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2 Corinthians

...lest I seem to terrify you by letters. 2 Corinthians 10:9

These words are dependent on the previous verse. Paul mentioned that he might somewhat boast about the authority that he and the others possessed, an authority which was given to them by the Lord for the edification of their audience. In that boasting, he says that he won't be ashamed, "lest I seem to terrify you by letters."

In other words, even if his letters bring about a sense of being frightened, he would not be ashamed of causing this type of result. The reason for this will be explained in the coming verses, but he is saying in advance that his boasting in the weight of his letters is not an empty boasting, but rather one which bears his authority to act upon what he has written.

Because of this, if the Corinthians were terrified of his letters, they should also be terrified of whatever action the letters threaten. If that action proves to be necessary, Paul will carry out what he has written.

As a side point, the wording of the Greek says, *dia ton epistalon*, or "by means of the letters." It is plural. For this reason, many scholars believe that there is another letter that Paul wrote to them which is not included in the Bible and which is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9. This verse may support that theory, but it does not prove it. It could be that he is referring to 1 Corinthians and the letter he is now writing, 2 Corinthians.

Life application: Paul is often very direct in his words as are other authors of the Bible. There are statements which are taken in today's politically correct world to be too forceful, or the remnants of a less-cultured or loving time. Even many words of Jesus are disregarded because they speak of judgment, hell, and condemnation. But let us stand on these truths and never withhold speaking them when it is appropriate to do so. Just because the "world" finds offense at the word of God, we have no excuse to not declare its whole counsel.

“For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” 2 Corinthians 10:10

Paul now notes how both he and his letters are perceived by his audience. "For his letters" is speaking of the letters of instruction that he wrote to the churches, some of which are now the epistles found in the Bible. The words "they say" is speaking of the people who received them. They would read Paul's words and come to the conclusion which he will next note in this verse about himself.

Before looking at their conclusion though, it should be noted that many manuscripts say, "...he said" rather than "they say." It is in the singular. It could be then that this is Paul's way of writing in an impersonal manner, referring to any individual who reads his words. Or it could be that there was actually one person who was the ring leader of the group who opposed Paul. If so, then it is he who made the charge which will be specified as the verse continues. Though it can't be determined which is correct, both should be considered. Paul was not without enemies, even in the churches he established.

Concerning the letters, they are noted as "weighty and powerful." This is surely the case. History has borne out that Paul's letters have the greatest weight and the utmost power. They have been studied for 2000 years and yet they still produce hidden treasures for us to consider. Within them are special words which have been used in unusual and particular ways to bring forth the most precise doctrine. There are numerous patterns which permeate his writings and which show the highest of intelligence and the sure mark of inspiration. They are the

greatest of treasures for the hungry human soul who needs to understand the grace of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

But, his detractors looked at his letters as somewhat of a contradiction to him as a man. Despite his letters being so weighty and powerful, they note that "*his* bodily presence *is* weak, and his speech is contemptible." The weak presence of Paul is hinted at throughout the book of Acts as well as in his own writings. He carried afflictions with him and he seemed to need to be accompanied everywhere he went, as if he couldn't take care of himself as he traveled.

The contemptible speech is literally "speech of no value." Charles Ellicott thinks this means either a "weak or unmusical voice, or to the absence of the rhetorical artifices, the exordium, divisions, perorations, in which Greek audiences delighted." With these infirmities, those who opposed him made the supposition that there was a disconnect between what he wrote and what he could actually carry out.

In essence, they felt assured that his letters were mere braggadocio and that there was no true authority in the man himself to enforce the words he wrote. He will correct them on this. His challengers mistook his humility and physical weakness as weakness of character and as an inability to exercise his apostolic authority. Instead, however, these were actually strengths which they had misunderstood.

Interestingly, this verse shows us an amazing parallel between Moses and Paul. When Moses was given his commission at the burning bush, we read his words of response to the Lord -

"O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue."

We see that like Paul, Moses' speech was "contemptible." And yet, human history has never seen words more "weighty and powerful" than those of Moses. It is of

great interest that the Lord chose these two men, with these similar impediments, to reveal His intentions for the people of the world. Moses revealed the law while Paul explains the grace.

But the parallel between the two doesn't stop there. In verse 10:1, Paul spoke of the "meekness and gentleness of Christ" which he possessed and how he was lowly among them, meaning humble. Moses likewise was characterized in this way, being called "very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

The Lord appears to have chosen these men for their weaknesses so that His power could be revealed through them. He also chose them for their humility, so that His own compassion would be more fully understood through them as well. Those who challenged both Moses and Paul underestimated the true power that they held and they ultimately strove against the One who commissioned them in the first place.

Life application: Let us never assume that someone of humility is weak and ineffective. Let us also never assume that one who is physically infirm is incapable of accomplishing great feats of strength. Instead, let us look at these aspects of the person and see how the Lord can work through them to reveal His own greatness.

Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *we will also be* in deed when we are present.

2 Corinthians 10:11

This takes us right back to the first two verses of the chapter -

"Now I, Paul, myself *am* pleading with *you* by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. ² But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence

by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

After that, each subsequent verse has built upon the thought. He was perceived as being "bold" when he wrote his letters, but when he was present they perceived him as "lowly." They made the assumption from this that his letters were only a facade with no substance behind them. Rather however, when he was present he attempted to be meek and gentle, emulating Christ.

He lets them now know that when it becomes necessary for him to show his boldness, he would not object to do so. In order to show them that this was the case, he begins this verse with, "Let such a person consider this." It is a way of introducing his next words, asking for sober consideration of them. And the thought to be presented is "that we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *we will* also *be* in deed when we are present."

Translators insert a few words for clarity here. Instead of "such *we will* also *be*" it should read "such we are." The reason is that if Paul intended it to be in the future tense, he would have expressed the verb. As he did not, it implies that it is in the present tense. The character of the person in the letters is the same as the character of the person at all times. It didn't matter if he and the other apostles were present or absent, they were consistent in their deeds and actions.

Life application: The Bible is God's word to us. It reflects who He is, and Jesus is the One who reveals Him. He is the subject of our being able to comprehend who God is. His word while He is absent reflects who He will be when He is again present. Therefore, though He is loving, as His word describes Him, He is also just, righteous, and holy. He will not spare those who reject Him. What is your impression of Jesus? The only way to know how He will treat you is to know His word and what it expects of you. Don't believe the lie that He is not in Person who He is in His word.

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. 2 Corinthians 10:12

Paul has been speaking of the perception of him by some of those in Corinth. In the preceding verse he let them know that the person he is in his letters is who he will be in their presence. Understanding that, he says, "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves." The Geneva Bible notes that he is actually speaking in a taunting manner. The words form an assonance which is lost in English, but which reveals his demeanor towards those he is challenging.

In his words, but without doing so again, he alludes to the accusations of self-commendation that he has written about several times already. These are found in 2 Corinthians 3:1; 4:2; & 5:12. Here in this verse he doesn't allude to these directly, but rather implicitly through the use of the words, "For we dare not..."

What is implied is that the people he is writing about, however, are doing just that. Continuing on, he says directly, "But they..." This is the instigators which have been the subject of his words and now they continue to be. It is they who spend their time "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves." They have set a false standard and then they have used that standard in order to make their evaluations of all others, including Paul and the other apostles.

His words do include a touch of irony though. By saying that he would never compare himself with those who commend themselves, he is actually doing just that. However, it is in a taunt rather than in a direct manner. But there must always be a basis by which he can show them their folly and so the words are appropriate.

It seems certain that, as in several verses previously seen in this epistle, he has the book of Proverbs on his mind. On several occasions, Solomon writes about someone who is wise in his own eyes. One example which Paul may have been thinking of is verse 26:12 -

"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him." Proverbs 26:12

As, Charles Ellicott notes about Paul's words -

"Of all such self-admiration—one might almost say, of all such autolatry—St. Paul declares, what the experience of all ages attests, that they who practise it 'are not wise.' They lose, as the Greek verb more definitely expresses it, all power of discernment."

In their lack of discernment, they were looking at themselves and their accomplishments as superior to all others. In so doing, no one could ever meet their supposedly unattainable mark. The inevitable result is that they would condemn everyone around them as lowly and contemptible.

Life application: Proverbs is filled with wisdom for those who are willing to receive it. The problem with attempting to enlighten those who are wise in their own eyes is that they will never be able to see the true wisdom through their own self-idolizing glare.

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

2 Corinthians 10:13

The sense of this verse seems plain enough, but to understand it in context, it should be taken with the preceding two verses.

"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you."

Paul spoke of himself and his associates as not putting themselves in the same class as those who would commend themselves. The reason is that in their commending of themselves, they became their own standard of measurement for everyone else and thus everyone else would seem lower than their supposed high and lofty measurement.

On the other hand, he says that, "We, however, will not boast beyond measure." There was a limit to what they could boast of. If they were their own standard, there could be no limit, but because they had limitations, their boast would be within those limits. And that is "within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us."

The word "sphere" here is *kanón*. It is a word only used by Paul and it is only found in 2 Corinthians and Galatians. According to Vincent's Word Studies, it indicates "a straight rod or ruler. Hence a carpenter's rule. Metaphorically, that which measures or determines anything, in morals, art, or language. The Alexandrian grammarians spoke of the classic Greek authors collectively as the canon or standard of the pure language. In later Greek it was used to denote a fixed tax. In christian literature it came to signify the standard of faith or of christian teaching; the creed; the rule of Church discipline, and the authorized collection of sacred writings. Hence canon of Scripture."

Paul and his associates had a limit which was set by God. They didn't boast outside of those boundaries. They didn't claim the work of another, they didn't speak of areas they had never evangelized as if they had, etc. They simply spoke of the authority that they had been granted by God and went no further.

However, as a large slap in the face to those he is particularly addressing, he finishes with, "...a sphere which especially includes you." Those who had been comparing themselves with themselves are being told that they are, in fact, not the standard. Instead, they don't even rise to the standard which God had set for Paul and the others with him. Therefore, Paul had a right to exercise his authority over them when he came to Corinth. If necessary, he would do so without compunction.

Life application: Let none of us think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;

2 Corinthians 10:14

Paul just noted that the sphere of influence which he and his fellow workers encompassed was one which God had appointed, and that sphere also included those at Corinth. Building on that, he says then that "we are not overextending ourselves." He had not gone outside of his divinely appointed sphere of influence. Rather, he was perfectly within his rights to claim authority over Corinth. He had established the church and continued to instruct it and direct it.

He then gives a parenthetical thought, "...as though *our authority* did not extend to you." For whatever reason, some intimated that their authority didn't reach out and encompass Corinth. Maybe they heard another teacher who was more eloquent and thought, "This is our true leader." Whatever prompted them to assume that they were outside of Paul's authority, it was incorrect. To confirm this, Paul reminds them that "it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ."

He and his associates were the first to preach the gospel to them; a message which they then received. Therefore, whoever came after them were actually intruders. It was inappropriate for someone else to come along and assume control of the congregation which was established by others. It was Paul's right,

established by God in the granting of his sphere of influence, to boast over them and to continue to direct them.

Life application: In this world people very quickly take credit for the good deeds of others, but are even quicker to put the blame for what is wrong on those same people. A very good example of this is the office of president. When a new president is elected, if he is a man lacking character, he will do just this. He will take the credit for what is sound and properly functioning, even if he had no part in it, and he will continue to blame his predecessor for every bad thing which occurs, even if it those things are completely his fault. Watch out for people like this and watch out for yourself as well. Don't be like such losers. They are corrupt and their corruption is infectious.

...not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, 2 Corinthians 10:15

In just the previous verse, Paul noted that his sphere of influence extended to those in Corinth, even those who opposed him. Therefore, he cannot be charged with "boasting of things beyond measure." Rather, it was those who exalted themselves that were following this exact path. As Paul had introduced the gospel there and established the church, then when someone made themselves the standard by which the churches' affairs were to be evaluated, they stepped over Paul's sphere of influence, not the other way around.

Continuing on, he notes that his sphere is not "in other men's labors." This was a principle tenet of Paul. He sought to establish churches where none existed. It is true that he met with churches established by others, but he did not extend his "sphere of influence" over them. It is one thing for a pastor to go to a different church while traveling and join in the fellowship, but it is another for him to walk into that church and ask for a seat behind the pulpit with the pastor of that church. He has no right to such a position because it is not within his sphere of influence.

In contrast to inappropriately extending his authority, he had rightly done so. As he says to them, "...having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere." The verb here is present tense - "increases." As the faith of those in Corinth increases, the fruits of his labors will also increase. In this, he is giving them a delicate rebuke that it is their lack of faith which is withholding the fruits of the labors he and his associates had sown. They were as if stubborn seed, not willing to put forth the harvest of grain despite the many efforts that had been invested in them.

However, the present tense notes that their faith is increasing and as it continued to do so, it would begin to bear fruit. This is the hope of any good spiritual leader. Eventually, the students will be able to stand up and also begin the process of tilling the soil, sowing the grain, watering the land, and pulling up the weeds as they come forth. The cycle of spreading the gospel would continue in the Corinthians as their faith and knowledge increased.

Life application: Everything that we do should have attached to it the end goal of bringing the gospel to others until the entire church is built up to its completion. When that day comes, the Lord will call his people to be with Himself for all eternity. Let us never tire as we continue on with this marvelous work, began so long ago.