domain, realistic and ultimately God-focused.

In ministry, as in all of life, the Lord's commendation is all that matters. Boasting in ourselves is not approved. Instead, we must make our boast in the Lord. He is the source of all good and truly boast-worthy things. And He is the only One whose commendation (recommendation) matters.

MAP

Appendix

Verse 7. This is not just an accusation of being unsaved. The context deals with apostleship, being Christ's minister, not Christ's son.

There is some debate about how to take the first sentence. Is it a question, "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?" (KJV, NKJV). Or is it a statement like "You are looking at things as they are outwardly" (NAS, NIV). Or is it a statement like "Look at the obvious things." I do not think it is a command. For one thing, there is a command later in the verse. Either of the other ways conveys the meaning that the Corinthians are looking at this from an outward perspective (if it is a question, it is rhetorical; if it is a statement, it just points out the fact). Paul's appeal for each believer in the church to consider again the situation in himself would also indicate that he is making a distinction between the inward/truth of the circumstances and the outward/mere appearances of it. So, this is not just looking at people's outward appearance, but it can refer to how we look at people and situations and various circumstances.

Note the method of the *ad hominem* attack used by some in Corinth to undermine Paul's ministry.

Paul's boast "in the Lord" was that the Lord had given him an authoritative ministry for building the church (v. 8); his boast has to do with the work inside the geographical limits God has given to him (v. 9); and ultimately his boasting is in the Lord (v. 17). His boast is NOT like the self-back-patters of v. 12, nor is it boasting in something someone else has done (v. 15).

Verse 10. The old charge comes up again here, that Paul writes heavy-handed letters but in person he is a wimp. He is not a good or dynamic public speaker. This verse fits under verse 9 as an explanation. Paul does not really believe he ever intimidated or terrified them with his letters or visits; this is simply the false charges of those false teachers.

Verse 11. To tie this to 10:1-6, note that Paul was beseeching that he would not have to come in boldness with a powerful exercise of apostolic authority to deal with those folks who thought he ministered in the power of the flesh. He actually did not minister according to the flesh. Instead, he worked with divinely empowered weapons of righteousness. But if he had to be bold when he came, he would, and he warns the folks so.

Verse 12 starts a new section. The false teachers are a group of people who compare themselves among themselves, pat each other on the back, etc. Notice the difference between the verbs “class” (classify) or “compare.” He says flat out that it is not wise to do so—and the point is that you don’t really want a commendation from another person or based on a comparison to another person, but a commendation from the Lord (v. 18). The Lord always makes the “right comparison” and that is to his holy and upright standard. People can compare themselves among themselves all day and miss the fact that they fall short of God’s standard. “I’m not like that cheat or wife-beater or murderer or common criminal!” But are they dishonest or spiteful in heart or angry toward their brother? These sins are no better than the other “worse” things.

Theirs is an in-grown club with no external measure to it. This is somewhat like the academic community—peer reviewing does not exclude them from going off in altogether wrong directions.

Verse 13. When you are working from a God-centered perspective, you will be as Paul was—able to disclaim any selfish extension of your authority, not boasting in other people’s work (taking credit for other’s work). Paul is not going to boast about another man’s working area – something the false apostles are doing. They are stepping in on his work and claiming it for themselves. He wants to limit himself to the geographical locations given to him by God.

Have you heard of advertisements like, “If you did all the work, why is your boss taking all the credit”?

Verse 14. His apostolic office and the fact that he was the one who evangelized the church certainly gave credence to the fact that his “region” included them.

Verse 15. Paul doesn’t boast in other men’s labors—he focuses on his own thing. Instead, he has hope that as the Corinthian church grows in faith, they will help Paul to be “greatly enlarged” in his sphere of work. Tied in with the next verse, this implies that the church will support him as a launching pad for him to move to other areas.

As Paul planted new churches, they themselves became churches that supported church planting. So, Paul was able to leapfrog from one church plant as a base to do another one, and from that one to another one, and from all the previous ones (hopefully) to do even more work for the gospel. The idea was this: plant the church, then see their faith increased (more firmly rooted), then they can be a launching pad to move to other areas.

Verse 16. Paul wants to move to a larger sphere beyond Corinth and not get entangled in someone else’s ministerial area. The common missionary phrase “the regions beyond” is here in v. 16. This probably does not mean far away areas like we think. “The regions beyond” does not mean overseas. It means areas just outside of where evangelism has already been done. These nearby church-planted regions would be used as bases of operation for the extended work.

Verse 17. Note Jeremiah 9:23-24: not to glory in wisdom, might, or riches, but rather in the fact that we know the Lord.