

# The Supremacy and Centrality of Christ

2 Corinthians 10:1–18

## Introduction

This may come as a surprise, but when I was in high school, I used to play on our very small school's basketball team. When I first joined the team, we were trained to work together. The goal was to win the game, together as a team. We followed the instructions of the coach, practicing dribbling, passing, shooting and rehearsing various plays. We followed the lead of our coach who kept us focused on the goal. But something interesting happened over time. Some of the players got focused on their statistics. They were counting how many points per game, assists, and steals. Soon, they wanted to improve those numbers, and it impacted the way they played the game. In fact, they started ignoring the coach's instructions and turned into hot shots so they could improve their numbers. They stopped playing as a team and started playing for themselves. They thought by improving those numbers, they would help us win the game.

This is the kind of thing that can happen to churches and church leaders. We can drift from following Christ to something else that seems more attractive and self-serving. That's why, here at Clearcreek, we hold very tightly to our commitment of the supremacy and centrality of Christ (not ourselves). Christ as our king and doing everything to his glory and honor are the foundation of what we do here. And this commitment is what brings us to 2 Corinthians 10. This chapter is a great example of faithful, Christ-centered ministry coming under attack by false teachers who serve themselves rather than Christ.

## The Scripture

I'm going to read it in the New Living Translation, because it makes Paul's language to the Corinthians a little easier to follow. Let's read in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, starting at the beginning in verse 1.

*Now I, Paul, appeal to you with the gentleness and kindness of Christ—though I realize you think I am timid in person and bold only when I write from far away. 2 Well, I am begging you now so that when I come I won't have to be bold with those who think we act from human motives.*

*3 We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. 4 We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. 5 We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. 6 And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient.*

*7 Look at the obvious facts. Those who say they belong to Christ must recognize that we belong to Christ as much as they do. 8 I may seem to be boasting too much about the authority given to us by the Lord. But our authority builds you up; it doesn't tear you down. So I will not be ashamed of using my authority.*

*9 I'm not trying to frighten you by my letters. 10 For some say, "Paul's letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are worthless!" 11 Those people should realize that our actions when we arrive in person will be as forceful as what we say in our letters from far away.*

*12 Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant!*

*13 We will not boast about things done outside our area of authority. We will boast only about what has happened within the boundaries of the work God has given us, which includes our working with you.*

*14 We are not reaching beyond these boundaries when we claim authority over you, as if we had never visited you. For we were the first to travel all the way to Corinth with the Good News of Christ.*

*15 Nor do we boast and claim credit for the work someone else has done. Instead, we hope that your faith will grow so that the boundaries of our work among you will be extended. 16 Then we will be able to go and preach the Good News in other places far beyond you, where no one else is working. Then there will be no question of our boasting about work done in someone else's territory. 17 As the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."*

*18 When people commend themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them.*

— 2 Corinthians 10:1–18 (New Living Translation)

## Christ-Centered Plea

Our passage opens with a Christ-Centered plea from Paul, the letter's author.

*1 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— 2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.*

— 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 ESV

### In Meekness

As we already mentioned, Paul is dealing with false teachers in the church of Corinth who are persuading the believers in Corinth away from the Gospel of Jesus. One of the tactics they are using is to undermine Paul's ministry. If they can destroy Paul's reputation and trustworthiness, then apparently, these false teachers can claim this church for their own selfish purposes.

In response, Paul grounds his plea and his entire ministry in Christ. These false teachers accused Paul of being 'meek' and 'humble' when he's with them in person. They were undermining his Christ-given authority, based on how he represented himself in person (like Christ). They were judging his 'personality', and found him to be 'unfit'. Paul doesn't give in to these false teachers. He reminds the church at Corinth of the pattern of Jesus' character, who Paul is modeling. Jesus is full of meekness and gentleness! This is what believers who are walking well in the faith should expect from their shepherds who love and care for them. It's not that Paul wouldn't or couldn't be bold in person, rather he chose in his opportunities with them to be humble and meek. Perhaps when he was there he had no reason to be bold. But, Paul now says that he intends to show boldness and confidence towards those false teachers, and he begs of the Corinthians to return to their Christ-centered living so that boldness isn't directed towards them as well.

This is a point of reflection for us. In faithful ministry that looks like Christ, we will be maligned. I have personally seen elders demeaned and attacked for their meekness and humility. Men who love the Lord and seeking to honor him in their character are hated for it. And, the same goes for many of you. As we faithfully minister in Christ-likeness, we can (and should) expect resistance and push back. Especially as we watch our culture running away from a biblical-kind of morality.

But, Paul's humility and meekness doesn't mean he won't be bold when necessary.

### **In Boldness**

Paul is pleading with them to repent of this alluring false teaching and return to Christ! Salvation is found in no other place but Jesus and his work alone. He pleads with them to repent so he can remain gentle and meek when he comes to them. Paul is ready to challenge this kind of serious spiritual danger with boldness and confidence. Not because he is confident in himself. No, Paul is confident in Christ, and Christ's message! He is willing to be bold with them, and these false teachers who are leading these souls astray.

You see, Christ-centered ministry isn't always easy to hear. It can certainly be meek and humble calls to submit and obey Christ. This kind of ministry and nudge and prod to keep us on the straight and narrow path of Christ. But, It doesn't always feel that way. There are times when Christ-centered ministry requires boldness and confidence in Christ to produce repentance that leads to salvation and everlasting joy with Jesus. Now, this boldness isn't what produces repentance and salvation, but rather the Spirit's work through the hearing of the message of Christ. This is why we can be bold in ministry...because the outcome isn't up to us...just the faithful confidence in the message and work of Christ.

## Christ-Centered Warfare

Paul continues in verse 3 to show us the pattern of legitimate Christ-centered ministry.

*3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*  
— 1 Corinthians 10:3-6 ESV

### **The Weapons**

Paul defends his ministry focus. His ministry and service isn't done in the flesh, it's done through divine power. It's done with the God-given foundation of the good news of Jesus. Our ministry follows that same pattern. Our ministry pattern at Clearcreek is intended to make much of Jesus, by relying on the truth of Jesus. When we get together as elders and ministry leaders, our goal is to start with how we honor Christ. That is our commitment and foundation. And, we try model it well. We don't start with church growth strategies, organizational models, social media tactics, or business models of retaining engagement. We start with Christ.

And, we do this so that as you serve (whether officially here in a ministry, or elsewhere) your ministry opportunities are focused on pleasing Christ as well. Because ultimately, he's the one who we all serve and represent. He's the one whose power destroys strongholds.

### **The Target**

Now, in Paul's ministry, he aimed to break down false beliefs and teach about God. He traveled around proclaiming the Gospel. He taught how it saves us, remakes us, and gives us hope. He taught what it means for daily life. Because, this truth is what destroys arguments against any other hope. Gospel truth is what breaks down our prideful opinions about what we think we know about Jesus and his work. Paul was focused on clearly and effectively preaching Christ to people...because human reasoning and vain opinions are nothing but a death trap that leads to eternal destruction.

We proclaim, teach, instruct, exhort, encourage, admonish, and disciple in and with the Gospel of Jesus. It's how we are saved. It's how we are preserved. There's a lot of smooth and sweet deception that's invading our lives. But, the Gospel of Jesus and the whole counsel of God's word not only guards us from it, but it actively works to break these kinds of strongholds down.

Our ministry is modeled after Paul's to build in each and every one of you discernment that's based on Scripture. So that you are equipped to hear the thoughts in your own head, take them captive, and judge them against the truth of the Gospel. Why? So you are able to obey Christ! Your king and savior.

Clearcreek's mission is not to further any agenda other than Christ in you. We don't support political parties, social agendas, businesses, or anything other than the equipping of the saints to do ministry.

## Christ-Centered Confidence

In ministry, it's easy to drift. You do the work of focusing on Christ up front working very hard at it. You get things running smoothly, only to find that along that keeping things running has become more important than honoring Christ. I'm not sure how these false teachers got where they are, but their motives and confidence are misguided. Paul continues in verse 7...

*7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.*

— 1 Corinthians 10:7-8 ESV

### Through a unifying view

Paul pleads with them to use the evidence in front of them to think biblically about these teachers opposing him. Anyone who is confidently in Christ, is united together with others who are in Christ. Paul seems to imply that those who oppose him claim to be in Christ, but yet still openly oppose and battle him for authority. It's become territorial! It's like a spiritual civil war dividing up the union of Christ. This is not building up the body, but dicing it to pieces. This should be evidence enough to show that these traveling peddlers aren't in it for the glory and majesty of Christ. This should set off alarm bells.

Following this kind of pattern, our church doesn't seek to divide or demean other pastors and teachers who build others up in obedience to Christ. We have a deep love and respect for many of our brother and sisters hold to the truth of Scripture, and bow to the supremacy of our great king Jesus. We partner with pastors and churches throughout our region and abroad to spread the greatness of Jesus.

Paul's ministry was given directly to him by Jesus, and it was for building up the church(es). That gives him boldness and confidence as the Corinthian church saw in his writing. While we haven't been giving a ministry directly from Jesus like Paul was, we carry on the work of the great commission by making disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:16-20). We don't make disciples of any particular pastor or human figure. We make disciples of Jesus. And, we are not ashamed or cowardly about this work. We take great confidence in obeying and magnifying Christ in this way through all of our ministries from children's ministries up through our men's and women's ministries. Kids, how many of you have heard about Jesus in your classes? Men and women, do you know the truth of what God has done for you in Jesus? Making much of Jesus is what drives us to preach the supremacy and centrality of Christ, not our way of thinking, or our opinions, or our methods. Simply Christ and walking in obedience to him for his glory.

## Human-Centered Foolishness

Paul moves from defending his own ministry foundation, to focus on the foolishness of these false teachers. You can hear the sarcastic tone in his letter here to call attention to their arrogance:

*9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*

### **By incorrect standards**

Paul is being accused of cowardice in person. But, their standard is all wrong. Paul is being judged and compared to the very men who oppose him. And, these men only look at themselves to make sure they are measuring up. Don't miss the foolishness of this. This group of teachers, compares themselves to each other to ensure they are worthy of honor for their ministry. They are completely missing Christ! They aren't concerned about Christ-like character, they are infatuated with themselves! They appear to be relying completely on their own standard of excellence...which is the very opposite of the Christ-centered ministry of Paul.

I want you to know that over the last two years that I've served as an elder, I can say that each and every one of the elders here at Clearcreek genuinely loves Christ. And they want to serve him with excellence. We admit we're not perfect. We know we have more work to do. But, we seek to model Christ well. And we seek to build ministries that make much of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the only hope we have as the gathered body of Jesus is to remain faithful to him. As soon as our goal in ministry is to please someone other than Christ, we are without understanding. If we seek ministry that isn't aimed at making much of Jesus in the hearts people, then we have strayed into dangerous territory.

## Christ-Centered Growth

But, there is reason for confidence. And, Paul even says there is reason for boasting (within limits)...

*13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.*

### **By the work of God**

Paul's area of ministry includes the Corinthian church. Jesus himself spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus and gave him the mission of taking the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles. Paul isn't "infringing" on someone else's "turf", rather he's fulfilling his God-given mission. Paul is eager to boast about the work that has happened by the hand of God. He's already founded his work in the divine power of God. So, as Paul works, God works. So, he boasts about the work of God. He is proud of their growth.

The elders, ministry leaders, disciplers, and members of Clearcreek care deeply about every one of you here. We want to help you grow in knowing who Jesus is, what he has done for you, and what that means for your life. We are committed to this body. That's part of why we have membership. That's how we express our care, concern, and commitment to each other. Not because we boast in the

number of members, or want to trap you into our congregation, but because we are proud to be a part of what God does in each of your lives together in him.

## Christ-Centered Ministry

Paul continues on in verse 15 shifting the conversation from a pattern of selfish boasting to Christ-centered hope.

*15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, 16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. 17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

### Based in Hope

Paul and Timothy aren't moving in on someone else's territory, in fact, there's as far as Paul is concerned we're not even concerned with the idea of territory or ownership. They simply want to extend the good news of the gospel beyond Corinth to further lands. And, in verse 15, Paul shifts the focus from boasting (pride in self), to hope (service of Jesus). That's because Paul's ministry is centered on Christ, and sharing the good news of Christ.

In the same way, our aim here at Clearcreek isn't to grow a megachurch (and may God help us remain faithful if we ever do). We don't try to take away from other faithful churches in the area. We aim to grow genuine Christ-centered believers as they seek our help and join us in fellowship. In the past, even when we considered church planting it is careful and thought out so we don't compete or detract from other faithful churches. We're not in competition for territory. We're in service of Christ.

### Focused on Jesus

As Paul wraps up this section, in verse 17 he quotes Jeremiah 9:23-24. Now, this isn't the first time the Corinthians would have heard this quote. Paul quoted this to them in his first letter to them (1 Cor. 1:26-31). So, they are familiar with this verse from before. They have heard this verse in the context of not relying on anything human for salvation, but rather Christ. It's the same in our ongoing lives. It's the same in ministry.

We supply creative thinking, hard work, and trust the impact and harvest to God. Our goal is not to make much of ourselves, but to make much of our king. We don't boast in what we accomplish, but rather what Christ has accomplished. So, we hold to a very high view of Jesus, and who we are in him. Our goal is to build disciples that look like Jesus, sound like Jesus, and aim to please him.

## Christ-Centered Approval

And in pleasing him, we receive a true approval of our ministry. Paul closes this section in verse 18:

*18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

Paul's aim in his ministry was to be acceptable before Christ alone. He does not seek approval or praise from other humans. What a contrast to these selfish, false teachers going around collecting the praise (and money) of these churches. Paul wasn't fighting for selfish human gain. He was sacrificing for the spiritual gain of the people he served.

Ministry is to be acceptable before and for the Lord alone, not for humanity. We are to follow the biblical pattern of Christ-centered ministry. We submit to Christ as supreme, the pinnacle, the height of power over us. As believers, in any ministry opportunity, we aim to be approved of our King, Christ himself.

## Conclusion

Well, as we look at Paul's ministry as a biblical pattern to follow and evaluate where Clearcreek stands, it should raise some points of reflection and some questions.

### **Our Foundational Beliefs**

First, we believe in the Supremacy of Christ. The supremacy of Christ simply means that we view Christ as our absolute and complete king. No person, goal, knowledge, or anything can direct us in a way that overrides his authority. In everything we teach and do, we submit to him. In our teaching, you hear much about New Covenant Theology, which is a tool we use to help keep us focused on the supremacy of Jesus throughout all of the Scriptures. In the individual ministry philosophies, we submit to Jesus. In our partnership with each other, and with other churches throughout the region and world, we submit to Jesus.

Secondly, we don't rely on worldly methods of business strategy and growth. We don't compromise the truth of the word. We don't seek to please people. We resist the temptation to measure success according to the world's standards and tactics. This doesn't mean we reject the common graces of technology, faithful Christian teachers, and resources, or withdrawal from the world entirely. We ground ourselves in Christ. We may be able to learn and benefit from the observations of the world, but only so much as it submits to Christ. We will not build churches and fight spiritual battles with worldly methods. We do all of this by being Christ-centered.

And this brings us to our final belief on this subject: We aim to be Christ-centered in all we do. This might sound a lot like the supremacy of Christ, but it extends the idea. Not only do we submit to Jesus in what we do, but we also aim everything we do to make much of him. It's two sides of the same coin that keep us rooted and ground in the Word. It's all too easy in this world to start focused on Christ, slowly drift away, and then ending up focused on preserving and building the institution of the church. It's the subtle shift from growing disciples to growing numbers, budgets, and buildings. The elders and ministry leaders of Clearcreek are not here to build a business. We're here to build disciples rooted in the truth of Christ. We do this by remaining Christ-centered.

This is a good opportunity to clarify what Christ-centered ministry looks like. It doesn't mean that every sermon, class, or event will contain only content about Christ or a full gospel presentation with altar call. Being Christ-centered means that we want to do things in a way that faithfully represent and serve Christ. We strive to do this at every level of ministry. From nurseries that care for children with the kind of love that Jesus had for infants and toddlers, to children's ministries that show kids that God is known through his Word, to men's and women's ministries that are focused on disciple making, to preaching and teaching that is faithful to Christ in all of Scriptures. At its most basic level, Christ-centric ministry is seeking to please him by obeying his word and following him faithfully.

### **Thinking together...**

We are not a perfect church. We have flaws, issues, and failings.

Elders, above all, we must remain faithful to Christ. Can we improve? Yes. And we have work to do. But, in all we let's hold ourselves to the primary mission of making dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ. As we adapt and strategize in a rapidly changing world, we can use the freedom and wisdom God has given to keep Christ as our king and central theme of our local gathering. Even, despite attacks for our meekness and humility.

As ministry leaders, deacons, and teachers, be faithful to serve Jesus. Are we seeking the approval of Christ in our work? The burden of serving people faithfully can be a heavy weight. It's especially heavy when we expect the work of the spirit to happen by using human efforts and strategies. Keep your focus Christ. In the midst of weariness, remember our future rest with him. Faithfully serve and lead in a way that glorifies and makes much of Jesus.

Members and fellow servants of Jesus. We are all a part of God's family together. Does your life or your calendar show it? Are you seeking the approval of Christ in your time and service? Let's serve well, together. And if you're not a member yet, your ability to serve is limited. We have specifically made ways for you to serve, but when you choose to partner with us in membership you benefit with more chances to be involved. We'd love to have you join us in membership.

Kids, as you listen, you may think: "there's nothing that I can do". Actually, that's not true. At home, you can and should be looking for ways to serve your family. By doing your school work well, and listening to your teachers you are serving them. As you come and sit in your classes each week here at Clearcreek, you have a chance to serve your teachers by listening, answering questions, volunteering to read, and being helpful in your class with clean up. And, when your dads and the men come to work at the church you can come too! And parents, do you see your children as an chance to serve?

Well...no matter who you are, or how you serve...let's seek the approval of Jesus. Let's work hard...and I do mean work hard. Spending our time and energy in faithful Christ-centered work for each other building disciples of Jesus. Let's dwell on, talk in our flocks, and with each other about what it truly means to live with Jesus as the supreme ruler of our lives.