

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Authority to Build Up, Not to Tear Down

by Dan Trygg

"Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! ² I pray that when I am present not to be bold with the confidence with which I consider to dare against some of the ones regarding us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful in God towards tearing-down of strongholds, ⁵ tearing-down reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the experiential-knowledge of God, and taking every perception captive to the hearing-under-obedience of Christ, ⁶ and we are ready to set-right every inability/unwillingness-to-hear-and-obey, whenever your hearing-under-obedience is complete. ⁷ You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself to be of Christ, let him consider this again within himself, that just as *he* is of Christ, so also are *we*. ⁸ For if ever I might boast anything more concerning our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I shall not be put to shame. ⁹ In order that I might not seem as ever to frighten you by my letters, ¹⁰ because they say, 'On the one hand, his letters are weighty and strong, but the presence of his body is weak, and his speech of no account.' ¹¹ Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present. ¹² For we do not dare to class or compare ourselves with some of the ones commending themselves! Rather, these, ...measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves..., do not understand. ¹³ But not unto unmeasured things will we boast, rather according to the measure of the area which God assigned us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. ¹⁴ For not as if we were not reaching unto you, do we stretch beyond ourselves, for even as far as you we came first with the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵ not in unmeasured things boasting, in other men's labors, but, having hope of your faith increasing, by you to be enlarged according to our area unto more, ¹⁶ so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, not in the area of another, to boast in the things already done. ¹⁷ But the one boasting, let him boast in the Lord. ¹⁸ For not the one commending himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."

II Corinthians 10:1-18

This is a long passage to choose for a text, but the Lord seemed to highlight it to me. In the context, **Paul had originally brought the gospel to the people of Corinth on his second missionary journey, about AD 50.** After a couple of years, he returned to Jerusalem, and later set out from Antioch of Syria on another missionary journey, focusing on the area of Ephesus in what is modern-day Turkey. While there, he heard reports that were troubling. He wrote a brief letter (lost to us, but referred to in I Cor. 5:9), encouraging them to deal with some sin issues that had arisen within the group. He then received correspondence regarding some questions and other issues that the Corinthians had. His response to this was I Corinthians. In it, we can see that **he became aware of divisions within the group, and warns those who purported to be teachers of their responsibility to be faithful stewards of God's word.** In chapter 5, he directly and strongly confronts the immorality that was being tolerated within the church. He also gave practical instructions for them to set aside money for an offering to the poor in Judea, a project that they had eagerly agreed to participate in (16:1f; II Cor. 8:10f.). Apparently, the epistle did not fully resolve the problems, so Paul made a hurried visit to Corinth, which ended up being confrontive and painful (II Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1). In response to their resistance, he wrote a third letter (2:4; 7:8), also lost to us. This was very strong and direct, and caused sorrow, but it was successful in bringing the church back into alliance with Paul.

A significant part of the problem had been the arrival of outsiders, who claimed to have credentials superior to Paul's, and who tried to diminish his influence. II Corinthians is written to heal the breaches left from the harsh letter, and to confront his accusers and detractors. These were people who came in after Paul, and claimed to be more qualified than he was. They claimed to have credentials and letters of recommendation from important people in the Jerusalem church that gave them almost instant credibility. **Their motives were far from pure, however. They were interested in power, respect and money. They played up their supposed superiority, and convinced many of the people to look to them for leadership and teaching. They attacked and ridiculed Paul, saying that he was weak, and was not to be respected or listened to.** They tried to turn people against him, saying, "Who does he think he is, telling you what to do?" They implied that all he wanted was their money. Meanwhile, *they themselves* were charging people money to learn what *they* had to teach. **In their superior attitude they ordered the people around like slaves, devouring their food and resources, and taking advantage of them.** They exalted themselves over them, and even abused them, physically, striking some in the face (II Cor. 11:20). Paul's sarcasm was designed to expose the shocking reality of what was going on, and how they had been slowly duped and controlled by these people.

What were they teaching? They were *claiming to be wise* in this age (I Cor. 3:18). They taught that *they were already abundantly supplied*, ...that *they were already were rich* (4:8). Quite apart from Paul, *they reigned as kings!* They considered themselves wise in Christ, but Paul was stupid. They said they were powerful, but Paul was weak. They were honored and distinguished, but Paul was without honor or reputation. **They claimed these boastful things, and seduced the Corinthians to believe that they could have those same things.** They too could be rich, could reign as kings. They too could be wise and powerful. They too could be honored and recognized as important. **How would this happen?** Well, if the Corinthians would give *them* money to teach them, ...if they would honor and obey *them*, ...if they would do as *they* asked, then eventually they would gain these desirable qualities and benefits.

Of course, most people were *not* seeing the promised results. They were told that they did not believe enough, or that they just had to keep doing as they were told.

By contrast, Paul was indeed weak. He willingly pointed out that **he and the other apostles were exhibited by God as men condemned to death, as spectacles to the world, both to angels and to people.** They were hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, unsettled vagabonds. Paul supported himself with the work of his own hands. When he was called names, he returned a blessing; when he was persecuted, he endured; when he was slandered, he would try to conciliate. **Instead of praise and recognition, they were considered as the scum of the earth;** the dregs of all things (4:9-13). This was from his attempt to deal with them in I Corinthians. In II Corinthians, he continues the contrast. He begins by pointing out that **he had been experiencing afflictions, some that even had brought him near despair.** *These afflictions, however, were actually being used by God to equip him to be able to minister to other hurting people* (1:3-10). **Instead of in fleshly wisdom, Paul conducted himself in holiness, godly sincerity and in the grace of God** (1:12). He was not one to lord it over their faith, instead he saw himself as a helping them establish joy in their lives (1:24). *Their joy was his joy* (2:3). He had written the harsh letter out of an anguished heart, with many tears. He did not want to make them sorrowful, but desired that they know *how much he loved them.* Through all his afflictions, God always leads him in triumph in Christ, and manifests the sweet aroma of knowing Christ through his life (2:14-16). **He was not a peddler of the word of God.** He did not need letters of commendation. *They themselves* were his letter of commendation. It is evident that Christ has written on their hearts, and is displayed through them. **He and his team are called to serve them** as servants of the new covenant (3:1-6). **Instead of walking in craftiness or compromising the Word of God, he lived out the truth, and by his walk commended himself to the consciences of people** (4:2). The inner reality of Jesus in Him was visibly seen through the way he responded to afflictions, confusing circumstances, persecution and mistreatment. **All he went through was for them,** that they might learn from and be strengthened by his walk in Christ (4:7-15). **He was looking not for the temporal, visible things of this world, but was living for the unseen things of eternity.** He walked by faith not by sight (4:17,18; 5:7). *Through his walk and unceasing service, his true heart was made visible to their consciences* (5:11).

Chapters 5-7 are a challenge to the Corinthians to devote themselves afresh to living for God. In chapters 8,9 Paul addresses the issue of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. He emphasizes the *voluntary nature* of this ministry. This is not to be as a result of some command from him or anyone else. It is to be the sincere expression of their love. **He reminds them of the great precautions taken to ensure that no one could discredit this effort.** Delegates from each church were to travel to Jerusalem to make sure the gift was properly accounted for and utilized. A well-known and respected brother was to oversee this work, and its implementation. **Again, the giving was not to be done grudgingly, or in response to pressure from others.** Each person was to decide in his or her own heart. *Unlike his opponents, no one could accuse Paul of being greedy for gain, or of misappropriating funds.*

Beginning with chapter 10, Paul strongly exposes and attacks his opponents. Some of the same themes come to the surface again. **He desires to approach them in the meekness and gentleness of Christ. His opponents have misunderstood humility as weakness.** Paul chooses *not* to deal with them in human boldness. They charge him with walking according to the flesh. He challenges that, saying that **although he lives in a fleshly body, his warfare is not according to the flesh.** Rather, the weapons of his warfare are powerful through God for the tearing-down of strongholds, ...tearing-down arguments, lines-of-reasoning and arrogant thoughts that are raised up to block the experiential knowledge of God, and taking-captive every perception to the hearing-under-obedience of Christ. **Paul's weapons are God-led to evaluate and correct thoughts, and lead a person to recognize, yield to and obey Christ.** He then said he was fully ready to "set right" every "hearing-aside", whenever their "hearing-under" might be complete. What is this? The "hearing-aside" is either not hearing God accurately, or disregarding what you hear, and choosing to do what you want. What God wants to develop in us is to "hear-under", to be able to hear and respond to Him in ready obedience. Jesus had to learn this "hearing-under" obedience, as well (Heb. 5:8). Paul says that he is ready to "set right" whatever needs correction, whenever they finally come to a place of full submission to God.

In vs. 8, Paul says that were he to boast more about his authority "which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I shall not be put to shame." He alludes to their charge that his letters were "weighty", but his physical presence weak. He clearly states, **"What I am in my letters is what I do in real life."** He wouldn't measure himself by his detractors, but they measure themselves in contrast to him and each other. **The true measurement is not what you say about yourself, or claim for yourself, but rather, what have you done.** Paul has not worked in another man's field, claiming to be somebody and to have all kinds of skills that are "legendary". He actually has *done* the stuff. He pioneered the work, brought it to a level of stability. His "authority", his ability from the Lord, is for building people up, which he did. These others are like scavengers. They feed off the work of others. They measure themselves by "legendary" or "imaginary" accomplishments, because they have not actually done anything on their own. **"For not the one commending himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."**