

The Measure of a Man

July 23 – 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

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Day 204 – 161 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After a brief discussion regarding the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem (8:1-9:15), Paul returned to defending his apostleship against false teachers (10:1-13:10). Of course, it comes as no surprise that the enemy would attempt to unravel any progress that Paul had made in Corinth. His assaults came through distorting the message and discrediting the messenger. False teachers had convinced the Corinthians that Paul simply “walked according to the flesh,” meaning he was ordinary and could not boast of anything commendable (10:2, 10). Evidently, these false teachers were extremely arrogant and boasted about their presence, power, and performance. **Compared to them, Paul was no match.** Thus, he responded to these three accusations.

First, regarding his presence, it was said that Paul was “meek when face to face with you but bold when he was absent” in his letters (v.1). Again, it was said of Paul, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible,” meaning worthless or despicable (v.10). Paul defended his integrity by saying that “what we are in word by letters, such persons we are in deed when present” (v.11). In other words, Paul was no hypocrite or actor. He was always the same with all people. In him was no deceit.

Second, regarding his power, Paul made it clear that he had not exercised his apostolic authority to its fullest extent. But he was ready and willing to do so, if necessary, with these false teachers (v.2, 6, 8, 9). He even added that though he “walked according to the flesh” (he was human), his powers were “not of the flesh” (v.3, 4). Rather his powers were of God, spiritual authority that enabled him to “destroy fortresses” or strongholds of deceit by “taking every thought” or philosophy, doctrine, and lie, “captive to the obedience of Christ” (v.5). Simply put, Paul’s weapons were more powerful than any demonic or human authority.

Third, regarding his performance as an apostle, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he and his teammates were the first to preach the gospel to them (v.13, 14) and that they were hoping to use Corinth as a launching pad for further ministry into Europe (v.15, 16). They did not do what the false teachers had done, build “on another man’s labor” (v.15).

Daily Reflection

The summary of Paul’s defense is this — anyone can brag about himself and think that his boasts commend him to others, but “it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends” (v.18). **Paul refused to compare himself to those who “measure themselves by themselves”** (v.12). If he bragged about anything, it would be “to boast in the Lord” and what He has done (v.17).

We would do well to follow Paul’s example. It is so easy to measure our worth by our own standard, and it’s even easier to measure ourselves against others. **But the measure of a man or woman is not us or others. It is for God to determine our performance and worth.**

Have you ever fallen into the comparison trap, measuring yourself by others’ standards? Why is that dangerous? What were the results?

What is produced in us when we measure ourselves according to what God says?

The Enemies Within

July 24 – 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

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Day 205 – 160 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued to defend his apostleship against the false teachers in Corinth (10:1-13:10). They discredited Paul's presence as unimpressive, his power or authority as walking in the flesh, and his performance as lacking, then they boasted of their superior skills (10:1-18). But Paul demonstrated the folly of measuring themselves by their own standards. It is the Lord whom we should please, not men (v.18).

However, for the sake of argument, Paul decided to play their game and boast himself. Thus, he asked the Corinthians to "bear with him in a little foolishness" while he bragged about his own credentials (11:1).

Why did Paul feel that such boasting was necessary? He gave three reasons. First, he said, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy..." (11:2). He had, in essence, officiated the marriage between the Corinthians and Christ, and he was concerned that the Corinthians were dangerously close to becoming an impure bride. Paul's jealous concern for them motivated him to prove his credentials.

Second, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were being deceived by these hucksters into believing a false gospel (v.3, 4). As a result, they were being led astray from "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Third, Paul wanted to exhibit his resumé and prove that he was "not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles" (v.5). In other words, he was not about to stand by and let these false apostles look down upon what he had endured as a true apostle of Christ.

Therefore, Paul launched a series of boasts, not out of pride but necessity. He cited his knowledge (v.6), the fact that he did not charge the Corinthians for his preaching (v.7-12), nor was he a burden to them while with them (v.9). He also pointed to the record of his persecution

(v.23-27), his concern for the churches (v.28), and the vision he received from God (12:1-6).

Thus far in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he has been taking punches. In this passage (and the ones to follow), he strapped on the gloves and swung back. **The enemies of God and His gospel are evil and relentless, and sometimes God's people must exhibit force to put them in their place.** One of the ways Paul swung back was to expose them for what they are.

What are they exactly? They are agents of the serpent himself, Satan. Paul called them "deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, angels of light, and servants of righteousness" (v.13-15). **They look good and sound good, but there is no good in them. They are rotten, and their only goal is to lead people away from Christ** (v.3).

Daily Reflection

So often when we think of agents of the devil, we think of demonic figures, hideous horned creatures that are easy to spot. But Paul does not describe them that way. **Notice that Satan's minions are inside the church, disguised as believers, talking and acting like us, and yet they are wolves in sheep's clothing.**

Attacking the church from the outside is not nearly as effective as attacking the church from the inside. But are God's people aware of their schemes? Are we awake and sober enough to catch them at their game? What does it require of us to spot the enemies within the church?

Boasting in Weakness

July 25 – 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

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Day 206 – 159 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

False apostles or false teachers had come to Corinth and were “leading them astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (v.3). They had also discredited Paul as an apostle and thereby discounted the message he preached. Paul was fed up with their boasting and decided to boast a little about his own credentials (11:1-12:6), what he called “a little foolishness” (11:1). He knew that, in the eyes of God, it was foolish to boast (v.17), but he wished to beat his enemies at their own game.

Thus, Paul spent a good portion of his second letter to the Corinthians in this foolishness, boasting of his ministry (v.16-18). Paul even stated sarcastically that the Corinthians were good at tolerating foolishness, so they would gladly indulge him of his boasting (v.19, 20).

Paul began his boasting by pointing out that these false teachers were just like him in some ways (v.22). But then he quickly proved that they were nothing like him, in that they had not suffered or experienced what he had (v.23-33). **What is unusual about Paul’s boasting is that he did not list his strengths, like the false teachers. Rather he listed his weaknesses** (v.30). He highlighted his moments of hardship, suffering, and brokenness. What most people would consider shameful, Paul elevated as badges of honor. He bore the scars for doing battle for the gospel, which is what the Lord had called him to do (Acts 9:16).

Another aspect that separated Paul from his opponents was his concern for the church (v.28, 29). Although they might have appeared to be in favor of the church, these false teachers were servants of the devil “disguising themselves as servants of righteousness” (v.13-15). They were not working to build up the church. They were working to tear it down. Paul’s boasting would have put his opponents to shame. They were no match for this man of God, and yet he hadn’t even mentioned his many strengths.

Daily Reflection

Paul wrote, “**If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness**” (v.30). This is not a common practice today. We are good at pointing out our strengths, our successes, and our gifts and abilities. We would rather keep our shame, suffering, and brokenness hidden.

Why would Paul boast of his weaknesses? He answered this question a few verses later. Take a minute to read *2 Corinthians 12:5, 9, 10*. What were Paul’s reasons?

We are all naturally prideful people. It is part of the sin package. No one likes to draw attention to their weaknesses. **But it’s in those areas where we are lacking that we get to see the Lord supply what we lack. It’s in our inadequacy that He proves to be all that we need so that we can be adequate** (2 Cor. 3:5).

So then, what are your weaknesses, and how could you use your weaknesses to glorify God?

The Lord has also given you strengths to use for His glory. **But it’s in your weaknesses that you and others witness His strength more clearly.**

In the Middle of a Thorn

July 26 – 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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Day 207 – 158 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul completed the boasting segment of his letter, what he called “a little foolishness” (11:1), in defense of his apostolic credentials and ministry. False apostles and teachers had maligned Paul to the Corinthians, and he felt the need to set the record straight and commend himself (11:1-12:6), even though the Lord is against such boasting. The situation had made boasting “necessary,” Paul said, even though it was not “profitable” (12:1).

Rather than boast of his strengths, power, and authority, Paul spoke of his “weaknesses, insults, distresses, and persecutions” (11:23-33; 12:10). However, he couldn’t help but mention one special moment that he had with the Lord — the vision or revelation God allowed him to witness (12:1-4). He wasn’t sure if the revelation was an out of body experience, but he described a time when he was caught up or raptured to the third heaven (v.2). The Lord showed him a glimpse of Paradise, where he heard inexpressible words (v.4).

The term *third heaven* is unfamiliar to us today. The Jews often referred to three heavens. The first heaven is the firmament or the sky, the earth’s atmosphere (Gen. 1:20; Deut. 11:11; Ps. 8:8). The second heaven is outer space, where the sun, moon, and stars reside (Deut. 17:3; Ps. 8:3; 19:1; Matt. 24:29). The third heaven or highest heaven is the place where God dwells (Deut. 10:14; Ps. 33:13, 14; Isa. 66:1; Matt. 6:9; Rev. 11:19). Paul was privileged to see the highest heaven, which he called Paradise.

Paul witnessed such an incredible scene that it would have been easy for him to be puffed up, to gloat and tell everyone, for such a vision would easily set him apart from other apostles and teachers. However, like Job, the Lord allowed the enemy to pester Paul in order to keep him humble (v.7). He referred to this torment as “a thorn in the flesh” (v.7).

Thorns and thistles were consequences of Adam’s sin in the Garden (Gen. 3:18). Thorns, of course, are prickly and painful to the touch, and when they are in constant contact with the skin, they are an irritant, like a sticker or bur in a sock. Every step is agonizing.

Paul did not disclose details about his thorn. Whatever it was, he prayed for God to remove it (v.8). **But rather than end his trial, the Lord promised Paul to enable him to endure it.** “My grace is sufficient for you...,” He said (v.9). The word *grace* here refers to God’s favor, sympathy, or kindness. In other words, the discomfort of the thorn enabled Paul to appreciate and long for the comforting presence and compassion of God. **Like having a friend by your side during a difficult time, God’s presence provided everything Paul needed to persevere.**

Daily Reflection

God never promised that following Him would lead to a trouble-free life. While we live in this fallen world, there will always be thorns. However, **God did promise us that He would never leave us or forsake us and that His gracious presence would supply us with what we need to endure. Most often, it is during times of discomfort that we experience the comforting presence of our good God.** Why, then, would we boast of anything except for those times that brought us closer to Him? For “when I am weak,” Paul said, “then I am strong” (v.10).

Write about a time when you experienced God’s grace during a thorny situation.

Expendable

July 27 – 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

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Day 208 – 157 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul reviewed the “boasting” section of his letter. He had been forced to brag about himself in defense of his ministry against the false teachers, “for he was in no respect inferior to the most eminent apostles” (v.11). However, he admonished the Corinthians who “should have commended him for performing the signs of a true apostle among them” (v.11, 12).

If Paul committed any wrongs, it was the fact that he was not a financial burden to them like the false teachers. For this “error,” he asked forgiveness (v.13). Of course, this comment is dripping with sarcasm, for Paul paid his own way and was not a burden to anyone.

We can also hear Paul’s sarcasm when he said, “Crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit” (v.16). Of course, the opposite was true about Paul. He spoke in sincerity and truth with the Corinthians. The false teachers were the deceivers among them. Neither Paul nor his teammates (i.e., Titus) “took advantage of them” while they were in Corinth (v.17, 18).

As their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 6:13), Paul made several parenting references to describe his relationship with the Corinthians. For example, parents are often embarrassed or humiliated by their children’s behavior. Paul said as much when he wrote, “I am afraid that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many...” (12:20, 21). After all that Paul had taught them, the Corinthians were still acting like brats.

Still, despite the Corinthians’ challenges, Paul wrote, “I do not seek what is yours, but [I seek] you. For children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children” (v.14). Paul continued, “I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls...” (v.15).

Anyone who is a parent knows that parenting is an endless, trying, wearisome, and thankless

responsibility. But, **because parents love their children, no amount of work, money, burden, or heartache is too much.** Parents will do anything for their kids. Paul used the word *expend*, which means to use up or consume, to lay out or disperse all resources, or to spend everything.

Paul was willing to do anything to save the souls of the people in Corinth, even lay his life and reputation on the line. Why? He answered, “It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking..., all for your upbuilding, beloved” (v.19). Once again, Paul affirmed the motives of all his work — to glorify God and edify His people. Everything that parents do for their children, even discipline, is for their benefit.

Daily Reflection

Parents are expendable. They will sacrifice everything for the success of their kids and grandkids. Even God the Father sent Jesus to die on the cross so that we could join His family and become “children of God” (Jn. 1:12). Paul recognized the value of God’s church, and he was willing to become expendable to ensure its survival and success.

For whom have you become expendable? No amount of work, money, burden, or heartache is too much.

Should you be expendable for the church, as Paul was? Why or why not?

Examine Yourself

July 28 – 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

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Day 209 – 156 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We finished Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. After having spent a great deal of time defending his ministry against the attacks of false teachers, Paul closed his comments with a challenge. "Examine yourselves," he wrote (v.5). After all that he had said, he gave them a test, to see if they could pass it before he arrived. What exactly was on the test?

First, Paul challenged the Corinthians to deal with their sin problems before he came to visit (v.1-4). This issue was the primary reason for his letter, so that he "would not need to use severity in accordance with the authority" he had been given by God as an apostle (v.10). His first two visits, as well as his first two letters, had been "witnesses" against their sin. If he returned to Corinth, and they were still willfully sinning, then he was authorized to execute justice and issue consequences.

Second, Paul challenged the Corinthians to "see if they were in the faith" (v.5). With so many controversies arising because of false teachers, Paul wanted them to weigh their beliefs against the truth of the gospel (v.8). Did they recognize that Christ was living in them as He was living in Paul (v.5, 6)? If not, it was time for a separation of the saved and the lost (6:17).

Finally, Paul challenged the Corinthians to be made complete (13:9). In other words, it was time for them to grow up, to stop playing games, to take Christ seriously, and to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. In the case that the Corinthians did not (or would not) grow up, Paul was prepared to use His apostolic authority to protect God's church.

Then, as Paul did at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, he summarized the themes of his letter in short statements. First, he wrote, "Be made complete," simply reiterating his third challenge to grow up in the Lord (v.11). It was

time for the Corinthians to put childish things behind them and grow into spiritual adulthood.

Second, Paul wrote, "Be comforted" (v.11). Remember, Paul began his letter by reminding the Corinthians that God comforts us in our afflictions so that we can comfort others in their afflictions (1:1-11)? Third, Paul wrote, "Be like-minded and live in peace" (13:11), reminding the Corinthians that the people of God should not be "bound together with unbelievers..." (v.14), for what harmony has Christ with the enemy (v.15).

Daily Reflection

If Paul were to write a letter to us today, in which he said, "Examine yourselves," what would he ask us to examine? His test would probably be very similar.

First, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. Simply put, are you saved? Salvation only comes through Christ, not good works.

Second, have you dealt with your sins by confessing them to God (and others), repenting (turning away) from them and leaving them at the cross for Jesus to forgive?

Third, have you grown up spiritually in the Lord? Are you being made complete?

What does that look like to be made complete?

Examine yourself. Would you pass the test?

Gospel Eagerness

July 29 – Acts 20:2, 3; Romans 1:1-15

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Day 210 – 155 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians to his letter to the Romans. Scholars believe that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans during his three-month visit to Corinth (Acts 20:2, 3), which explains why the chronological Bible places *Romans* after *2 Corinthians*.

Rome, of course, was the capital of the Roman Empire, the dominant occupying force of the entire western world at the time. Paul knew that whatever happened in Rome could potentially influence the entire empire (*Rom. 1:8*), and so **he desired to travel there and share the gospel** (*Acts 19:21; 23:11; Rom. 1:15*). Perhaps, he could even use Rome as a headquarters and launching pad for expanding the gospel’s reach to the west (i.e., Spain).

However, before Paul could get to Rome, news from the Christians there had already made it to him (*Rom. 1:8*). Evidently, those who had heard the gospel preached at Pentecost returned to Rome and planted a church (*Acts 2:10*). Thus, **Paul was very excited to encourage their faith** through his letter and subsequent visit (*Rom. 1:11-13*). In his letter, Paul also introduced himself, explained his role as an apostle of Christ, and expounded on the doctrines of the gospel. Thus, Paul’s letter to the Romans is the most thorough explanation and application of salvation in all the Bible.

In the introduction (v.1-7), Paul described himself, the gospel of Christ, and the recipients of his letter. Regarding himself, he used the terms *bondservant* and *apostle* of the gospel, which summarized his life’s purpose (v.1). Regarding the gospel of Christ, Paul described it as “promised beforehand by the prophets in the Scriptures,” referring to the Old Testament (v.2). Here he was appealing to his Jewish audience in Rome, claiming that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophets had proclaimed, even the Davidic king who was to come and reign forever (v.3).

Regarding the Gentiles (non-Jews), Paul wrote that he was called to preach the gospel to them, and that they too were included in God’s gracious gift of salvation (v.5, 6). Together Jews and Gentiles were called by God “as saints,” meaning the church (*ekklesia* or called out ones), people of all walks of life.

In the remaining portion of his introduction, Paul expressed his desire and intention to visit the Romans for two reasons (v.8-15). First, he wanted “to impart some spiritual gift to them, that they may be established” as a church (v.11). Second, he wanted to encourage their faith, and at the same time be encouraged by their faith (v.12). However, until then, he sent this letter to build up their understanding of the gospel (v.15). We will unpack his explanation in the weeks ahead.

Daily Reflection

I love the simplicity of Paul’s life and ministry. **He was about one thing — the gospel. He described himself as a servant of Christ, and his calling was to tell others about Him. That’s it.** When you read his introduction to *Romans*, you sense his excitement to go and share the gospel somewhere that he hadn’t been yet. “For my part,” he wrote, **“I am eager to preach the gospel to you”** (v.15).

Does that describe you — a servant of Christ whose calling is to tell others about Him? Do you share his eagerness to proclaim the gospel? Why or why not?
