

2 Corinthians 10

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[0 : 00] Well, as we continue our progress then through this latter part of 2 Corinthians, we saw how in chapters 8 and 9, the apostle was concerned with the gathering of the collection for the saints, that is, the poor believers in Judea and Jerusalem.

And this was being gathered largely from the Gentile church throughout the eastern Mediterranean area, through what is now Turkey and Galatia and Ephesus and so on, and in northern and southern Greece, Macedonia and Asia and so on.

So this gathering, which was referred to and the need for it, as a spiritual thing as much as a physical thing, in chapters 8 and 9, he has dealt with there. Now in chapter 10, he moves on really to the subject of his own authority as an apostle over against those, or perhaps only one, who appear to be challenging and seeking to undermine his leadership, albeit in absentia, of the Corinthian church.

Now these were the false apostles, or sometimes the super apostles we could call them, that were sort of going about in the ancient church, as it were, riding the back of apostolic planting.

Coming in as though they were somebody special, as though they were great leaders, and usually bringing a certain Judaizing or legalizing tendency, so that they might say, oh yes, you've got the gospel, but really you need circumcision as well, or really you need a wee bit of the law as well, if you're going to be extra holy, sort of thing, and seeking perhaps to live off the church in that way, and then move on to the next one, and so on.

[1 : 41] So Paul is challenging this year, and you can see in this chapter the sense of great apostolic power being restrained and held in check, because he is anxious not, with a blast of apostolic authority, to blow away or to damage or to harm his relationship with those he regards as his own spiritual children.

There is an error that he needs to defeat and to dismantle, but at the same time he is conscious that if he does it with too much authority or too much wrath, then there may be damage to the fragile and perhaps to the gullible amongst the Corinthian believers.

Remember that Corinth is a church which is planted in an absolute cesspool of iniquity. That's what Corinth was. It was a real sink of vice and of all the worldly commerce and all the evils that were there.

As we remember, some said in ancient days, to Corinthianize was to become depraved in all one's practices. So there they were, Christians called out of this depraved lifestyle and immersed in that, having been immersed in all the ways of the world and the civiousness and so on, now called out of this.

And we see that in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, the extent to which they've been called out of this, and were now seeking to live according to God's own teaching. But there was also a difficulty in that they believed themselves, in a sense, superior, filled with spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues and prophecy and doing this, don't know what.

[3 : 23] And we see in 1 and in 2 Corinthians, how the apostle has to gently bring them down a wee bit back to earth. And, you know, if you think of 1 Corinthians 13, where it's great to prophesy and speak in tongues and so on, but if you don't have the basic gift of Christian love, then you've got nothing.

So he is having, again, to gently bring them back down to earth here and say, look, whoever it is that's thinking he rules over you, just remember who is really the one who planted the gospel amongst you.

But he's seeking to be gentle. There is all this apostolic authority, all this power that could be released against him, but he's holding it, as it were, in check.

Now I, Paul, myself, beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And this is what he's taking as his example. You know, unlike those who are false apostles or seeking to impose their superior gifts of intellect or oratory on the different churches, he is coming in gentleness.

The meekness and gentleness of Christ. Now these two separate words imply slight distinction here. Meekness implies a certain inward mentality. If there is meekness, then it is how you are within.

[4 : 43] But of course, the gentleness is more a sense of how that outward behaviour is expressed. Now it's not a hard and fast rule. You can't say, oh, well, meekness never means any outward expression or gentleness never means anything within.

There is a certain overlap, but as a general rule, meekness is, you could say, an internal mentality, an inward mentality. Gentleness, you could say, refers to outward behaviour.

But it's a general rule. The edges are not firmly defined. But the point is that it's the meekness and gentleness of Christ that he is seeking to imitate. Who in presence and base among you?

And he doesn't make any secret in the fact that his bodily presence, as he says, is weak. And that's what everybody says, that he's not of any great imposing figure. He doesn't have great gifts of rhetoric.

He's not the kind of charismatic leader that people look to and go, ooh, ah, yes, follow Paul. And this is part, he says, of his strength. He says, when I am weak, then I am strong.

[5 : 46] Because clearly, whatever has converted you, Corinthians, from what you dwelt in before, it wasn't my personality. It wasn't my strength.

It wasn't how impressive I was. I, who in presence am base among you, but being absent, am bold toward you. I may write with strength, but you know what I'm like in personality when I'm there.

But I beseech you that I may not be bold when I am present, with that confidence wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

Some people are suggesting that I, Paul, and Timothy, or the other apostolic leaders, remember Timothy is co-author with this, with Paul in this letter, as though all we wanted to do was receive praise of men, as though somehow we were seeking to become great in your eyes, because we walked according to the flesh.

That's how these other false leaders walk. That's what they're seeking to do, is ride the back of the church and the labors of others, and make out there something special themselves.

[6 : 53] Because their great focus is themselves. And as I've said so often in the past, this is one reason how we may detect true religion from false.

Because true religion will always centre upon Christ. It will always focus on Christ. It will always be God-centred and Christ-centred.

False religion, of whatever description we may call it, whether it may be some forms of so-called Christianity, or other false prophets, or false gods, or whatever, will always end up putting man's salvation, or his journey, or his relationship with God, or whatever, into his own hands.

It will be man-centred. It will be that what I do, the things that I do, and how much faith I've got, and what works I do, and whether I can perform these particular rituals, or sacraments, or whatever the case may be, that I have salvation in my own hands, so that if I'm lost, well, it's my own fault.

And if I'm saved, well, that's because I was good enough to turn and repent and believe. It puts, as it were, our eternal destiny into the hands of men, as opposed to in the hands of the sovereignty of God.

[8 : 10] And the same is true with these false apostles, these false leaders. They were focusing on themselves, rather than on Christ. But see here, Paul begins, I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence and base among you, I'm nothing.

You know, when you were converted, it wasn't because of anything in me. It was because of the spirit and the power of Christ. I beseech that I may not be bold when I am present with you, with that confidence wherewith I think to be bold against some.

He's reigning in this authority that he wants to unleash on the false leaders, but he's holding it in check. I don't want to let go all this apostolic authority and power against, as I may have to do, against those who think we walk according to the flesh.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. Notice the distinction there. It's not, although we walk in the flesh, we don't war in the flesh. It's the in the flesh is how we walk, we live.

We are in the flesh, as long as we're in this earthly veil. But we do not war after. That is according to the flesh. Because this is not a physical fight.

[9 : 23] It is a spiritual warfare. We walk in the flesh. We live in the flesh, as long as we're still in this earthly tabernacle. We cannot help that. Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.

This is a spiritual warfare. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, fleshly, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, those, as it were, fortresses in which men's vanity seek to hide.

And this, the weapons of his warfare, to which he makes reference elsewhere, of course, we'll come to that in a minute, in 1 Corinthians and so on, is his apostolic authority. And it is not a physical punishment or a physical kind of fear that he seeks to instill in men.

It's not the threat of the civil magistrate. It's not physical punishment or violence. It is rather something, in a sense, far more fearful. And that is the possibility of being shut out of the grace and favour and mercy of God.

In other words, there is the danger of being outcast from the very grace of the gospel by which any soul is ever saved. And that, he recognises to be a far more solemn, serious, weighty, and fearful thing than anything physical or fleshly.

[10 : 50] If we look, for example, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, if you look at verse 40, I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons, I warn you.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers. But in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. He's pleading with them here as his own children.

But then we see in verse 21, What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, but in the spirit of meekness? This is 1 Corinthians chapter 4. Then in chapter 5, verses 4 and 5, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now he's making reference, of course, to the person in Collins who was having an affair with his stepmother. And in chapter 7 of 2 Corinthians, we saw how that had been dealt with by the Corinthian church.

But the threat here is not of any physical punishment. It is of being outcast, disciplined, barring the church, and then the flesh itself, that fleshly desire, would be mortified.

[12 : 08] That is, in a sense, put to death, faced with the enormity of its cost. That the cost of this kind of immorality is the choice between choosing that illicit affair on the one hand or continuing in the fellowship of Christ on the other hand.

This is what is meant by the destruction of the flesh in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 5. It doesn't mean killing the body. It means the flesh in the sense of carnal desires, being put to death, being mortified, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

And again, in verse 13 of that chapter, that them that are without, outside of the church, God judgeth, come the last day, come the last judgment. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Now, that's the kind of apostolic authority he's talking about here. Likewise, again, if we were to look in this 2 Corinthians chapter 13, at verse 10, therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present, I should use sharpness according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, that is, to building up, the sense of an edifice, a construction, a building, and not to destruction.

His concern is always, as we saw there in 1 Corinthians 4, to encourage his children, those who have come to faith under his tutelage, under his apostolic preaching, those whom he, in a sense, as he says elsewhere, has birthed into the kingdom.

[13 : 39] Though we walk after the flesh, we do not war after the flesh, because the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, they're not carnal, but they're mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, that's the vanity of men's thoughts and puffed up emptiness, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.

We've got reference, of course, that in 2 Thessalonians as well, chapter 2, verse 4, when it talks about the man of sin, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God, pretending to the things of God, being puffed up, vain imaginations, and this authority of Paul's is casting down such imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

You see, it is shown to be false because of its vanity, because of its exalting of itself. If something is of the spirit of Christ, it causes humility.

It causes us to recognize how small we are before God, how unclean we are before God's purity. If it is truly the spirit of Christ which is within a soul, then it will create a spirit of humility.

Think of the humility of Christ, who, though he were a son, though he were in the form of God, thought it not robbery, something to be grasped at, to be equal with God, but emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a son.

[15 : 23] This is the humility of Jesus Christ. And the spirit of Christ brings forth that same humility. It is the very opposite of exalting itself as something special.

So it is casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

So you see what is happening there? Three steps here in this verse 5. There is the demolishing, the casting down of whatever is opposed to God and his spirit. And then if it is of the Lord, this demolishing, it then brings it captive, it leads it captive, bringing into captivity everything that was exalted, everything that was against God, it makes it captive of it, and then it brings it into obedience to Christ.

So this is not, this is not a warfare or an enmity which is in a sense to death. God does not seek to destroy sinners, nor do his apostles seek to destroy sinners, but they do seek to cast down their fortresses of opposition, the vanity in which they have trusted and considered themselves safe, and to demolish that, to cast down these false strongholds, and then to make captive the soul, to bring it into captivity to Christ.

Remember that Paul describes himself as, you know, when he says the servant of Jesus Christ, the Greek word that we translate as servant means literally slave. And as he says, as I swear, I think it's in 1 Corinthians 3, he says, you know, to be God's slave is to be truly free, and to be truly free is to be his slave.

[17 : 07] We are in bondage in a sense, joyful enslavement to Christ, not that we are crushed by slavery, but rather we belong to his family, to his household, so it leads it captive, and it brings it into obedience to Christ.

Now when the human will is brought into sweet complicity with the divine will, then we know that perfect peace which alone the Lord can give, because then we are living as we were designed to live.

Then we are fulfilling that purpose for which we were created. Relationship with God. That's why God made man as he did. Name and fear. For relationship with him, man and our each, so it demolishes what is opposed to God, it leads it captive, and it brings it into obedience to Christ.

The verse 5. And having in our readiness says to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. There's both the threat against the false teaching and the false pride, and yet it is being in a sense overly generous.

You know, generous to a false subjecting, oh, but I'm sure most of you Corinthians are genuine in your obedience, so I really can't acknowledge, and there must be just one or two troublesome ones amongst you or false leaders here.

[18 : 35] Having a readiness to revenge all disobedience, he will come down on a ton of bricks, like a ton of bricks against all false students, disobedience, but having a readiness to do it when your obedience is fulfilled.

We'll separate out the wheat from the chaff. We'll see those who are truly faithful. Your obedience is fulfilled, but the false disobedience will be exposed. And you see, throughout this chapter, he is always seeking to draw this distinction between the false leaders, the so-called super apostles or false apostles on the one hand, and those whom he sees as his dear children, who may or may not have been led astray by these false teachers, or wowed by them, or dazzled by them.

Do you look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trusts to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ, even so are we Christ.

Now notice again what Paul is doing here. He is not saying, oh well, realize that we are much more important than these people. We're real apostles. We actually planted the gospel amongst you in Poland.

He's saying, if they are Christ, then at least give us the same courtesy of recognizing that we are as they are. Now, almost certainly, this is a reference back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 12 where he says, you know, it hath been declared unto you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe that there are contentions among you.

[20 : 05] Now this I say that every one of you say, I am a Paul, and I have a Paulus, and I have Cephas, and I have Christ. And the implication is that those who say, oh I am a Christ are the ones who are pure and sort of above all these divisions, but probably it means that, you know, they're implying that those who fall upon us or Paul or Cephas, rather than being sort of different groups of other Christians, oh we alone are the true Christians.

And this is almost like a backhand swipe against those, oh yes, well I am just Christ's. You know, if he thinks he's Christ, if anybody let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

Now, the fact that it says, if any man trusts to himself that he is Christ, let him of himself, think this again, always an implication, maybe it's just one individual.

One individual who has come in amongst the Corinthians, and is troubling them with this kind of false leadership, again, and seeking to undermine the leadership of Paul.

Again, in Galatians chapter 5, verse 10, I have confidence in you through the Lord that you will be not otherwise minded, but he that troubleth you, it's a singular, shall bear his judgment whosoever he be.

[21 : 20] Perhaps there is the implication there is just one false teacher who has come in amongst them and has sort of led the mystery and dazzled them. So he puts himself down, as it were, just to claim the same level as this so-called false leadership.

He is Christ, even so are we Christ. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, building up, and not for your destruction, demolition, I should not be ashamed.

I've got the right. He says, I'm the apostle, I'm the one that planted the gospel among you, that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. He doesn't want to be seeming to terrify them like little children with something from far away.

But for his letters, say they, or literally, as the Greek is, say such a one. In other words, does it imply singular? Again, at verse 11, let such a one think this, that such as we are by letters, when we are absent, such will we be indeed when we are present.

Again, possibly the implication is dealing with one person who has this disproportionate amount of influence. But he's not naming a name, and he's not trying to isolate them by keeping ignominy on his head.

[22 : 37] He's just identifying if it's an individual, I know who it is and I know what I will deal with them like. Then I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters, but his letters say they are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.

Just as he says himself in chapter 12, verse 7, lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Now, we don't know what this thorn in the flesh was. There's some scriptural evidence to indicate it may have been a weakness in the eyes, as a reference elsewhere to him saying that, you know, I testified to you to pluck out your own eyes and give them to me if that were possible.

Maybe it was that. Some other kind of bodily weakness that kept him from functioning at full strength. His bodily presence is unimpressive, but his letters are weighty and powerful, but his speech is contemptible.

Let such in one think this, that such as we are in word by letters when we're absent, such will we be also indeed when we are present. Now, this is the plural that he's using.

[23 : 50] So, it may be that he's saying, well, even if I am nothing, I'm going to bring with me, you know, the likes of maybe Titus or Apollos, whoever it may be, and they will follow my instructions, they'll follow my, we will deal in discipline with whoever is opposing themselves in this way.

Let such in one think this, that such as we, plural, are in word by letters when we're absent, such will we be also indeed when we are present. But, we've got to get back to this point again that Paul wants to emphasize the fact that his power, his potency, is not carnal.

It is not in how impressive his personal appearance is. It's not how noble he may look or how great his gifts of auditory or how charismatic his leadership.

He is just a clay jar. He is just an earthen vessel. The treasure is the gospel which is within that earthen vessel. And to him, and he says it should be to the Corinthians, proof positive that it is the power of God alone which has converted them and changed their lives, the fact that he himself is so nothing.

He's so contemptible in his personal appearance and his speech. It wasn't with great eloquence that he converted them. It wasn't with his personal nobility or attractiveness.

[25 : 11] It was all of God. For we dare not make ourselves of the number that will compare ourselves with some that commend themselves, but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.

They think they're so wise and clever, but anybody can look good if they just compare themselves with either their contemporaries or with somebody who is less impressive than they are.

You know, if I wanted to look good as a footballer, you know, I wouldn't take on those who are themselves professional footballers, I'd probably have to play against five-year-olds or something like that and then I would look good.

Then I would look as if I could run further and kick the ball harder and have more stamina than the wee five-year-olds. But if I was playing against people my own age or a similar or greater skill set, I would look pathetic and I would look like I had no stamina, I had no fitness, I had no ability and skill and so on.

But against five-year-olds, I might stand and have a chance. If we always compare ourselves with those who are simply our equals or weaker, then we stand a chance of looking good.

[26 : 24] But what we ought to be comparing ourselves is with the perfection of Christ. And then we see how insignificant we are and how great is our weakness.

This is what we come back to again. If it is of the spirit of Christ that is within us, it will show us how humble we ought to be, how weak and insignificant we are.

We dare not make ourselves of the number or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves with they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves.

Are not wise. You think they're special? You think they're wise? You think they're clever? They just show themselves to be fools. And then these verses 13 to 18 and to the end of the chapter here, he's talking about a jurisdiction of rule.

In other words, these other super apostles or false leaders who were all empty froth as far as he was concerned, were basically sort of, what's the word I'm looking for?

[27 : 27] Trespassing upon his apostolic patch. The implication is that the different apostles went different places spreading the gospel. Where they went, that was their sort of suite of jurisdiction.

The room or the area of jurisdiction or room which the Lord had given to them. Verse 13, the room which God had distributed to us. A measure to reach even unto you.

And where they went spreading the gospel, that was taken as being sort of their kind of jurisdiction. Now, subsequently, in the so-called apostolic canons, which were in the subsequent centuries after the apostles, those canons stipulated that no bishop should appoint ministers beyond his own limits, beyond his own sphere of jurisdiction.

In other words, the rules of his area of jurisdiction that God had appointed to him. You know, in much the same way as if we were to decide to make new elders here in Scalpie or new beacons or whatever the case may be, we've got that jurisdictional right.

If we were to decide to do it in North Harris or in Librale or whatever, then people would say, oh, hang on a minute, you've got no jurisdiction there, you don't have the right there. And Paul is saying like, this is the rule, this is the sphere of jurisdiction that's been given to me.

[28 : 44] They've got no right to come in, they've got no right to sort of set themselves up as leaders, they shouldn't even have the status of leaders amongst you without my say-so.

Because no leader should have been appointed without Paul's say-so's in any of his jurisdiction. We will not boast of things without our measure going beyond where God has given us.

jurisdiction where we planted churches and so on, but according to the measure of the rule which God has distributed to us. In other words, those areas where he has enabled us to plant churches and to set up, you know, bodies of believers, a measure to reach even to you.

Now, the implication here is that Paul's sphere of jurisdiction has not gone further than Corinth. And in that sense we mean not further south and west.

If you've got maps at the back of your Bible, it'll be handy to look at them. You'll see that Corinth and Cancra are down at the southern end of Greece. There's just a sort of peninsula below them.

[29 : 48] And that's possibly what he means by he wants to go beyond there and preach the gospel perhaps in the Sparta and Olympia sort of peninsula there. Athens is to the east.

He's been there. He's done Amphipolis and Apollonia, which is between Philippi and Thessalonica. He's worked his way south and he's come now to Corinth. But this is as far as he has gone southwards.

Romans chapter 15 and verse 19, which some believe, and the evidence might suggest, it was written actually from Corinth. So in other words, it was probably written, if we think in terms of, we have to go over this like tangent here, so if you can bear with me.

In Acts 18, we see how Paul comes to Corinth and how he begins to preach the gospel there and how those who wouldn't receive it, well he shook his raiment, he said your blood be in your own heads, I'm clean, from henceforth I will go to the Gentiles.

And then we go on and see how the Lord appeared to him and said, be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace, I am with thee, no man shall settle thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city.

[30 : 59] And he continued there a year and six months, 18 months he stayed in Corinth, teaching the word God amongst them. That being the case, that's quite a long time to stay in one place for Paul.

It is likely that the letter to the Romans was written during that 18 month period. Lots of internal evidence indicates that it's got a Corinthian background to it, not least.

chapter 16 verse 1 reference to Phoebe Deconesim or servant of the church at Cancra which was like the twin city right next door to Corinth.

So he probably wrote it from Corinth. That means he wrote it whilst he was first staying in Corinth before he had written either 1st or 2nd Corinthians or the letter that probably precedes 1st Corinthians.

so by the time he writes Romans 15 at verse 19 he has already been into Illyricum. Now Illyricum is the Roman territory which is north of what is now Albania, basically into Yugoslavia.

[32 : 08] It means that by then, having preached that far north he had probably, given he went on main cities, he had probably preached in Skupi, which is modern day Skopje, which is the, as some of you will know, the capital of the modern day former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but that's to the south, and probably on to Skudra, which is modern day Stoder, which was within Roman Illyricum and is now in northern modern day Albania.

Now, given that there aren't that many more Roman cities in Illyricum, it is probably that southern one that he went this far as. So he'd gone up that far north into Illyricum, modern day Yugoslavia, he'd been up, but south wise, within that area of the country, he'd come as far as Corinth and the implication is then stopped because he says that we have come as far as to you, verse 14 of 2 Corinthians 10, as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ, you know, as far, but implication, no further.

But we definitely came to Corinth, you know, if you didn't have many teachers, if you got two teachers, you've only got one father, and he was the one that planted the church amongst them, he was their spiritual father.

Not boasting of ourselves without our measure, we don't go beyond our measure, that is, if other men's labours, like these false teachers are doing, you know, if I planted an Apollos water and God gave the increase, these guys have just come in and written the back of that, they didn't plant the church here, they didn't labour to set up it, they're riding the back of all men's labours.

But having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule of hundred, the implication here is, if your faith was a little bit stronger and more mature, we could afford not to have to keep focusing on Corinth itself, but rather we could use Corinth as a springboard to go south and west into Sparta and Olympia and so on, into that final southern bit section of Greece, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to most in another man's line of things made ready to our hand, we're not trying to ride the back of somebody else's work, but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord, for not he that commendeth himself as a prude, but whom the Lord commendeth.

[34 : 38] In other words, these false apostles, these false leaders, they are making out how great they are. If it is really the spirit of Christ that is in them, they will be filled with humility of how insignificant they are.

For not he that commendeth himself, the sense that the imagery he in commendeth is the sense of metal being tempered in the furnace, of it being sort of tested and molded and like a blacksmith working the sort of horseshoe in the furnace and the real measure of it being seen there.

Not he that commended himself as a prude, but whom the Lord commended, whom the Lord has fashioned in the furnace. He will judge who is right and who is telling the truth and who isn't.

Now, you might think, okay, well that's fine, for long ago and so on. That was the apostle Paul, where does it leave us? I would suggest to you that it leaves us in this situation whereby we can know, first of all, the distinction between true and false religion.

We can know that which is of God and the fruit that it produces in a soul. If it causes us to be puffed up and man-centered and focused on individuals and leaders and so on and the sort of hero worship that puts people on pedestals, that is probably not of the Lord.

[35 : 59] That which produces humility and which exalts the Lord and says how great he is and what he has done in his sovereignty and his glory and his mercy from all eternity, then that will be something which the Lord has produced.

The true spirit of Christ will always point to Christ. Secondly, however, we see that just as Paul, throughout this letter, is seeking to hold back, as it were, the desire to unleash his apostolic authority for fear of damaging the comparatively fragile Corinthian believers in their feet.

He doesn't want to blast them with both battles. He wants to try and almost as it were pinpoint, like a smart bomb, pinpoint his wrath against the false teachers, against the false leaders, but preserve intact his children, his spiritual children in Corinth, because to him it is more important to protect the fragile than to destroy as yet the false teachers.

God will ultimately weed out the chaff from the wheat in the fullness of time. And I would suggest to you that for ourselves, there is a need to recognize that God is in sovereign control.

And because the Lord is in sovereign control, we don't need to unleash our wrath against others who may think are wrong. We can rather exercise this restraint and humility which Paul himself exercises.

[37 : 32] We can recognize the fragility of fellow believers, our need to be gentle with them. Even if we have legitimate authority, even if we know that we are right and they are wrong, there is a need for gentleness.

The meekness and gentleness of Christ. Verse 1, remember, I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence and base among you, but being absent and bold toward you.

And we wonder, oh, but then, others might get away with wrongdoing, they might get away with false teaching, they might damage the church, they might destroy it and so on. Well, we have to leave that with the Lord. And we have to be gentle as Paul strives to be gentle.

We have to be restrained as Paul strives to be restrained. He doesn't exercise his full authority and we likewise have to restrain in that even where we may have a legitimate case to trust God with his church, to trust God with his sovereignty, and to strive ourselves to be faithful where the Lord has placed us, where his rule of jurisdiction has put us.

That is where he desires us to serve. Not him that commandeth himself as a fruit, but whom the Lord commandeth, and he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

[38 : 54] Amen. May the Lord bless us. Peace be for God. Amen.