

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 10

Introduction

As a society we have become increasingly sensitive to the terrible abuses taking place in people's lives. We are aware of child abuse; spousal abuse; and elder abuse. There is yet another type of abuse you need to recognize: **Spiritual abuse**.

There are churches whose leaders abuse their spiritual authority. I've spoken with Christians whose leaders take the concept of "shepherding the sheep" far too literally. In those churches you can't make **any** decisions without the permission of your shepherd. You can't buy a car or a house... you can't change jobs... you can't date or get married... without the approval of your shepherd.

Those are radical and fairly obvious abuses of spiritual authority. There are also more subtle, less obvious, ways to abuse spiritual authority. When your leaders use manipulation, or coercion, or deception to motivate you, it's really a form of abuse. When they borrow the techniques of the world and apply them to the church, it's really a form of abuse.

Spiritual authority is not the problem. In our text you learn that God *establishes* spiritual authority to *exalt* Himself and *edify* you:

1. God establishes it: In verse thirteen it is called "the rule which God appointed..."
2. It is to exalt God: In verse five you read about casting down things that "exalt" themselves against God so that He might remain exalted.
3. It is to edify, or build, you: In verse eight it is called the "authority which the Lord gave us for edification..."

Spiritual authority is not the problem. How church leaders exercise their authority is what makes it a problem. You therefore need to know how to properly evaluate the exercise of authority by your leaders.

Chapter ten gives you at least three ways to evaluate: #1 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority By How It Battles, #2 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority By How It Builds, and #3 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority By How It Boasts.

#1 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority By How It Battles

(v1-6)

Beginning with chapter ten there is a sharp change of subject in this letter. There is a pattern of Paul stating an accusation against him and then answering the accusation. He was being accused by a group of teachers at Corinth who were attacking his authority. The confused believers were coming under the authority of these teachers and were being abused by them. For example: Paul says in verse eight that these teachers were leading the believers to “destruction.” Paul never defends himself; he defends the authority God had given him, and only in order to protect the believers from being abused.

2 Corinthians 10:1 Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence *am* lowly among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you.

One of the accusations attacking Paul was that he was “lowly” in person and only “bold” in his letters. His accusers saw this as an evidence that he lacked authority. To them authority should never be lowly; it was to be exercised by having an overbearing, commanding presence by which you challenged believers to fall in line under your leadership.

Is spiritual authority exercised by assuming a command presence? No; never. Paul points you to “the meekness and gentleness” of Jesus. Though He had all authority, to command even demons, Jesus was meek and lowly and refused to ever abuse anyone by exercising His authority in a fleshly manner. The Lord’s meekness was a strength of spirit that enabled Him to accept calmly the wrongs done against Himself, but to act powerfully on behalf of others. His gentleness was the outward expression of His meekness.

2 Corinthians 10:2 But I beg *you* that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

Paul didn't need to assume a command presence among the believers; but he would deal powerfully with those who sought to abuse them!

The kind of authority his accusers were suggesting was "according to the flesh." It was from their old, sin nature – no matter how spiritual they made it sound. Fleshly authority can only eventually abuse.

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

Paul used the attack against him as an example of how you can evaluate the exercise of spiritual authority. He saw the attack as a spiritual war. The accusations of his enemies, and his answers, were weapons in the battle. You can evaluate the battle to see who was properly exercising spiritual authority:

1. Was it Paul, who answered with gentleness out of meekness and only to protect the believers from harm?
2. Or was it these other men, who brought unfounded accusations against Paul in order to promote themselves?

It's clear that Paul's accusers were warring "according to the flesh" while he was walking in the Spirit.

While he was on the subject, Paul decided to give an insight into spiritual warfare.

2 Corinthians 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

There is no list of the specific "weapons." The real point Paul is making is that, regardless the attack, you must resist the temptation to counterattack in a fleshly manner. Instead you battle by walking in the Spirit, utilizing whatever spiritual resources are made available to you by the indwelling Spirit. In Paul's case, *meekness* and *gentleness* were weapons by which he would win the warfare. He refused to counterattack according to the flesh.

As you walk in the strength of the Holy Spirit you "pull down strongholds." It sounds like you are ripping apart the gates of Hell

and crushing demons underfoot! Not so. These “strongholds” are defined for you in verse five:

2 Corinthians 10:5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

The “strongholds” are “arguments” and “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”

1. An example of such “arguments” would be the theory of evolution... Or psychology... They are examples of the reasonings and ramblings of those who eliminate God and His Word from their explanations.
2. “Every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” probably refers to the pride of human intellect that causes you to be drawn to such arguments.

The battle is won by “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” This is the simple yet profound principle of having a biblical mindset and a Christian worldview. Judge **everything** using Scripture as your final authority.

Paul returns to the situation in Corinth in verse six,

2 Corinthians 10:6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

As soon as they would recognize his proper authority, he would “punish,” or discipline, those who were abusing them for their own gain and glory.

Evaluate the people who say they have authority over you: How do they battle? If it is “according to the flesh,” they will abuse you. Stick with those who walk and war in the Spirit.

#2 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority
By How It Builds

(v7-11)

Paul's accusers had pointed to the apparent discrepancies between his personality when he was present and the tone of the letters he wrote when he was absent. They went even further and attacked his physical traits. In verse seven Paul refers to their judging him by the "outward appearance." Then, in verse ten, he writes,

2 Corinthians 10:10 "For *his* letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence is weak, and *his* speech contemptible."

It was their opinion that a man who looked like Paul could never really exercise spiritual authority.

We don't really know what Paul looked like, but there are some unsubstantiated historical records. He is described as short, squatty, with a large hooked nose. He is believed to have had a continual discharge from his eyes which caused him to squint and was generally disgusting. By his own admission he was no great orator. You would never think that God would put such a man in a position of spiritual authority over others.

But God did! God never looks on the outward appearance. He looks on the heart. Spiritual authority cannot be evaluated by outward measurements at all.

Paul does mention a second way you may evaluate spiritual authority when he says in verse eight,

2 Corinthians 10:8 For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—

God gives you spiritual leaders to "edify" you – to build you up in your walk with the Lord. Paul's accusers were men who promoted themselves by tearing down Paul. They were men who **destroyed** – and their "destruction" would eventually be turned against the Corinthians. Why follow leaders who tear down when you need to be built-up?

In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul wrote,
Ephesians 4:11 And [Jesus] gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

God ordains spiritual authority to build you up. It is intended for your good. Authority is never the problem.

How are you built-up? Paul told the elders at Ephesus to share the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They do it by teaching you *all* of God’s Word. They don’t pick and choose areas of Scripture... They aren’t drawn-off by things that seem sensational... They’re not tempted to introduce extra-biblical truth to satisfy the surrounding culture... They know that only God’s Word, taught line upon line and precept upon precept, will produce growth and fruit in your lives.

#3 You Evaluate Spiritual Authority By How It Boasts (v12-18)

“Boasting” is a much repeated word in chapters ten through thirteen. Paul’s accusers were boasting of their ministries:

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

These guys were boasting about their accomplishments, but they were using the wrong “measurement” for their accomplishments. We’ve learned that they looked on the outward appearance, so we can conclude that they were measuring by **externals**. They looked, for example, at all of the activities they had established and boasted about them. But we’ve already learned that God looks *within*, not *without*. Numbers and activity are no true measurement of spirituality.

2 Corinthians 10:13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

2 Corinthians 10:14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our authority* did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;

Spiritual authority is a “sphere,” or a *rule*, “which God appoints.” God had appointed Paul to go to Corinth and bring them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was certain of God’s appointment and, thus, he could “boast” about what God had done in Corinth.

By comparison, the men who were attacking Paul did not pioneer the work in Corinth. They came in after Paul left and built their ministry by tearing Paul's down. What kind of a boast is that?

2 Corinthians 10:15 not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, 2 Corinthians 10:16 to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and* not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

2 Corinthians 10:17 But "*he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*"

Paul was always motivated to take the Gospel to unreached people. His accusers had no heart for pioneering churches. They established themselves in existing churches among believers.

You see far too much of this today. Someone gets upset with the God-appointed leadership in their church. They leave, but *not* to pioneer a work where no one has heard the Gospel. They go next door and invite the people from their previous church! Then they boast in their accomplishments. Was it God-appointed? Usually not.

2 Corinthians 10:18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Your ministry should be something that the Lord **can** "commend." The Lord cannot commend your work if it is built upon dissension, division, accusation, and attacks. Your ministry may appear successful; it may even be thriving. But the Lord cannot commend what is carnal. After all, some of the largest congregations in any town are cults! They may boast, but when you evaluate their boasting you find that they are definitely not bringing glory to God.

You can evaluate spiritual authority by its boasts. Do the leaders boast of carnal things? Or spiritual things? Are they excited about material prosperity? Or spiritual fruit? Is their emphasis on external growth, or on internal transformation? "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

Conclusion

Spiritual authority is a comforting, compassionate ministry of instruction and inspiration when properly exercised by the leaders God has appointed in His church on earth. It is for your *good*, and for God's *glory*.

Just make sure it is God-appointed and not self-appointed. Evaluate spiritual authority by how it **battles**, how it **builds**, and how it **boasts**.