

## Week 11, 2 Corinthians 10

### Hook



**Main Point:** Believers should follow Christlike leaders and boast only in the Lord.

**Current Event:** The courtroom television program *Judge Judy* first aired in 1996 and continues to be produced today. It features Judge Judith Blum and her no-nonsense style of dispensing justice. Below are some of Judge Judy's most famous (or infamous) courtroom quotes.

*"Beauty fades. Dumb is forever."*

*"I love the truth. If you don't tell me the truth, you're gonna be eating your shoes."*

*"If you live to be a hundred, you will never be as smart as me. On your BEST day, you're not as smart as \*I\* am on my WORST day."*

*"...I eat morons like you for breakfast. You're gonna be crying before this is over."<sup>1</sup>*

***Are you a fan of courtroom television? Why or why not?***

***Do you feel that you would be a good judge? Why or why not?***

***Would you consider yourself a decisive person? What is your process when making significant judgment calls?***

**Transition:** Today's lesson will witness Paul's response to false apostles who judged his ministry.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.biography.com/news/judge-judy-quotes>

## Week 11, 2 Corinthians 10

### Book

**Main Point: Believers should follow Christlike leaders and boast only in the Lord.**

**Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 10** In this chapter, Paul defends his ministry again, likely because there is a new crisis in the Corinthian church. He explores the balance between meek humility and bold authority, and he also reveals the reason behind the exercising of his authority. Paul also unpacks the dangers of comparison as a means to boast in oneself, and instead offers a better way: boasting in the Lord.

### **2 Corinthians 10:1–6 [Read]**

**Sub-Point:** Hold tightly to your identity in Christ as you battle in spiritual warfare.

*Verses 1–2* Chapters 10–13 in 2 Corinthians have a marked change in tone. Scholars disagree on the reason behind the change; however, regardless of the tonal differences, Paul appeals directly to those who are still rejecting his Gospel and apostolic authority.<sup>2</sup> In these chapters Paul calls for obedience.

Paul wanted to embody Christ in his last visit to Corinth, wanted to be meek and gentle, and based his argument in the character of Jesus himself (v. 1). But this Christlike attitude received criticism from Paul's opponents. They noted the apostle's humility when in the presence of the Corinthians and his boldness when he was away (such as the "severe letter" referenced in 2 Corinthians 2).

Knowing these accusations, Paul does not want the Corinthians to equate Christ's (or his) humility with timidity or lack of authority. While it was his preference to come to Corinth in love and gentleness, he was not afraid to use harsh measures if necessary (v. 2; 1 Corinthians 4:21).

***Compare the qualities that Paul valued (revealed in these verses) and those that Paul's opponents valued (revealed in these verses).***

***How do you maintain your integrity and identity amid the criticism of others?***

*Verses 3–5* In verse 3, Paul defends why he has acted in humility while he was with them: because, despite his presence in the world, he does not "wage war" according to the values and standards of the world. The weapons of the world include impressive presence, eloquent

---

<sup>2</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2235.

speaking, self-commendation, religious pedigree, the experiences of visions, performance of signs, and an authoritarian demeanor.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's approach to warfare is quite different, as are the results. David Lowery explains.

*The weapons Paul used were the proclaimed Word of God and prayer (Eph. 6:17–18), weapons with divine power. In dependence on God (1 Cor. 2:4–5) these weapons, frail by worldly standards, are able to demolish the arguments and every pretension of the gospel's foes. Neither the god of this Age (2 Cor. 4:4) nor his henchmen (11:15) could oppose the knowledge (or power) of God on which Paul relied. No thought (noēma; cf. 2:11), including those of his opponents, is beyond the reach of the One who "catches the wise in their craftiness" and "knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile" (1 Cor. 3:19–20; cf. Job 5:13; Ps. 94:11).*<sup>4</sup>

While Paul wants to tear down *arguments* (vv. 4–5), he desires to build up *people* (v. 8).<sup>5</sup> Paul's heart and goal in this warfare is to make people obedient.<sup>6</sup>

Paul does not discourage the testing of credentials. Surely the Corinthians should test any person claiming to be an apostle. However, Paul casts doubt on the *criteria* the Corinthians were using.<sup>7</sup> Their criteria was ironically worldly, all the while claiming that Paul was the one walking in the flesh.<sup>8</sup>

***Compare the weapons of the flesh with those of the divine.***

***According to verse 5, what does Paul want to destroy? What strongholds has God destroyed in your life?***

***Where does the power come from to destroy these strongholds, according to verse 4?***

Verse 6 Paul is ready to practice discipline against the unrepentant dissenters, but only once the Corinthians' obedience and reconciliation with Paul is truly complete (v. 6). To risk a face-to-face confrontation with these opponents without the true support of the Corinthian church would likely result in ineffective discipline.<sup>9</sup> The church would have to stand behind the

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>4</sup> David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 576.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 576.

<sup>7</sup> Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 514.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, 181.

<sup>9</sup> Harris, 514.

discipline Paul exercised on these dissenters and maintain it in the future, else the opponents would not truly be served justice.

This shows us the importance of both church discipline and Christlike leadership, as we've seen in other parts of Paul's Corinthian correspondence. If a church is not unified and resolute in its discipline of those who divide and manipulate the congregation, great havoc can be wrought.

***Why does a church's leader rely on the support of the congregation when carrying out discipline on an unrepentant member?***

## **2 Corinthians 10:7–18 [Read]**

**Sub-Point:** Believers should not boast based on comparison to others, but in the Lord.

*Verses 7–11* In a culture that boasted in elegant rhetoric, social connectedness, flashy resumes, letters of commendation, and greatness based on associations with the powerful, Paul was eccentric and dismissed. He displayed none of these values that the Corinthians cherished. To answer them, Paul offers them a defense of his authority and urges them to embrace a ministry that boasts only in the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

The Corinthians had an elitist mentality, one that said “only we are of Christ.” Paul answers this by saying that he and his team are of Christ, too (v. 7). In verse 8, Paul explains God's purpose behind giving him apostolic authority—that he may build up the Church. He did not want it to seem like he was scaring them into submission through “weighty and forceful letters” (v. 10), but instead, building them up in love.<sup>11</sup> If the Corinthians would think for just a moment about his place in their history, they would realize that it was *he*, through God's strength, who brought them the Good News of Christ, established their church, and built them up in faith.<sup>12</sup> While they may assume that his letters are just scare tactics, thinking that he will be “soft on them” when he finally comes, Paul assures the Corinthians that once he arrives, his actions will be just as resolved, firm and authoritative as his letter was (v. 11.)

***What does Paul mean in verse 7 when he says “Look at what is before your eyes”?***

***Why is Paul unashamed to use his authority, according to verse 8?***

*Verses 12–18* In a moment of satirical irony, Paul puts on an artificial “timidity” of sorts, saying he would not dare to place himself on the level of people who sing their own praises, compare their levels of magnificence with one another (instead of comparing themselves to Christ), and

---

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, 185-186.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, 514-515.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, 187.

elevate themselves above each other by means of worldly competition (v. 12). His real opinion of them emerges beyond the façade at the end of the verse: “they are without understanding.”

Here Paul is setting up a contrast between proper boasting from true apostles and improper boasting of false apostles. Acceptable boasting has a specific sphere and boundary line, which Paul reveals in verse 13. The proper sphere for boasting is a *divinely given area of service or influence*. Unlike his adversaries, Paul refused to take credit for the work being done outside the limits of his own ministry.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Paul boasted in God’s work being done in the appointed geographic boundaries of his own apostolic ministry, which ironically included Corinth (v. 14)! His only boast was that God was working within his specific area of influence, bringing the lost to faith and building up the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Paul finishes by revealing his ultimate hope for this situation: that the Corinthian church would not only be stabilized, but grow in power and influence so that the Gospel could go forward to further lands (vv. 15, 16). Paul’s goal was never to become a “somebody” to the Corinthians. Rather, it was to see the power of God move across Europe so that he could boast all the more in what God would do as the Gospel marched onward.<sup>15</sup> If the Corinthian church would heal and grab hold of this vision, these childish competitions could end and the nations could be reached. This is unlike Paul’s opposition, who boasted in the work of others, ascending on a church already established.

To conclude, Paul finishes with a fitting principle about boasting in verse 17: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” To Paul, there is a type of human boasting that is acceptable, however, self-congratulation and vain credit-taking is missing the point. God is the source of all gifting and ministry success, and He alone deserves our boasting. His approval matters more than the high esteem of men, and Paul reminds the Corinthians of this in the end: Approval comes from *God’s* commendation of you, not your commending one another (v. 18).<sup>16</sup>

***In what ways have you followed the Corinthian pattern of comparing to others?***

***How can you give God glory for the work He is doing in your specific area of influence?***

---

<sup>13</sup> Harris, 517.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 190-191.

## Week 11, 2 Corinthians 10

### Took



**Main Point: Believers should follow Christlike leaders and boast only in the Lord.**

**Historic Event:** In 1990 the musical group Milli Vanilli was experiencing incredible success. The duo's debut album *Girl You Know It's True* sold 14 million units and featured five Top 5 singles. The applause continued to grow from fans and the music industry and on Feb. 22, 1990, Milli Vanilli received the Grammy for Best New Artist. Later that same year, Frank Farian (German record producer) acknowledged that he had fraudulently coupled the faces of Milli Vanilli with unseen actual vocalists.<sup>17</sup> Their short careers had been a lie. On Nov. 18, 1990, the Grammy was removed.

***Who are some other individuals in history who took credit for the work of others?***

***How does one avoid boasting about himself?***

***What does it mean to boast in the Lord?***

**Teacher, challenge your class to take a few moments and boast in the Lord.**

**Lesson Conclusion:** In a culture that has similar values to these Corinthian dissenters, we, too, can assume that we are “spiritual” or “elite” based on our religious resumes, our background, our influence in certain spheres, our conversational abilities, our social network, or our connections to important people. We, too, can let our spiritual status base itself on how we stack up against others. To avoid boasting in ourselves, we must fight to believe that any success we have seen in ourselves or our areas of influence are due to God and God alone. On top of this, we must be willing to embrace the hard parts of faith, not just the easy parts, and support leaders who do the same.

### Challenge

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/milli-vanilli-win-the-best-new-artist-grammy>

**List the things that give you a sense of standing before God.** We all have things that make us feel like we're doing "okay" in our spiritual life, things that are not necessarily the finished work of Christ. What are those things for you? You may lean into your social capital with a certain group of people. You may assume your current influence or your past involvement in church can coast you through this season of walking with God. Perhaps you can use Scripture in conversation really well, or your ministry seems to be going along smoothly. Assuming that these things give you spiritual standing before God without giving Him credit is the same as *boasting in yourself*. List the ways you do this on a weekly basis, and spend some time with God repenting over the ways you, like the Corinthians, boast in yourself instead of the Lord.

**Evaluate how you use your authority.** Paul reveals that his authority was given to him for a specific purpose—to build up others, not to bend people to his will, not to steamroll over anything that gets in the way of his personal preferences. Whatever your sphere of influence may be, evaluate how you use that authority day to day. Is it to build others up and see them flourish? Do you use it to help those in your sphere push the Gospel forward? Or do you use your authority to get your own needs met? Do you exert your power in order to get people in line, or to help them grow? Write out some of your tendencies in your positions of authority, and ask God to give you a heart that uses authority for the proper purposes.

**Identify thoughts you have about God that are not true.** Paul says in verse 5 that he desires to destroy arguments about God that are not true. He desires to see the knowledge of Christ spread, and any thought that gives a false message about who Christ is should be taken captive. What thoughts about God go through your mind on a weekly basis that you know aren't true? What opinions or lies about God do you let linger when you should be taking them captive? List these lies below and share them with an accountability partner. Find truth in Scripture that combats these lies, and have them ready in your mind for the moment the lie resurfaces.