

**The Leader's Divine Authority**

**Lesson Scope:** 2 Corinthians 10:1 through 2 Corinthians 12:13

**Lesson Focus**

This study begins the third and final division of 2 Corinthians (chapters 10-13). Earlier in Paul's letter (2 Corinthians 7:6-16), he told how greatly encouraged he had been by Titus' report of their noble response to the correction in his first letter. Not all of them, however, responded so well. Some of them continued to challenge Paul's apostolic authority and the authenticity of his message.

In today's text we find his defense. His goal was not to promote himself, but rather to help the Corinthians recognize the authority Christ had given him. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (5:20).

If they could accept Paul as a divinely appointed messenger, then they could also accept his message. Coupled with Paul's desire for their welfare was his acknowledgment of his responsibility before God to them. God calls leaders to serve under the authority of Jesus Christ. As Head of the church, He gives them responsibility to lead and nurture the church.

This lesson presents Biblical principles that are not popular in our society. The anti-establishment cry of our day is producing a generation of irresponsible, indifferent, and reckless people, not only in the secular world but also in nominal Christianity. Rebellion is native to the fallen nature, and too often it surfaces in conservative Christian churches.

The Bible warns that this anti-authority attitude will increase in the end time. Rejecting God results in no fear and no restraint. The church needs to continue countering this dreadful enemy.

God has vested the church with authority for the good of His people. Maintaining a proper view of God-given authority is imperative for the church to fulfill her mission. Church leaders who misuse their office violate God's order, but they do not remove the need to respect their God-appointed office. Church authority is simply the extension of God's

heavenly authority. Spiritual leaders serve under Christ, the Head of the church.

**Lesson Aim:** To promote a Scriptural view of spiritual leaders.

**Theme Verses:** [1 Thessalonians 5:12-13](#). And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

## Lesson Text

### Authorized by Christ

[2 Corinthians 10:1-12](#) <sup>1</sup> Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you: <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: <sup>4</sup> (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) <sup>5</sup> Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; <sup>6</sup> And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. <sup>7</sup> Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he *is* Christ's, even so *are* we Christ's. <sup>8</sup> For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: <sup>9</sup> That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. <sup>10</sup> For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible. <sup>11</sup> Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present. <sup>12</sup> For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

2 Corinthians 10:18 <sup>18</sup> For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

### **Serving for Christ**

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 <sup>2</sup> For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:6-7 <sup>6</sup> But though *I be* rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things. <sup>7</sup> Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

2 Corinthians 11:23 <sup>23</sup> Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

2 Corinthians 11:28 <sup>28</sup> Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

### **Relying on Christ**

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 <sup>7</sup> And 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. <sup>8</sup> For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup> And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Authorized by Christ**

1. Why did Paul need to defend the authority delegated to him?
2. What attitudes are held by an effective leader?
3. How can parents contribute to wholesome attitudes toward church

authorities?

4. Discuss the difference between a critical spirit and a sincere concern.

### **Serving for Christ**

5. Why was Paul jealous over the Corinthians?

6. How might spiritual leaders inspire loyalty and respect in their congregations?

### **Relying on Christ**

7. How did Paul relate to his infirmity?

8. What disciplines might leaders experience?

9. How can divine chastening increase a leader's effectiveness?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

A minority at Corinth opposed Paul, challenging his authority and his character. Paul responded to this criticism by carefully defending his divinely given authority and contending that God's approval is what ultimately matters (2 Corinthians 10:18). Although he had numerous credentials that he might have boasted of (2 Corinthians 11:22-28), he rather gloried in the work of God.

Espoused (2 Corinthians 11:2) carries the thought "of fitting or joining."

The espousal of a man and woman in Bible times was a full commitment to a future marriage. Paul meant for the Corinthians to cherish and to carefully maintain their commitment to Christ.

Simplicity in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3) is sincerity without self-seeking or hypocrisy. Rude (2 Corinthians 11:6) means "unlearned, as a lay person." Perhaps Paul's preaching lacked the refinement that they expected.

To buffet (2 Corinthians 12:7) is "to strike with clenched fist." This terminology depicts Paul's intense struggle with this thorn in the flesh. Through it all, a clear testimony to the real motivating forces in his life shines forth—God's power and sustaining grace.

### **Principles and Applications**

#### **Authorized by Christ**

1. Faithful leaders seek to imitate Christ as they relate to their people (2 Corinthians 10:1). Christ demonstrated gentleness when He blessed the children. He illustrated courage in rebuking the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. He displayed great patience in relating to the weaknesses

and failures of Peter and the other disciples. Christ is the Good Shepherd; faithful undershepherds follow Him closely and exercise their authority for the safekeeping of the flock.

2. Leaders desire ready obedience and find no pleasure in dealing with sin (2 Corinthians 10:2). "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4) reveals the heart of a true shepherd. What joy they find in seeing their people mature and prosper spiritually!

Sometimes, however, someone under their care might fail of the grace of God and fall into sin. Confronting and dealing with sin requires a Christ-like spirit. Confidences must be kept, and sensitive information must be handled discreetly. Discipline brings pain both to the administrator and to the recipient, and the response will not always be positive. Restoration of the fallen is much more likely if the brotherhood supports the leadership. Voicing disapproval of how they handled a matter can easily yield a bitter harvest of more sin. Exploiting leaders' weaknesses or degrading their methods of discipline will produce contention and strife. Wise parents build trust and respect for leaders even if the discipline involves their own family members.

3. Spiritual leaders submit their thinking to the authority of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Careful study of God's Word and willing obedience to its precepts helps leaders fulfill God's will. Spiritual leaders need to work within the framework of the church and under the authority given to her. Following God's order in leadership—Christ, the church, and then leaders individually—secures God's blessing.

4. The divine authority of spiritual leaders should bring respect for them and their office (10:8). In another epistle, Paul instructed the brotherhood to "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." Why? They are "over you in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Even though spiritual leaders are imperfect and fallible, the people should respect and support them.

5. A leader needs to focus his efforts toward nurturing and edifying his people (2 Corinthians 10:8). Spiritual leaders guard their loyalties and priorities. Valuable resources can easily be wasted in pursuing petty grievances, in wandering outside one's realm of duty, or in neglecting the care of the "flock." Jesus said, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Spiritual shepherds focus on the needs of

their sheep—spiritual food, water, health, and protection.

6. Spiritual leaders seek direction and approval from the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:12,18).

Since the leader's authority comes from God through the church, he is ultimately accountable to God. A holy fear of God preserves the leader's integrity as he relates to his people. His desire is to be "a man after [God's] own heart." He will then have divine approval as well as the respect of his godly people.

### **Serving for Christ**

7. The leaders' work has an urgency for the spiritual good of their people (2 Corinthians 11:2). Every faithful leader will do all within his power to keep each of his people free from the clutches of Satan. He will be zealous in maintaining a pure church through clear guidelines and consistent discipline. Casual Christianity and its false teaching are luring many from the fold of God. Only with diligent, watchful care will the church, the bride of Christ, be preserved blameless.

8. Leaders who exemplify the Gospel greatly aid their message (2 Corinthians 11:6). A godly life reinforces the message of a leader, providing stability and rest for his people. Humility and transparency build trust and appreciation. "In all things chewing thyself a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7).

### **Relying on Christ**

9. Godly leaders view the Lord's disciplines as essential for maintaining their usefulness (2 Corinthians 12:7). As Paul experienced God's chastening in his life, he became more keenly aware of his own weakness and need of divine grace.

Today's church leaders also experience the sanctifying effect of the Lord's disciplines. The chastening of the Lord refines the character, increases understanding, and yields "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6). The Lord knows exactly what is needed to enhance the work of each leader.

10. Spiritual leaders find the grace of God ample for any circumstances that they face (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). "My grace is sufficient for thee" becomes reality for every leader who accepts God's discipline and seeks

to conform to the image of His dear Son. The resources of God's grace are inexhaustible. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." God's joy can be experienced even in the midst of trying circumstances!

### **Important Teachings**

1. Faithful leaders seek to imitate Christ as they relate to their people (2 Corinthians 10:1).
2. Leaders desire ready obedience and find no pleasure in dealing with sin (2 Corinthians 10:2).
3. Spiritual leaders submit their thinking to the authority of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).
4. The divine authority of spiritual leaders should bring respect for them and their office (2 Corinthians 10:8).
5. A leader needs to focus his efforts toward nurturing and edifying his people (2 Corinthians 10:8).
6. Spiritual leaders seek direction and approval from the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:12, 18).
7. The leader's work has an urgency for the spiritual good of their people (2 Corinthians 11:2).
8. Leaders who exemplify the Gospel greatly aid their message (2 Corinthians 11:6).
9. Godly leaders view the Lord's disciplines as essential for maintaining their usefulness (2 Corinthians 12:7).
10. Spiritual leaders find the grace of God ample for any circumstances that they face (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why did Paul need to defend the authority delegated to him?  
Paul needed to defend his authority because a minority at Corinth was challenging his disciplinary actions by criticizing his motives and his character. These critics were undermining his efforts to purge the church from sin and immorality.
2. What attitudes are held by an effective leader?  
An effective leader recognizes that his work is not to promote himself but rather to promote the furtherance of God's kingdom. He sees potential for good in everyone. Meekness and gentleness temper his relation-

ships with others. A compassionate spirit seeks to be redemptive in disciplinary action. He is trustful of those under his care. He is fervent in spirit and undaunted in standing for truth. Humility graces his being. Transparency and consistency provide rest. Submission to the other church leaders is evident.

3. How can parents contribute to wholesome attitudes toward church authorities?

A good example is very important. Parents can teach children by word and example to respect those in authority. They pray for their ministers by name. They are discreet in sharing sensitive information regarding the failures or weaknesses of others. Expressions of appreciation for the ministry and their example nurture gratitude. Carefully guarding table talk helps to check disrespectful expressions. Willing, cheerful support of ministerial decisions and directions gives evidence of genuine submission.

4. Discuss the difference between a critical spirit and a sincere concern. A critical spirit often grows out of wounded pride and a lack of submission. It usually targets the person or motives of others with subtle intent to undermine their work. What it really wants is more room for expressions of the flesh.

Genuine concern stems from spiritual vision that is seeking to guard the purity of the church and is willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to preserve a saving relationship with Christ, the Head of the church. The love of God is its motivation.

5. Why was Paul jealous over the Corinthians?

Paul understood that the struggle with his critics was more than an interpersonal clash. It represented a conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The souls of men were at stake. Christ, the Head, was not being honored. The purity of the church was under attack. The relationship between Christ and the church was at risk.

6. How might spiritual leaders inspire loyalty and respect in their congregations?

Spiritual leaders inspire loyalty and respect by faithfully leading the flock. Giving clear direction, preaching the "all things" of the Word, and exercising consistent discipline are important aspects. Expressing appreciation for the church and for individual contributions displays the virtue of gratitude. A thankful spirit is very contagious, and it helps to

build respect for each other. Showing contentment in the sacrifices they need to make for the well-being of their people inspires the same in the brotherhood. Meekness and gentleness temper all their relationships. Graciously receiving concerns or criticism builds trust. They humbly serve the house of God. They provide good examples of loyalty by upholding the direction of the church and also displaying respect for her standards.

7. How did Paul relate to his infirmity?

Paul resigned his will to that of the Father. He willingly accepted God's tests in his life. His earnest beseeching the Lord to remove the thorn in the flesh three times reveals the intensity of his needs. We see him reaching out to the grace of God. He recognized the need for God's discipline to check pride in his own heart.

8. What disciplines might leaders experience?

One of the disciplines a leader might experience is being called away from home and family to serve in various ways. Members might share legitimate burdens or concerns that are hard to accept. Financial sacrifices resulting from the many hours of message preparation, traveling to preach in other communities, or spending time in personal work helping the souls of men are other disciplines they may face. Sometimes physical limitations are a discipline.

9. How can divine chastening increase a leader's effectiveness?

A leader will better understand the struggles of his people. The power of God is seen more clearly. It draws the leader closer to his heavenly Father, resulting in a deeper understanding of the grace of God. It develops patience and keeps one from becoming proud of his abilities or credentials. It helps them to depend more heavily on God and direct all glory to Him.

## Summarizing the Lesson

Let Zion's watchmen all awake  
And take the' alarm they give,  
Now let them from the mouth of God  
Their solemn charge receive.

'Tis not a cause of small import,  
The pastor's care demands;  
But what might fill an angel's heart,  
And filled a Saviour's hands.

They watch for souls, for which the Lord  
Did heav'nly bliss forego!  
For souls, which must forever live,  
In raptures, or in woe.

Lord, let Thy servants, as they preach,  
Thy great salvation see;  
And watch Thou daily o'er their souls,  
That they may watch for Thee.

—*Philip Doddridge*

## Research Guide

1. Read the chapter titled "The Ministry" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. In *Distinctive Beliefs of the Anabaptists*, read chapter 7 titled "Their View of the Church."
3. In *Nave's Topical Bible*, read the verses listed under "Church—Government of" and "Church—Unity of."
4. Compare Old Testament and New Testament spiritual leaders, and note God's vindication and protection of His delegated authority.