

## Message #27

## II Corinthians 10:7-18

When we read through the Bible, it becomes very clear that God hates pride and He hates proud people. The world loves boastful braggarts but God despises them. Now pride is something with which we all struggle at times, but the closer we are in our relationship with God, the more we will hate it and deal with it.

One of the most horrible things that pride does is it causes people to boast about themselves and commend themselves. Any person who has any biblical wits about them hates it when someone starts boasting about themselves. The reason that it is so offensive is because it is offensive to God. Boastful people are always given to self-promotion and self-commendation. They want to make sure everyone knows how great they are. They are not interested in having people realize how great God is but they want them to know how great they are.

Now in regard to the church, braggarts try to weasel in on other people's ministries. They are jealous that someone is doing something that God is blessing and they want the limelight. They do not walk close with God in or to accomplish anything themselves. So they try to make themselves look impressive so people will follow them. That is what was happening to Paul.

There were some false teachers, who were false apostles, who weaseled their way into Paul's ministry and territory and were trying to undermine Paul. This is the way these kinds of people always work. They brag about themselves and promote themselves when in all reality they don't have any real close connection with God at all.

They said they knew Christ and they said they were apostles and they said Paul's promotion of grace was wrong and they should not listen to him. These religious phonies promoted O.T. Law and rigid legalism not grace. They claimed they knew more than Paul and that people should follow them. So in this text, Paul had to once again defend himself. What he says is this:

**GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO REALIZE THAT THE PERSON WHO WILL BE COMMENDED BY GOD IS NOT ONE WHO BOASTS ABOUT HIMSELF OR HIS WORKS, BUT BOASTS ABOUT GOD AND HIS GRACE.**

Now when we look down through these verses, the point of these verses is not too difficult to see. There were false people who were creeping into the world of the Corinthians who were "commending themselves" (10:12) and "boasting beyond real measurement" (10:15) in an attempt to turn people away from Paul. So in this section Paul is forced to defend himself and his ministry.

Now there is a kind of boasting that is legitimate and Paul will use it later (11:30; 12:1). The kind of boasting that is legitimate is that which states truthful facts. It does not exaggerate and is often defensive. Years ago Dr. Walvoord told the story of how someone was challenging his eschatology and he said very humbly, "I think I know a little something about the subject." He had spent his entire lifetime studying that. That is reality. It was truth.

But the kind of boasting that Paul was up against was arrogant, proud people who didn't like him and his grace message. So Paul defends himself and there are eight defensive points that he makes:

**DEFENSIVE POINT #1** – God's people need to look at outward things accurately. **10:7a**

Now the Greek text literally reads "You look or see things according to face." The meaning seems to be that they were being duped into taking things at face value. The King James takes this as a question, "Do you look on things after the outward appearance?" but the NIV and NASV translate it as a statement, which is what the Greek appears to me to be.

**The point is that these Corinthians were continually looking at religious people and taking them at face value as to what they said outwardly.** If they said they knew Christ, they believed it. If they said they were apostles, they accepted it. If they said their works system was necessary to salvation, they bought into it.

If they said Paul's view of grace was wrong, they just took that at face value. Paul is saying that they needed to look beyond the outward verbiage and look at the facts.

Just because some religious person says it, doesn't make it true or right. Religious people say all kinds of things that don't square with God's Word. God's people need to always remember the Word of God is our authority, not the outward view of some boastful religious person.

A few years ago, a television heretic was bragging about the major spiritual successes he had accomplished in his ministry in another country. He was bragging that God had used him for great revival. He was using this as a basis of getting people to send him more money, which people did. A friend of mine, who was a skilled man of the Word, happened to be in the area where this man was. He said there was no real revival at all. He didn't present the Gospel clearly. This heretic put on a charismatic show and people came to see it. He bragged about how God had used him, when in fact, he had been more of a tool for Satan and he had taken in millions of dollars. That is what Paul was up against.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #2** – God's people who are confident that they have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ need to carefully consider so do those who taught them about the grace of God. **10:7b**

These Corinthians had placed their faith in Jesus Christ because Paul took God's grace message to them. The story of that is found in Acts 18. He taught them the Word of God for over 1 ½ years (Acts 18:11). False teachers were saying Paul was not right with God and Paul said look, if you are right with God, you need to realize so also are we because we are the ones who taught you in the first place.

Now the word “consider” (λογίζομαι) is a critical word to Pauline theology. It is the word sometimes translated “imputation.” This refers to a careful mental consideration and calculation at a rational and judicial level.

Paul is saying you Corinthians need to make a very serious mental and judicial calculation here. Paul is alluding to the fact that he was the one who taught them about grace and justification. He was the one who taught them about the standing they had with God the moment they believed.

Now Paul says if you people are saying that you are justified and right with God, then you need to consider the fact that so are we, because we are the one’s who taught you about the doctrine.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #3** – God’s people need to realize that a true minister does have authority and would not be wrong boasting about it. **10:8a**

One of the greatest proofs of one right with God is the proof of one who has power but does not abuse power. If you can find a minister who is not power-crazed, you have found the rare man.

Paul was an authoritative apostle. He is the key apostle to the Age of Grace and the grace Gospel. Paul says if I wanted to boast I could certainly do that. Paul said it would not be a shameful thing for me to boast about reality. Think about this; Jesus Christ had personal, private meetings with Paul. Jesus Christ had specifically stopped Paul on the road to Damascus and He personally taught him the grace Gospel (Gal. 1:12). Paul had been used all over the world to communicate God’s truth. He has seen God do more in his life than all of the religious leaders combined. Yet Paul never bragged about his power and never misused it.

Had Paul wanted to brag about that, he had every right. It was all true. Paul had tremendous authority as an apostle. Real ministers do have authority given to them by God, but real ministers don’t go around bragging about it and lording it over the people.

There is shameful boasting and there is a boasting that is not shameful. We are never to think about ourselves more highly than we should. We need to be realists in our relationship with God. We need to be realists concerning what God has given us the ability to do and what we have seen God do. We should never be some proud, arrogant braggart who struts around inventing spiritual things that are delusional.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #4** – God’s people need to realize that the goal of a true minister is not to destroy or terrify people, but to build them up in the faith. **10:8b-9**

Understanding true Pauline grace will always build you up in the faith. It will never destroy you like some works system will. Paul did have to write some things that were strong, but Paul says I never did that out of a motive to destroy you or terrify you; my motive was to build you up in the faith. Grace presents truth about all kinds of things for the purpose of developing people in the things of God.

False teachers were alleging that Paul was shooting devastating “paper bullets and paper missiles” at the church that were designed to blast them. Paul says, when I have to warn people of what is true and right or we have to deal with sin issues, the real purpose is not to destroy the church, but build it up. Sin has to be addressed so one may experience grace in Jesus Christ. For example, when Paul would write about the Bema Seat Judgment, specifically to the Corinthians, he did it because he wanted God’s people to realize that if they are faithful they will be rewarded. He wanted to encourage them to be faithful to get on track for rewards.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #5** – God’s people need to realize that what a true minister is in word is what he is in life. **10:10-11**

Paul was being accused of not being a good-looking guy or a polished orator. There was nothing about Paul that looked physically impressive. In fact, the archeologist William Ramsey said that the Syriac book *The Acts of Paul and Thekla* was written in the first century and there is a physical description of Paul that is not impressive at all. He was “a man of middling size and his hair was scanty and his legs were a little crooked and his knees were projecting (or far apart); and he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long” (cited from Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 283).

Paul was not some glamour boy with bulging muscles and a washboard rippled stomach. Paul was not someone who walked into a room and turned heads. People were not impressed with his presence. He didn’t seem to command the attention of the religious leaders of his day. He was not a man who looked like some dominant religious figure and he didn’t lord things over people. He didn’t fit the norm of an impressive or polished religious leader and his speech wasn’t the flowery oratory they were used to hearing.

While we were on vacation, I purchased a history book that was written by Suetonius, who was born around A.D. 70 and died around A.D. 130-140. He spent his early years in Rome at the emperor’s palace and practiced law. But he became well-known as a historian and one of the books he wrote was called “*The Lives of the Caesars*,” which is the book I purchased. It discusses all of the Roman Emperors who lived and reigned in biblical times. As I have been reading this book it is very clear that public speaking and oratory and rhetoric were applauded by the Roman Emperors. At the time Paul wrote II Corinthians, Claudius had just ended his reign and Nero had just come into power and both of them loved oratory. Nero loved to give speeches. He loved to compete in speech competitions. Suetonius claims that in A.D. 60 he actually won the prize for Latin oratory and verse for which all of the best-known speakers of the world had contended (Suetonius, p. 187).

Paul lived in a world that honored those who could speak well publicly. Now make no mistake about this, Paul could speak well. He stood in Athens before he got to Corinth and spoke to all the scholars and philosophers who were there. So Paul is no lightweight. He was a true scholar. But he did not have all the polish or charming personality that fit the norm of great public

speakers. He did not have the impressive credentials of having a degree from Ivy League schools.

Pg. 155

Back in Paul's time, if there had been some "preacher boy" contest, Paul would not have won. Paul would not tug at people's emotions to try to generate some response. He would not lower his voice to a quiet, soft tone while an organ was playing to try to sway people. He did not spend hours studying his audience so he could come up with a message that would leave them eating out of the palm of his hand. He simply, clearly and accurately taught the Word.

**Paul's verbal power was not in his style, it was in his substance.** Paul clearly and carefully expounded the Word of God and there is tremendous power in doing that because the Word of God is living and active and it is sharp.

So Paul says my critics don't like the way I look or speak, but let my critics consider this point; my life squares with the Word of God at all times. What I write is what I live. If you read it in one of my letters when I am not there, you can know that I will live it in my life when I am there.

Paul's authority and righteousness was the same in person as it was on paper. If they thought that Paul was just some wimp in person who would not address things, they needed to carefully think again because what he writes the church should do, he would do.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #6** – Godly leaders do not get caught up in comparing or measuring themselves with others. **10:12**

Paul absolutely refused to get caught up in the arrogant, ministerial game of comparison commendation. There were ministers in Paul's day who promoted themselves and commended themselves by comparing themselves with each other. They would compare credentials and buildings and numbers. They would compare dollars and personal stature and speech ability.

One of the things that has always been offensive to me is this game of church comparison. It makes me sick. I saw it in Indiana. I saw it in Idaho. I have seen it in Kalamazoo. There are some people who are always playing the game of comparison. It is a tasteless, useless game to play. We need to be people who focus on our church, not another church. We need to be people who work to promote what God is doing here, not get into the gossip of what is going on there. That is exactly what was happening to Paul. Notice what Paul says, people who do this kind of thing "they are without understanding." That word "understanding" means they do not have real spiritual perception.

Paul stayed focused on his calling, his ministry, his work. He did not get caught up in the fray of comparing himself to what others were doing.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #7** – Godly leaders boast within the sphere of what God has actually done. **10:13-16**

Paul says let me point out some facts for you Corinthians to think about:

**Fact #1** - God directed us to come a great distance to reach you. **10:13**

Paul says I will only boast about what is legitimate to measure—and it is a legitimate measurement—that God was the One who directed us to reach you as far away as Corinth. Travel in Paul’s day was not easy like in our day. Corinth was a long way from Antioch. It was several hundreds of miles away. Paul says God directed us to come from Syria to Greece. Paul says we came clear across half the known world just to reach and teach you people. Paul says consider that. We literally traveled hundreds of miles to bring you God’s Word.

**Fact #2** - God apportioned us to be the first to bring you the Gospel of God’s grace. **10:14**

Paul says we are not overextending our analysis of things when we remind you that we were the first to bring you an understanding of the Gospel of the grace of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

**Fact #3** - Our hope is that our grace labor with you will be enlarged by you. **10:15-16**

Paul says our hope is that you will take what we have given to you and expand it. Paul said we spent a lot of time with you expounding God’s grace and teaching you about God’s grace. We did not promote law or religious works, we taught you about grace and our hope was that you would grasp that grace and take the message of it out to other people and regions.

That is what a true minister of God’s grace hopes. He hopes that God’s people will grasp it and will defend it. He hopes people will go out and tell others you need to be in this church hearing about true grace. But unfortunately, just as in the case of the Corinthians, there will always be people in the church who do not enlarge the ministry of grace. There will always be those who will gravitate to religious people and the systems that promote their laws and their codes and their rituals and their works.

They will brag about their numbers and their accomplishments and their buildings and some of the people will buy into it and actually move away from grace. Paul said to the Corinthians, I hope that does not happen to you.

**DEFENSIVE POINT #8** – Legitimate boasting is boasting in the Lord boasting. **10:17-18**

When a person grasps grace and when a person has a true, apostolic Pauline perspective of the Gospel, he will not boast in works, law, rituals, codes, traditions or legalism, he will have one boast; his boast will be in the Lord.

Paul says you can know this with absolute certainty—if you want to strut around and brag about yourself and how great you are and how important you are and how spiritual you are, God will not ever commend you. You can waste your life trying to convince people how great and

spiritual you really are and in fact you may convince them, but it will mean zero when you face God.

Pg. 157

The person who will be commended by God is not one who commends himself or boasts about himself, but will be one whose boast will always be in the Lord.

When considering this text, we cannot help but think of something God said through Jeremiah: “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understand and knows me that I am the LORD...” (Jer. 9:23-24a).