

2 Corinthians 10:7-11 Authority, part 2

Some of us remember years ago when George H. W. Bush was running for president and Dan Quayle was his running mate. In the VP debate, Lloyd Bentsen, Quayle's opponent, at one point made a big deal about how Quayle had compared himself to JFK.

Quayle said, "I have as much experience in the Congress as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency." Bentsen replied, "Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy."

That was a very zippy line that people remember to this day. But frankly, it does not really matter how well Dan Quayle compared with JFK. He is not the standard by which we judge how good or bad a politician is.

Comparing ourselves to others seems to be a standard part of human nature. We judge how well we are doing by comparing ourselves to others. Many today base their value on how they compare to others. Some people dismiss or reject others because they fail to measure up to their own personal standards.

In our passage today, we find that the false teachers in Corinth were comparing themselves to Paul and finding Paul coming up short. He didn't measure up to their standards. They set their own standards and then praised themselves for measuring up. The problem was that they were measuring by the wrong standard. It was unwise of them to measure themselves by themselves.

The main theme in this passage is authority. The false teachers were denying Paul's authority over the church, and Paul was asserting his authority. The church had to decide whether it would follow the authority of its founder or of the false teachers who had infiltrated the church.

Likewise today, we need to make sure that we are evaluating and measuring authority within the church by the right standards. Paul is telling us here how *not* to exercise authority in the context of the local church.

We began looking at this passage last week and we found two major prohibitions:

- I. .7 Don't judge by external appearances. Don't be superficial; try to see things from God's point of view, not merely from a human perspective.
- II. .8 Don't deny legitimate authority.
 - A. Authority is God-given—"authority, which the Lord gave us."
 - B. .8b Authority is to be used for the church's edification.

C. Properly used, authority does not destroy the church.

We also looked at the complaints leveled against Paul in vss. 9-11.

III. .12 Don't compare yourself with others.

Paul's adversaries in the church were doing this very thing—commending themselves by comparing themselves to one another. They were claiming that Paul did not measure up to them—which is a really ridiculous thing to say. Other than Jesus, Paul is the preeminent representative of Christianity. No one else comes near the stature of Paul in the Christian faith. And yet these false teachers were claiming to be better or greater than Paul.

A. .12 Avoid self-commendation. “those who commend themselves”

1. The false teachers compared themselves with themselves and found themselves to be commendable.

Quote: They invented false standards that they could meet, then proclaimed themselves superior for meeting them.¹

In the Roman culture of that era, political speakers would boast about themselves and assassinate the character of their opponents. Extravagant self-promotion and self-commendation were common in that society. It's rather common today in our culture as well, especially among politicians, athletes, and entertainers.

2. .12a Paul refused to engage in these ridiculous comparisons. He dared not class himself or compare himself with his adversaries. He's probably saying this with a good bit of sarcasm or irony. “I don't presume to count myself among such an august group of scholars; I am a child among giants compared to you; I am not worthy to be classified with you.” This is a bit of ridicule or mockery directed toward the false teachers.
3. In reality, Paul was in a different league from his adversaries. He was an apostle; they were not. He was sent by Jesus; they were working for Satan.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 2 Co 10:12.

App: A clear biblical principle is that we must avoid self-commendation and self-promotion. The sin of pride is what drives people to promote themselves.

Pr 27:2 Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

This is especially true of those in positions of spiritual authority. One of the marks of false teachers is that they commend themselves.

B. .12b Avoid self-comparison.

1. Paul uses two words here for measurement and comparison – “class, compare” (μετροῦντες, συγκρίνοντες). What standard did the false teacher use to class and compare? “themselves” – i.e., each other. They measured up pretty well to one another.

2. Paul fell short when his adversaries compared him to themselves. The false teachers were judging Paul by the standard of themselves, and he did not measure up to them, in their humble opinions.

They should have been measuring themselves by Paul, not vice versa.

3. .12end Paul asserts that self-comparison is “not wise” (οὐ συνιούσιν). I.e., without understanding. It’s a polite way of saying that the false teachers are fools; they lack common sense; they are not thinking correctly. Only fools commend themselves by comparing themselves to others.

App: Self is not the standard we should use to evaluate ourselves or others. That’s a worldly standard, but not a Christian one.

It seems to be human nature to compare ourselves with those around us. If we seem to be somehow better than others—or have better things or greater achievements—we tend to feel good about ourselves. If we seem to be somehow lesser than others, then we tend to feel badly about that.

Comparing self to others leads to all kinds of problems. **E.g.**, people want to change genders because they compare themselves to others.

What is the proper standard of evaluation? Our goal is to be Christ-like. Jesus sets the standard for our attitudes and behaviors. We should be striving to be like Jesus, not like others.

1Jo 2:6 *He who says he abides in [Christ] ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

1 Corinthians 11:1 *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Cf. Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican:

Lu 18:11 *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

“I’m not like others” – so that means that I’m better than they are.

When you start commending yourself because you seem to be better than others, you are “not wise.”

Quote: It is a senseless undertaking (ὄ σὺνιᾶσιν) to act as your own appraiser or write your own testimonial and then congratulate yourself on the splendid appraisal or the glowing reference.²

App: What is true about ourselves? “There is none righteous; no, not one.” “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” The only goodness and value we have comes to us because of Christ and his work in our lives.

So don't compare yourselves with others. Don't think that you are fine because you are not as bad as others. Sinful man is never the standard of comparison. Compare yourself with the standards God has established for his people. How well do you measure up to God's expectations? How well do you compare with genuine biblical standards of behavior? Everyone falls short of that standard. It's only by God's grace that we can do anything.

And when we are evaluating those in authority, the standard is not how well they compare to others. The standard is faithfulness to biblical expectations. Are spiritual leaders fulfilling their God-given responsibilities? Are they being faithful? Do they meet the qualifications? – That's how we gauge success.

² Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 708.

IV. .13 Don't go beyond the sphere God has appointed for you.

- A. .13 God appoints authority within a sphere or area. The sphere of authority for the apostles was the local church. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21). He was Jesus' authorized representative or spokesman. Paul and his colleagues had started this church, and the church was within the sphere of Paul's authority.
- B. Part of the measure that God appointed to Paul was the Corinthian church. God "appointed/divided" (ἐμέρισεν) this "measure" (μέτρου) to Paul; his measure reached to them; they were within his "sphere/field/jurisdiction/assignment" (κανόνοϛ). God had assigned this territory to him. Since the church was in Paul's sphere, the false teachers did not have authority there.
- C. .13end Paul's sphere of authority "especially includes you." If any church fell within Paul's authority, it was this church, since he was the founding pastor. Many of these people had been converted through Paul's preaching. They, of all people, should recognize Paul's authority.
- D. The false teachers could *not* claim this kind of authority. God had not sent them; they had not started the church; they were not apostles. They had no sphere of authority, and the Corinthian believers should not listen to them. They were intruding or trespassing within Paul's area of ministry.

Quote: His complaint with the rivals is not simply that they have wrongfully invaded turf assigned to him but that they have tried to discredit his influence where he rightfully deserves influence and to take credit for what God has done through him.³

App: Likewise, pastors have a proper sphere of authority—they have been appointed to serve the local church. As long as the people of that church recognize the man as their pastor, his sphere/area of authority is the local church that he pastors. The people of that church should respect the authority and leadership of their pastor—his sphere of authority measures out to them.

³ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 455–456.

Many people today don't like that structure of authority over them. They don't want to be accountable to a pastor or a church. They want to be free to do whatever they want without accountability. So they refuse to be part of a church; they refuse to come under the authority of a pastor.

Part of the Christian life is accountability to a church and to a pastor. There should be no "lone wolf" Christians who are not affiliated with a church.

It also says here that there is a limit to one's sphere of authority. We must be careful not to follow those who have no authority over us. If we are not within their sphere of authority—if we are not within their jurisdiction—then they have no authority over us.

By the way, the measure/extent of pastoral authority is over the members of the local church. Legally and biblically, pastoral authority does not extend over people outside the church. E.g., a shepherd over his flock.

E. .14 don't overextend yourself

1. This word (ὑπερεκτεινομεν) means "to stretch ourselves out beyond one's rights."⁴ Paul was not overreaching or over extending himself by exercising authority over the Corinthian church. He had the right to assert his authority in that sphere.
2. Paul's critics were apparently saying that the church should no longer be under his authority. He should leave the church alone and mind his own business. The false teachers wanted to extend their authority over the church, so they had to get rid of Paul's authority over the church.
3. .14b One reason why Paul had authority in the church at Corinth was that he and his coworkers had brought the Gospel to them. They arrived and established the church long before the false teachers showed up. Their authority was not an over-reach.

1 Corinthians 3:6 *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

⁴ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Co 10:14.

1 Corinthians 4:15 *For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*

4. It was the false teachers who were overstepping their boundaries. They were seeking to operate in a sphere that did not belong to them. They were trespassing/encroaching in Paul's territory, his assignment, his legitimate sphere of authority.

App: When there are conflicts within a church, it is often because people are trying to operate outside the limits/spheres/measure God has ordained for them. They are overextending themselves into areas not under their authority. Sometimes deacons usurp the position of the pastor. Sometimes a person who is neither pastor nor deacon wants to exert authority over the church. A pastor has a measure of authority over the church he serves; he is operating within his proper measure, his sphere of authority, his jurisdiction.

V. .15-16 Don't claim credit for others' accomplishments.

- A. .15a This is exactly what the false teachers were doing—they were boasting in another man's sphere of accomplishment. I.e., taking credit for what Paul and his coworkers had done.

Paul had started the church, and now these false teachers were trying to take over/horn in on what other men's labor had produced. They were boasting in what others had done as if they'd done it themselves. They were taking credit for the health and vitality of the church as if they were responsible for it.

Illus.: Imagine if you worked hard to plant a garden. All summer long, you tend to the garden, weed it, water it, and protect it. Then, in the fall, when the fruit is ready to harvest, someone else comes along and takes all the produce. Not only that, the thief claims that he is responsible for everything the garden produced. Most of us would be rather upset if something like that happened. That's basically what the false teachers were doing—they claimed credit for what Paul had done.

.16b Paul intentionally avoided other people's spheres of ministry. He didn't want to encroach on someone else's work or build on someone else's foundation.

Romans 15:20 *I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,*

The false teachers infiltrated the church at Corinth, took credit for what Paul had done, and started to tear the whole thing down.

App: It's a great shame when a new pastor takes over a church, enjoys what others had labored to build, and then runs the church into the ground. It does not take long or much effort for a new pastor to ruin a church; it happens all the time. Or sometimes they turn the church into an entirely different direction.

Churches transitioning to a new pastor must be exceedingly careful to choose someone who will build on and expand what previous workers have built. That's what a good pastor does—he strengthens and builds on the foundation that others have laid. He does not tear down what others have built.

- B. .15b-16 A stable church can expand ministry and influence.
 - 1. .15b Their faith would increase.
 - 2. .15c That would allow for Paul's work to expand/enlarge. In fact, he's hoping that it will be "greatly enlarged."
 - 3. .16a That, in turn, would allow Paul to "preach the Gospel even to the regions beyond you..."

He was hoping that the Corinthian church could be a base of operations to expand his outreach. He had plans to preach the Gospel in Rome and Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). We know that he made it all the way up into modern Albania (Illyricum—Rom 15:19). The Corinthian church could have aided that expansion of the Gospel.

- C. Think what Paul might have done if he didn't have to deal with the continuing problems in Corinth! Instead of reaching to "regions beyond," he was stuck trying to fix the problems at this dysfunctional church. So he's hoping to solve the problems there so he can expand his ministry into other areas.

App: One of the goals of the church is to enlarge our sphere of influence. We want to grow and reach more people; we want to have more of an impact on our world. We want to see growth and expansion of the ministry. And we want to help others reach "regions beyond." In fact, we want to help reach the whole world with the Gospel of Christ—Acts 1:8.

We definitely don't want to hinder God's work anywhere. We don't want to prevent an expanding ministry by our own conflicts and spiritual immaturity. It's a real shame when a church is so weakened by internal strife that it fails to reach out to "regions beyond."

We should see our church as a base of operations for efforts to "preach the gospel in regions beyond." That's almost impossible when the church is beset by strife, conflict, and false teaching. Let's not allow that to happen here.

VI. .17-18 Don't commend/promote/praise yourself; instead, glorify the Lord.

A. Vs. 17 is a quote from Jeremiah 9:24

But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, ...

B. The highest purpose and goal for all of Christian ministry and life is the glory of God—1 Cor 10:13.

Eph 3:21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

1Pe 4:11 ... that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

C. Paul has does not hesitate to boast/glorify in what God has accomplished through him. He does not need to compare himself with others or gain commendation from anyone. His approval comes from God, and his goal is to glorify God.

Quote: Paul ... wants no glory for himself but devotes everything to Jesus, while his adversaries want everything for themselves and present commendations that are void of divine approval.⁵

App: Everything that anyone accomplishes in Christian ministry is ultimately for the Lord's glory and through the Lord's power. Whatever we are able to accomplish in ministry is because of God's work in us. God gets the glory for whatever we might achieve. So there's no room for boasting.

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 351–352.

- D. .18 God often proves the value of a work through testing. The word “approved” here (δόκιμος) means “proved through testing; tested and found genuine.”
1. How we handle difficult situations serves to prove what we are. When leaders of the church handle difficulties properly, it proves the strength of the church. We want to pass the tests that God gives us.
 2. Church leaders are tested in various ways—how do they handle *conflict*? How do they deal with *finances* (prosperity or debt)? How do they handle church *discipline* issues? What do they do with *false teachers*? How do they process *change*? How do they deal with *challenges* to legitimate authority? If a pastor passes these tests, it demonstrates that he is approved.
- E. .18 Self-approval really amounts to disapproval by God. He who commends himself is not approved. Only the person who is approved by God and who brings glory to God is commended by God.

App: How do we know whom the Lord approves? One means of discerning God’s approval for leaders is ordination. In the ordination process, a group of fellow pastors, missionaries, and educators meet to evaluate a potential pastor to see if he is ready to do the job. The ordination council recommends that the church either ordain the man or refrain from ordaining him. If the ordination council votes to ordain, that is a strong indication that the man has the qualifications and gifts to serve as pastor. That recommendation serves as a sort of approval that assures a church that a man is qualified to serve as pastor. It’s an approval process, it’s a test that reveals if a man is approved.

It’s always dangerous when a pastor commends himself but does not have God’s approval. If a man is not ordained or has no recognition beyond himself, then it’s highly unlikely that God approves of him. These days, a church has to be diligent in checking references and in vetting a potential pastoral candidate to make sure that he has the proper qualifications.

Many people today trying to impose their authority are not approved; they are not qualified to be pastors.

F. Our ultimate goal in all of this is to hear the Lord's commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." That's the greatest commendation that we could ever hear. Receiving God's approval is the most important and the one we should be striving to gain.

Quote: Paul does not glory in his accomplishments; he received his talents, tact, wisdom, insight, and strength from the Lord. To him he ascribes honor and glory. Thus, he boasts in the Lord and in him alone.⁶ That's the pattern that we should follow.

This passage gives us a whole series of "don'ts" to tell us how not to exercise authority. If we were to put all of this language in positive terms, we would have something like:

- Recognize God-given authority. God gives authority for the edification of the church. Legitimate authority will not tear down a church; it will build it up.
- Evaluate yourself and others by the standard of biblical expectations, not how well you compare to others.
- Stay within the sphere of authority that God has appointed for you.
- Pray that God would expand our area of operations and to extend out to "regions beyond." We should be a base of operations for expanded Gospel outreach.
- Pursue commendation and approval from God. Boast only in what God has accomplished through you. Our highest goal is always to bring glory and honor to God, not to gain commendation for ourselves.

⁶ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 352.