

“Authority Which the Lord Hath Given”

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

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

This lesson introduces the third main division of the Book of 2 Corinthians—Paul’s defence of his apostleship.

The Corinthian church was being influenced by false apostles who were trying to undermine Paul’s apostleship, his authority, and his message. In his defence, Paul endeavoured to persuade and convince the brethren that he indeed was given his apostolic authority directly from the risen Christ, of whom he was eyewitness as “one born out of due time,” though he considered himself the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:18-10).

Also, many times in his letters, he shares his love, care, and concern for them. He suffered many afflictions and persecutions to bring them to the knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ. He reminded them, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (12:12).

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.

The apostle Paul had no small task on his hands to convince the Corinthian church of his God-given authority. While it may seem that he was glorying in self, he clears himself time and again in various verses: 10:8, 18; 11:30-31; 12:11-13, and others.

Many today still reject the letters of Paul as being inauthentic, uninspired, or irrelevant to our day. Thus they justify themselves in violating the headship order, in marital permissiveness, in unequal yokes, and suchlike. How about us? Do we believe the whole Bible? If so, do we live like it? As always, there is more to discuss in this lesson than time will permit. Stay close to the lesson aim, promoting a Scriptural view of spiritual leaders.

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

Theme Verse: [Hebrews 13:17](#). Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Lesson Text

Living Sincerely

[2 Corinthians 10:1-12](#)

¹ (KJV) 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: ² 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. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing in-to captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; ⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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: ⁹ That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. ¹⁰ For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

Glorifying the Lord

[2 Corinthians 10:18](#)

18 (KJV) For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

2 (KJV) 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. ³ 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

6 (KJV) But though *I be* rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. ⁷ Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

Serving in Weakness

2 Corinthians 11:23

23 (KJV) 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

28 (KJV) Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

7 (KJV) 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. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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

Living Sincerely

1. What attitudes are essential for spiritual leaders, as seen from Paul's testimony?

2. What false accusations were levelled against Paul?
3. Explain why and how every thought is to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.
4. How can spiritual leaders avoid the snare of comparison?

Glorifying the Lord

5. What important virtues will be manifested as a spiritual leader resolves to glorify the Lord?
6. What role do spiritual leaders play in nurturing the relationship between Christ and the members of His body?

Serving in Weakness

7. Explain the paradox of strength in weakness.
8. How should spiritual leaders view God's disciplines in their lives?
9. What is involved in the daily care of the church today?

Analysing the Passage

Paul opens this discourse with the word beseech (10:1-2). In 10:1, beseech means "invite, invoke." It is stronger than ask. In 10:2, beseech means "to desire, long for," in relation to a need. He uses the "meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10: 1) to give weight to his petition.

Imaginations (10:5) means "reasonings," and suggests evil intent.

To bring into captivity (10:25) means "to make captive; to bring under control."

Though some, by implication, accused Paul of not being a properly commissioned apostle, he explains specifically that his authority was from Christ and that he was ready to deal with sin, not for their destruction (to pull them down) but for their edification (to build up) (10:6-8).

Paul manifested a godly jealousy (1 1:2) (an ardent zeal in the favourable sense), a strong concern as a spiritual leader in perfecting the espousal (a binding commitment to marriage not yet culminated) between his people and Christ (11:3).

Rude in speech (11:6) means "unlearned in speech." Some said Paul's speech was contemptible, or something to be despised (10:10).

To buffet means "to rap with the fist." This terminology describes the intensity of Paul's difficulty with his thorn in the flesh.

The paradox "when I am weak, then am I strong" (12: 10) stands true only in Jesus' words, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Principles and Applications

Living Sincerely

1. Spiritual leaders seek to exercise their authority in meekness and gentleness (10:1). Christlike in love, gentle as a good nurse, yet firm as a spiritual father (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11), each leader should endeavour to be approachable and to communicate with gentle speech. Each member should receive equal opportunity for a hearing.

2. Spiritual leaders submit all their thinking to the authority of Christ (10:5). God has called them to their work, and they will give account to Him. The doctrines of God's Word and the time-proven practices of the church employ their meditations and comprise their messages. They find no place for speculations and novel ideas.

3. The divine authority of spiritual leaders calls for respect for them and their office (10:8). Those who rule well are worthy of double honour (1 Timothy 5:17)—one honour for the office and one honour for ruling well.

King Saul did not rule well, but David honoured him for his God-appointed office. In any given situation, we as members should remember to respect the authority of our leaders, to obey them, and to “salute all them that have the rule over [us]” (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). Parents who respect their leaders wield a great influence on the generations that follow.

4. God delegates authority to leaders for the purpose of edification (10:8). Edification includes teaching, preaching, reproof, rebuking, exhorting with all authority, and holding forth the Word of life to their people—sheep and lambs alike (John 21: 15-17; 1 Peter 5:2). All who have been given a spiritual gift to exercise are called to “seek that [they] may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). The leader's consuming passion is the furtherance of God's kingdom.

Glorifying the Lord

5. The spiritual leader seeks God's approval rather than comparing himself with others (10:12, 18). Each leader must be himself before God. To imitate another will not please God nor command respect from His people. God approves leaders who love Him and His Word and who unswervingly obey His commands. God approves leaders who love the church, ruling with other leaders in harmony with the Scriptural applications of faith and doctrine.

6. Spiritual leaders have a godly jealousy for the purity and preservation of the church (11:2-3). The church is the bride of Christ, being prepared as a chaste virgin for one husband, Jesus Christ. Spiritual leaders keep this vision alive, promoting the “simplicity that is in Christ.” They will not compromise truth or condone sin, but endeavour to maintain purity in the body.

Serving in Weakness

7. Spiritual leaders sacrifice willingly for the cause (11:23, 28). Many hours are given in preparing and preaching sermons, directing school functions, leading out in mission work, doing the work of an evangelist, instructing new Christians, and counselling members, who in distress, anxiety, sickness, or sin seek for help. Yet they also must provide for the needs of their own families. Pray that they may take this oversight willingly (1 Peter 5:2).

8. Spiritual leaders carry the daily care of the churches close to their hearts (11:28). They seek to understand each member’s strengths and weaknesses. They visit, listen, encourage, minister, strengthen, and empathize with their people. "

9. Spiritual leaders view the Lord’s disciplines as essential for their ongoing usefulness (12:7). Moses learned in the backside of the desert. Joseph waited on God in Egypt’s prison. David was tested as a fugitive in Israel. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He mentions twice the reason for it: “lest I should be exalted above measure.”

10. A leader’s right view of his physical limitations allows God to demonstrate His great power (12:9-10). Every leader understands that at his best, he is inadequate. He does not have sufficient wisdom of his own nor hours in a day to accomplish all that would be good to do. And then sometimes he must face the reality of still greater personal limitation. As he humbly faces his inadequacy, he can count on God to strengthen him and bless his labours.

Important Teachings

1. Spiritual leaders seek to exercise their authority in meekness and gentleness (10:1).

2. Spiritual leaders submit all their thinking to the authority of Christ (10::5).

3. The divine authority of spiritual leaders calls for respect for them and their office (10:8).
4. God delegates authority to leaders for the purpose of edification (10:2).
5. The spiritual leader seeks God's approval rather than comparing himself with others (10:12, 18).
6. Spiritual leaders have a godly jealousy for the purity and preservation of the church (11:2-3).
7. Spiritual leaders sacrifice willingly for the cause (11:23, 28).
8. Spiritual leaders carry the daily care of the churches close to their hearts (11:28).
9. Spiritual leaders view the Lord's disciplines as essential for their ongoing usefulness (12:7).
10. A leader's right view of his physical limitations allows God to demonstrate His great power (12:9-10).

Answers to Questions

1. What attitudes are essential for spiritual leaders, as seen from Paul's testimony?

Paul manifested a beseeching attitude toward his people, patterned after the meekness and gentleness of Christ (10:1—2). Spiritual leaders will be bold in their attitude toward sin (10:5-6), yet keep their attitude redemptive for the salvaging of the weak and struggling and for the building up of the members (10:8). They will endeavour to maintain an attitude of sincerity, humbly seeking God's approval, rather than commending themselves (10:12, 18).

2. What false accusations were levelled against Paul?

Some said he walked after the flesh (10:12). It seems they were implying that he was not of Christ (10:7). His bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible, they said (10:10). The underlying cause of these false accusations was their doubt of his apostleship.

3. Explain why and how every thought is to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The imaginations or human reasoning of mankind are always self-centred. High things or proud things exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The flesh is always bent toward carnality and would yield to the suggestions of Satan and thus is

blinded against the knowledge of God. Pulling down the strongholds and casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against God can only be done by the power of God and the holy armour which He provides (Ephesians 6:10-18). Captive thoughts are controlled thoughts, controlled by the power of God's Holy Spirit in each believer who purposes in his heart to keep his mind stayed on the Lord (Isaiah 26:3). Remember, this is a lifelong battle; the enemy is relentless, but God is faithful! The victory is sure! "Quit you like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

4. How can spiritual leaders avoid the snare of comparison?

Everyone needs to be content with the gifts God has given to him, "according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us" (10:13). (See Ephesians 4:7.) The spiritual leader seeks the approval of God. God approves leaders who love Him, His Word, and the church, and unswervingly obey His commands. God approves leaders who blend with other leaders in promoting the Scriptural applications of faith and doctrine, and work together in authority under the authority of Jesus Christ, the Head of the church.

5. What important virtues will be manifested as a spiritual leader resolves to glorify the Lord?

He will seek to be commended of God (10:18). He will exhibit a godly jealousy for his people (11:2). He will promote virtue and chastity in his people (11:2). He will practice and promote the simplicity that is in Christ (11:3). He will seek to be transparent in his authority (11:6). He will endeavour to avoid offenses as much as possible (11:7). He will freely preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ (11:7).

6. What role do spiritual leaders play in nurturing the relationship between Christ and the members of His body?

They will watch diligently for Satan's beguiling subtlety in the life of each member (11:3). They will be awake to false doctrine (11:4). They will endeavour to help their people understand the solemn, binding relationship of espousal. They watch for the souls of their people as they that must give account to God (Hebrews 13:17).

7. Explain the paradox of strength in weakness.

The strength referred to here is the enabling power of God through His amazing grace made available to every believer. The weakness in this context refers to physical limitations of the believer in comparison to

the authority and responsibility given him. In order for one to receive this strength, he must acknowledge his weakness and seek God's strength. The secret is in surrender to God's sovereignty.

8. How should spiritual leaders view God's disciplines in their lives?

They should view the Lord's disciplines as essential for their continued usefulness. The Scriptural basis "lest I should be exalted above measure" (12:7) is relevant for all time.

9. What is involved in the daily care of the church today?

Spiritual leaders seek to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each member of their flock. They visit, listen, encourage, minister, strengthen, and empathize with their people in their personal lives. They seek to preach edifying messages without being influenced by anyone with itching ears. They bear their people on their shoulders (Exodus 28:12). They willingly sacrifice many hours away from their families. Along with all this care, they have their own families' needs to supply. Much time is spent in prayer to God for their people.

Summarizing the Lesson

Pour out Thy Spirit from on high;
Lord, Thine ordained servants bless;
Graces and gifts to each supply,
And clothe them with Thy righteousness.
Wisdom and zeal and faith impart,
Firmness with meekness, from above,
To bear Thy people on their heart,
And love the souls whom thou dost love.
To watch and pray, and never faint;
By day and night strict guard to keep;
To warn the sinner, cheer the saint,
Nourish Thy lambs, and feed Thy sheep.
——James Montgomery

Research Guide

1. Study Galatians 1:11—17 and 1 Corinthians 15:8—10 for help in understanding the chronological sequence of Paul's direct revelation from Jesus Christ in Arabia after his conversion at Damascus.
2. Read "The Christian Church" in *Doctrines of the Bible*, pages 318—

327. Notice especially “Christ the Head,” page 326.

3. In a Bible dictionary, Vines Expository Dictionary, and/or Manners and Customs of Bible Times, study the espousal/betrothal period as is mentioned in 11:2, and how it fits as a type of the present relationship of Christ and the church.