

True or False?

How to Discern between False Teachers and Genuine Servants

2 Corinthians 10:7–11

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Introduction

Well we return again this morning to our series of expositions through Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. So open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Pastor MacArthur has often said that the greatest threat to the church is a lack of spiritual discernment—a lack of the ability to rightly distinguish truth from error, *sound* doctrine from *false* doctrine. He likens it to having spiritual AIDS—to having a compromised spiritual immune system, unable to recognize and destroy diseased doctrine. Just like a person who is immuno-compromised can literally lose their life from just one of any number of diseases or infections, so is the man or woman without doctrinal discernment susceptible to dying the death of a thousand heresies.

And a thousand heresies there are. These 2,000 years of church history have afforded us no shortage of false teaching purveyed by false teachers, all of whom lay claim to the name of Jesus Christ and to fidelity to the Bible. Before the New Testament was even completed, the Apostles had devoted a significant portion of their ministries to guarding the flock of the Church from a number of heresies that, while claiming faithfulness to Christ and Scripture, fundamentally undermined the very Gospel itself. We have been very familiar with the Judaizers, those teachers who insisted that faith in Christ was insufficient to be declared righteous before God; one had to believe in Jesus, but also be circumcised and keep the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law in order to be justified and accepted with God. Paul deals with them most directly in his letter to the Galatians.

There were the Gnostics, so named because they believed that genuine spirituality was achieved by obtaining a certain exalted, secret knowledge of divine things—a knowledge which was unavailable to the masses and only attained by some sort of mystical experiences. A subgroup of these teachers, often called docetists, held to a radical dualism, insisting that matter was inherently evil and only that which was spiritual was acceptable to God. As a result, they insisted that Jesus Christ only appeared to be human; since physical matter was inherently evil, they denied that Jesus was genuinely human, and therefore undermined the Gospel. The Apostle John deals with these teachers in the first of his epistles.

Early in the fourth century, just after the Roman Empire was Christianized by Constantine, the Arians rose up and denied that Christ was fully God. In an attempt to safeguard the doctrine of

monotheism, Arius and his followers taught that the Son was *God-like*; He was of a *similar* nature to the Father, but not the *same* nature. Then the Apollinarians came along and denied that Jesus was fully *man*. They taught that the eternal Son of God just clothed Himself in a human body, rather than taking to Himself an entire human nature, body and soul together. The Nestorians so sharply distinguished the divine nature and human nature of Christ that they conceived Him to be two persons, rather than one person with two natures. The monophysites committed the opposite error and confused the two natures of Christ, teaching that Christ's deity and His humanity were so mingled together as to become an altogether different kind of nature, neither divine nor human.

If you move from Christology to soteriology, it wasn't long after this that the Pelagian controversy arose, where Pelagius and his followers taught that mankind was unaffected by the fall of Adam. He may have proven to be a bad example for us, but the Pelagians denied anything that smelled like the doctrine of original sin. We are not imputed with Adam's guilt. We don't sin because we're sinners; we *become* sinners once we sin. We come into this world with a clean slate and don't need the grace of Christ to obey God. The cross wasn't about paying for sin; it was about setting a good example of how to live and treat one another, over and against Adam's bad example. And the great Augustine of Hippo rose up in defense of the total depravity of man and the absolute sovereignty of divine grace in salvation.

And that is only a brief survey of the kinds of errors that have plagued the church—really limited to the first 400 years of the church. The 1600 years intervening have only seen the exponential multiplication of false doctrine and false teachers. And all of that has been from within the professing church. All of these false teachings and false teachers have claimed to be followers of Christ. And that's one of the things that makes false teaching so deadly: It is poison that comes in the name of the remedy. It is venom peddled as medicine. And that's one of Satan's greatest strategies: to disguise error in the name of truth. It's just one chapter later, in 2 Corinthians 11:14, that Paul famously says that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." When Satan comes to attack the Church and the sound doctrines of Scripture, he doesn't come with horns, a pitchfork, and a red cape! Why? Because he'd be too easy to spot. By disguising himself as an angel of light—by aiming to smuggle false doctrine into the church through the teaching of professing Christians—he deceives the undiscerning.

And that's why the pages of Scripture are saturated with warnings concerning false teachers. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus warned His followers to "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." The Apostle Paul echoed these words to the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20:29–30. He says, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." Peter warned of the same thing in 2 Peter 2:1 when he said, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as

there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” And in 1 John 4:1, the aged Apostle John counsels the churches of Asia Minor: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

And those are just a sample of the warnings strewn throughout the New Testament. But the common thread woven in all of them is the deception of those teaching false doctrine. Jesus says they come in *sheep's* clothing. They blend right in with the flock! Paul says these men will arise *from among your own selves*. Peter says they *secretly* introduce destructive heresies. And John tells the church to test the spirits at work in the prophets who come to them claiming to speak for God. If there's one thing that we must do as Christians, it is be able to identify and dispense with false teachers. Especially in a day such as ours, when the church is veritably inundated with error and false doctrine masquerading as truth with unprecedented ease due to technology and social media.

Well, in the passage before us this morning, the Apostle Paul equips us for just such a task. Throughout this letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul has been dealing with the Corinthians themselves, who had been infiltrated and deceived by this band of false teachers seeking to undermine Paul's character and ministry. He has defended his integrity, he has defined the nature of his apostolic New Covenant ministry, and he has called the Corinthians to repentance. And we learned in chapter 7 that through Paul's severe letter and through Titus's peacemaking ministry, the Lord had granted repentance, and the majority of the Corinthian church reaffirmed their love and loyalty to Paul and to the Gospel he preached.

Despite that, though, there was still a minority group among the Corinthians who remained unrepentant. And the false teachers, though they may have gone underground for a time waiting for the dust to settle, were still there, anticipating the opportunity to resurface and rekindle their rebellion. And so while Paul had addressed the repentant majority in chapters 1 to 9, in chapters 10 to 13 he turns to address the unrepentant minority in the church, as well as to take aim directly at the false teachers themselves.

And what he does in 2 Corinthians 10, verses 7 to 11, is he contrasts himself and his ministry with the ministry of the false teachers and their ministry. And as he does this, his comments may be used as something of a litmus test for how to discern the difference between a genuine servant of God and a false teacher. The people of God have been charged to be on guard against false teachers who arise even from within the church. Here Paul equips us to recognize and differentiate between the false and the true. Let's read our text. 2 Corinthians 10, starting in verse 7. “Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for

destroying you, I will not be put to shame, ⁹for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. ¹⁰For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’ ¹¹Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.”

Now, Paul begins this paragraph by saying, “Look at what is right in front of you,” or “Look at what is staring you in the face.” And right off the bat there is some ambiguity in the original text. In my reading, I read the ESV’s translation of verse 7. The NASB says, “You are looking at things as they are outwardly.” And the New King James says, “Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?” And the reason that the translators disagree on whether this is a declarative statement, a question, or a command, is because the form of the Greek verb could be all three. Literally, the original reads, “Look at the things according to the face.” The word *blepete* means “to see,” or “to look,” and in the second person plural form, as it is here, it could be translated in multiple ways. Paul could be stating a fact, indicting the Corinthians by saying, “You are looking at things as they are outwardly. You’re not examining things beneath the surface. You’re judging according to appearance, according to the face. You’re taking ‘pride in appearance and not in heart,’” as he says in chapter 5 verse 12. He also could be asking them if they’re judging according to appearance; it would be the same form.

But it’s best to see this as an imperative, as Paul commanding them to look at something. The reason for that is because every other time Paul uses the term *blepete*, it’s always unmistakably a command. In this case, “the things according to the face” would be rendered as “that which is right in front of your face.” So Paul is commanding them to look at what is right in front of them—to face the obvious facts. He wants the Corinthians to consider the situation—to consider what they know about him and what they know about the false teachers—and to render a righteous judgment based upon the clear presentation of the facts, of the objective evidence that was staring them in the face.

And in verses 7 to 11, Paul calls their attention to several facts that he wanted them to carefully consider as they evaluate whether he is a false teacher or whether the intruders are the false teachers. And in so doing, he provides us with **four points of contrast** between a faithful servant of God versus a false teacher. If we’re going to discern between truth and error, between sound doctrine and false doctrine—if we’re going to protect ourselves from dying the death of a thousand heresies—we need to understand that true servants of Christ and the purveyors of false doctrine will differ remarkably from one another on these **four points of contrast**.

I. Commission (v. 7b)

That **first contrast** is the contrast in their **commission**. And we see this in the second half of verse 7. Paul says, “If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.”

Apparently, one of the false teachers—perhaps the ringleader, indicated here by the use of the singular—had claimed that he and his comrades were Christ’s—literally, “*of Christ*”—in some special way, in a way that Paul wasn’t. And there’s debate over what precisely it means for these false apostles to be claiming to be “of Christ.” Some have suggested that he was simply claiming to be a Christian—to belong to Christ in a saving sense—thus implying that he was questioning Paul’s salvation. But that doesn’t seem to be their accusation against him here. Besides, Paul doesn’t spend the entirety of this letter defending his genuine Christianity; he spends it defending the genuineness of his apostleship and the legitimacy of his ministry.

Another view is that it’s a reference to the “Christ party” of 1 Corinthians 1:12, where Paul chastises the Corinthians for splitting into factions, some saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” Perhaps this man is claiming to be “of Christ” in this sense here. But that’s unlikely, because in the second half of verse 7 Paul goes on to say that *he* is “of Christ” in this same way, and he derided the factionalism of the “Christ party.” A third idea is that it refers to the false apostles physically walking with Christ during His earthly ministry, and since they had had that close contact with Him, they were the true successors of His ministry. But again, Paul says that he is of Christ as well, and we know that Paul never walked with Christ prior to His death and resurrection.

The best way to understand this is to hear in it the claim to being servants of Christ in a distinctive sense, a sense in which Paul could not claim. In chapter 11 verse 23, Paul reiterates their claim to being “servants of Christ,” and because he calls them “false apostles” in chapter 11 verse 13, we can assume they claimed to be apostles as well. To claim to be “of Christ” in this sense was to claim unique authority in the church because they had been specially and distinctively **commissioned** by Christ as His authoritative representatives. Many commentators think that this involved a claim to a transcendent, higher, mystical, almost *gnostic* knowledge of Christ that Paul had no access to. One commentator paraphrases the false apostle’s claim in this way. He says, “*I am Christ’s man. I belong to Jesus in a way you don’t. He has a higher interest in me than in you. He has a deeper affection for me than for you. I have access to his mind and heart in a way that transcends whatever claims you might make. Therefore, I and a few others have been given an authority and power and place above you and your co-workers*” (Storms, 103).

But note how Paul characterizes this claim. He says in verse 7, “If anyone is confident *in himself* that he is Christ’s....” Paul implies that the false apostles make this claim presumptuously. Their confidence isn’t in any objective facts or reality; their confidence is in themselves. Their claims

of this exalted knowledge of and special **commission** from Jesus weren't based on the objective evidence of the fruit of their ministry; they were based on their own words. In other words, the **commission** they claimed was unverifiable, rooted in subjective opinion and unprovable, untestable assertions.

But such is not the case with Paul. He goes on to say, "If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." He's saying, Keep thinking along those lines and you'll be constrained to recognize that Paul has just as strong a claim to a special relationship with and **commission** from Christ as they do. And in fact, he has far stronger of a claim, but he doesn't pursue that line of reasoning just yet. Later on in chapter 11 verse 13 he'll call them false apostles, and in 11:15 the servants of Satan. But here he accepts their claim for the sake of argument and says, "Ok, let's suppose that such persons lay claim to a special commission from Christ. They ought to recognize that we have no less a right to make the very same claim. Subjective claims and unverifiable assertions aren't going to win the day here, because we can make the very same claims."

And what Paul is doing here is implicitly insisting that the record of the objective facts be the basis upon which the Corinthians evaluate the genuineness or falsehood of these ministries. Paul could point to the Damascus road—to the fact that while he was on his way to imprison and murder more Christians, the risen Christ struck him blind and yet opened his eyes to his own sin and to the beauty of Christ's glory, and called him into the service of the very church he was on his way to destroy! Paul could point to Ananias, who could testify that the Lord gave him a vision and told him to heal Paul of blindness, so that he could be, Acts 9:15, "a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel!" He could point to the testimony of the disciples at Damascus, who were perplexed that this persecutor of the church was now proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Son of God and the promised Messiah!

Not only this, he could point to the blamelessness of his life, as he's done several times in 2 Corinthians. In chapter 1 verse 12 he says, "For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." In chapter 7 verse 2 he affirms, "We wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one." In chapter 4 verse 2 he says, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Paul's life was an open book! He lived among them! He was harboring no secret sin. He had no hidden agenda. He was on the inside who he appeared to be on the outside. And the conduct of his life—the absence of scandal—was objective, verifiable evidence that he was who he claimed to be.

But more even than that, his ministry among the Corinthians *themselves* was clear, objective evidence of his genuine apostleship. He says it in 1 Corinthians 9:1–2: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” In 2 Corinthians 3:1–2 he says something similar: “Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men.” “I don’t need a letter of commendation to you! You yourselves are my letter of commendation! You yourselves are the seal of my apostleship!” They say, “What do you mean, Paul?” He says, “Who did you hear the Gospel of Christ from? Wasn’t it I who came and spent 18 months with you, preaching the Gospel of Christ and teaching the Word of God? It was through my ministry in Corinth that you all were converted to Christ! Simply put: if I’m fake, you’re fake! If my Gospel doesn’t save, you aren’t saved! But dear friends, consider the radical transformation of your lives! That is the fruit of my labors among you!”

So you can clearly see the **contrast** that Paul is setting up between false teachers and genuine servants of Christ. False teachers are *self-appointed*. Even though they claim to be **commissioned** by Christ, that commission is grounded only in their subjective assertions, and in unverifiable anecdotes about their supernatural spiritual experiences or their special, extraordinary knowledge of Christ that is unavailable to the ordinary believer. God gave them a dream, or a vision, or He spoke to them and told them that they were to have authority. They’ve been to heaven, an angel has appeared to them, or God has given them a message that, conveniently, He’s given to no one else. And these teachers, they never seem to be approachable in any way. They don’t live among the people so that their lives and their conduct are subject to the scrutiny of their followers. Pastor John says, “They’re always out of town. . . . They always keep their distance.” And they don’t have a track record of ministering *personal benefit* to those whom they’re attempting to take advantage of.

But on the contrary, the genuine servant of Christ is not appointed by *self*, but by the Lord Jesus. And far from being an unverifiable claim, the genuine servant can point to the objective evidence of a transformed life, a clear conscience, and the fruit of the Lord’s work in the lives of those to whom he’s ministered. Jesus said, Matthew 7:16, that His disciples would know false prophets by their fruits. Well, that clearly implies that you’ll know true teachers by their fruits, too. One commentator sums it up well. He says, “Genuine, godly leadership that warrants your allegiance is built on character, not charisma. It is grounded in virtue, not visions. Its appeal is the centrality of Christ, not displays of power or heightened states of ecstasy” (Storms, 104). The **contrast** is a **commission** backed up by subjective, unverifiable claims, versus a **commissioned** grounded in objective, measurable fruit.

II. Authority (vv. 8–9)

We find a **second contrast** in verses 8 and 9. Number **two**: In differentiating between false teachers and genuine servants of Christ, there is not only a contrast in their commission, but there is a contrast in their **authority**. Look with me at verse 8: “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame. For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.”

And Paul begins to speak of *boasting*, a theme that absolutely dominates the rest of the letter. In fact, in the next two and a half chapters, Paul mentions boasting sixteen times. And he’s going to explain that there is an inappropriate form of boasting, which the false apostles engage in, and which consists in pointing to oneself and exalting one’s own accomplishments. But he’s also going to explain that there is a biblical way of boasting, and that is, chapter 10 verse 17, to boast *in the Lord*—to boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, Galatians 6:14—to boast in the character and work of Christ our Savior.

And because he doesn’t want to be misunderstood to be boasting in that fleshly way, he clarifies at the beginning that if he *was* to boast in the authority that the Lord had given him as a genuine apostle of Christ, he won’t be ashamed of that boasting. There won’t come a time where the light of truth will reveal that his boasting was unfounded or without substance, leading to his great embarrassment. No, that light will only reveal that his words are substantiated by the facts of what the Lord had accomplished through him.

And this point about **authority** is intimately connected to the previous point about commission. Because they have no true commission from Christ, false teachers *seize authority for themselves*. They make groundless boasts of unverifiable experiences in order to lord their authority over those to whom they seek to “minister.” But the genuine servants of Christ *are commissioned* by Christ, and so whatever **authority** they have is an authority granted by Christ Himself.

Note how Paul speaks of his authority. “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which *the Lord gave*.” He didn’t seize any authority for himself; it was granted to him by the only one who has any inherent authority. It was granted to him when the Lord said, Acts 26:16, “for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness . . . [to] the Gentiles, whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” It’s for this reason that he could say of himself that he was “a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). And his authority as an apostle meant that he was entirely within his domain to exercise the church discipline that he was promising to exercise if the Corinthians did not repent of their alliances with the false apostles. He says in 2 Corinthians 13:10, “For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the **authority** which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing

down.” And so, once again, we learn here that false teachers illegitimately seize authority for themselves, while genuine servants of Christ are *granted* authority *by* Him, through His grace.

But there’s another aspect to the **contrast** of the **authority** of false teachers versus genuine teachers. And that is that false teachers use the so-called authority which they seize to themselves to tear down the church, whereas genuine ministers use the authority granted to them by Christ for building up the church. Look again at verse 8: “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave *for building you up and not for destroying you*, I will not be put to shame.”

You see, the criticism had come down from the false apostles that Paul was heavy-handed—that he lorded his supposed-apostolic authority over the Corinthians. That’s why he could write so severely about expelling the wicked man from among themselves, in 1 Corinthians 5, and then again in the severe letter written in between First and Second Corinthians, where he sternly rebukes the Corinthians for siding with the false apostles and failing to discipline the man who had openly defied Paul before the whole church. The false apostles seize upon that severity and draw the Corinthians’ attention to it: “Look at how harsh he is with you! He just tears you down and demoralizes you with his weighty letters! But of course, when he comes in person he’s just a timid, mousy cry-baby! He’s manipulating you!”

And Paul responds by saying that even though he has had to deal severely with them—his purpose throughout his entire ministry to them has never been to destroy them, but to build them up. Verse 9: “For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.” “My goal isn’t to terrorize you! It’s not to tear you down! It’s to build you up!” He says in chapter 2 verse 4 concerning the severe letter, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the *love* which I have especially for you.” “I was never aiming at your sorrow, though I knew you would have to be sorrowful in order to be brought to repentance. No, I was aiming at your holiness! I was aiming at your greatest benefit: a life fully submitted to Christ, in the enjoyment of the fullness of divine blessing! And I knew that if I was going to snatch you from the clutches of false teaching and damning doctrine, I was going to have to go to unpleasant lengths. But it was never to tear you down; it was always to build you up.”

We saw Paul strike that balance in the opening verses of chapter 10, where learned that the genuine servant’s posture in his ministry is that of being eager for peace, but ready for battle. Again, in chapter 13 verse 10 he says, “For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.” See? He has no perverse delight in using severity, because the authority the Lord gave he gave for building up, not tearing down. He was a reluctant disciplinarian. But if the Corinthians forced him to it, he would come with the rod. He

would come wielding the divinely powerful weapons, verses 4 and 5, wherein he would destroy the fortresses of false doctrine, and tear down the walls of unbiblical speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.

You say, “How is that not inconsistent? He says he’s going to destroy and tear down, and then he says his authority isn’t for tearing down but for building up!” Well, just like in literal construction work, sometimes demolition is necessary before the new edifice is raised up. The old, rotten building can’t be restored; it’s got to be leveled to the ground in order that the new building can be built up in its place. Well in the same way, Paul needs to clear away the old, rotten patterns of sinful thinking that cause the Corinthians to be enamored with the fleshliness of the false apostles before he can build them up into maturity in Christ. But the ultimate goal is never mere demolition or destruction; his severity is always in service of the benefit and eventual edification of the body of Christ.

Contrast that noble, humble, courageous attitude with the ministry of the false apostles. How have they wielded their so-called authority? They have used it to exalt themselves at the Corinthians’ expense. One of the accusations the false apostles levied against Paul was that his speaking abilities were so meager that he couldn’t charge money for his ministry of the Gospel. In chapter 12 verse 13, he indicates that the Corinthians were falling for this. It was likely, therefore, that the false apostles were insisting that the Corinthians finance their lifestyle, since they had an eloquence and rhetorical skills and ministerial bombast worth paying for!

And so in chapter 11 verse 20, Paul says, “For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.” This is what the false apostles were doing to the dear church in Corinth. They were wielding their “authority” not to build the Corinthians up, but to tear them down so they could build themselves up. And more than that, they’ve used their “authority” to cause division within a local church, to criticize the servant the Lord used to bring these people to salvation, and to lead them astray from the only true and saving Gospel.

This teaches us, friends, that false teachers don’t lay down their lives to serve and edify the people of God. No, they use their self-professed authority to manipulate the church into laying down their lives for their teachers. They deceive the flock into handing over their money to support the lavish lifestyles of these charlatans, so that they can make a name for themselves rather than glorify the name of Christ! But the true servants of God wield their authority for the benefit and edification of the church. And even if it means that your pastors or elders have to bring you correction—even severe reproof—and even if that rod of discipline stings sometimes, it’s never wielded as a domineering, tyrannical power-trip to tear you down, but only in the service of your ultimate spiritual benefit—only in the service of truly building you up in Christ. What does Paul say in Colossians 1:28? “We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and

teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” That is our goal! To present you complete in Christ! And if it means we have to exercise the authority that the Lord gave us in the ministry of admonition, dear people, recognize that we exercise that authority to build you up, not to tear you down.

III. Methodology (vv. 9–10)

There’s a **third contrast** between false teachers and true teachers that Paul speaks about in this passage. And that is, number **three**, there is a contrast in their **methodology**. And we see this principally in verse 10, but look with me again at verses 9 and 10. Paul writes, “For I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”

Now, we’ve spoken about this charge before. You remember that a key aspect of the intruders’ false doctrine was the concept of *triumphalism*. You see, Jesus was a conqueror of sin and death, the believer is said to have overcome the world through Him, and so suffering and weakness and affliction in ministry were sure signs that one was under the judgment of God, or at least not walking in the “victory” that was available in Christ. This gave birth to a sort of “ministerial success syndrome.” The mark of God’s blessing upon a minister of the Gospel was *outward success*: an imposing presence, rhetorical eloquence, a large following, financial success, and ostentatious displays of spiritual power. And so these were the things that the false apostles built their ministerial **methodology** around. They were enamored with fleshly externals, and thought that if they projected a high-powered, smooth-talking polish in their ministry, then they’d attract a following and win people to their version of Christianity.

But Paul was none of those things. And his enemies derided him: “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive.” “He sure talks a big game—when he’s writing letters from thousands of miles away! But then he shows up in person and the little man is no match for his big pen! He’s got no personal aura or charisma about him. He faces a little conflict and gets shown up in front of the whole church! And then, rather than stay and battle it out, he gets all weepy, slinks away with his tail between his legs, and leaves town in disgrace! He’s a coward! He has no gravitas, no boldness, no authority! He’s a weak, wishy-washy failed-leader who’s not worthy of being followed. His personal presence, frankly, is just unimpressive.” And of course, the false teachers painted him that way in order to portray themselves as strong, decisive, bold, celebrity-pastor, visionary leaders!

“And,” they continued, “his speech is contemptible.” And this was a particularly big deal for the Corinthians. One scholar notes, “In Hellenistic society the practice and expectations of rhetorical eloquence were pervasive. Not only were political leaders expected to speak persuasively and eloquently, but so also those who claimed authority in philosophy and religion. Among such

people there was great competition, and success depended upon one's ability to express the power of the divine in his or her performance—not only through miracles, but also through rhetorical performances” (Peterson, 59, as in Garland, 446). And so if you wanted your message heard in Corinth of all places, the one thing you needed to have was eloquence and rhetorical skills. But Paul shows up, and what's he got? He says himself, in 1 Corinthians 2, “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Why Paul? Why did you choose weakness, and the simple proclamation of Christ crucified, to be your ministry **methodology**? 1 Corinthians 2:5: “So that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

And there's so much that can be said about this, but for the sake of time I'll just note this **contrast** in the **methodology** between false teachers and genuine servants of Christ. False teachers are always enamored with fleshly externals—like polished oratory and manipulative gimmickry—to appeal to fleshly people. They preach themselves, 2 Corinthians 4:5. They make themselves and their style the draw of their ministry, rather than the foolishness of the cross of Christ. But genuine servants of God are preoccupied with spiritual benefit, and they renounce all fleshly methodologies and refuse to call attention to themselves, because they don't want the success of their ministry to depend upon their winsomeness or charm—on the wisdom of men—but on the power of Almighty God who transforms the heart through the miracle of regeneration! They don't dress up their sermons in the flowery, artificial adornments of academic rhetoric. They speak plainly, simply, and clearly, so as to accurately communicate divine truth, which alone has the power to subdue sin and create faith in the heart.

IV. Integrity (v. 11)

Well, we've seen that there are several contrasts between false teachers and genuine servants of Christ. There is a contrast in their commission, a contrast in their authority, and a contrast in their methodology. A **fourth contrast** comes in verse 11, and that is: there is a **contrast** in their **integrity**. Paul says, “Let such a person”—that is, such a person who would accuse me of being different in person than I am in my letters—“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.”

I've had the privilege of serving on pastoral staff at Grace Church for more than six years now. And in my time here I've had the privilege of working closely with a number of seminary students training for the ministry. And sometimes people ask me, “What do you look for in the guys that work alongside you in GraceLife and in Local Outreach? What kind of seminary student makes a good pastor?” And there are a number of responses to that question. But my

answer to that question is not, “The guy who I think will make the best preacher,” or “The one who’s the most gifted communicator,” or “The man who’s the sharpest thinker or brightest theologian or most efficient administrator.” All those things have their place. But my response to that question is: I look for a man with **integrity**. I look for a man with no guile, who’s humble, who’s the same person on the inside as he is on the outside, who has no interest in building his own kingdom because he is consumed with advancing Christ’s kingdom. And I’m biblically justified in that, because of the fifteen qualifications for an elder that Paul outlines in 1 Timothy 3, only one has to do with gifting, and the rest have to do with character. Personal **integrity** is absolutely indispensable in a genuine servant of Christ.

So what a serious charge it is for a minister of the Gospel to have his **integrity** called into question! The commentator Philip Hughes says, “No [slander] of a man’s authority is more dangerous than that which accuses him of insincerity, fickleness, and inability to translate his words into action” (363). And that’s true, because if your credibility is shot, it’s virtually impossible to defend against such charges, because there’s so much distrust! And that was what Paul was facing. The false apostles’ accusations of his lack of integrity were abundant in this conflict! But here he says: I’m no phony. I am not one thing in private and another thing in person. There is no inconsistency or inconstancy or duplicity in my character. I am not a hypocrite who wears two masks, has two faces, two personas. What I am in word by my letters when absent I am in my actions when I’m face to face with you.

Again, chapter 1 verse 12: “For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.” Chapter 2 verse 17: “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” And chapter 4 verse 2: “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (ESV).

The implication is, though, that the false apostles were peddling the Word of God, and were engaging in disgraceful, underhanded ways, practicing cunning. And it’s so interesting how the false apostles seemed to have been projecting onto Paul the very evils that marked their own sinister character. *They* were self-appointed phonies with no true relationship to Christ! *They* were fleshly manipulators who sought to take advantage of the Corinthians and exalt themselves! *They* were the ones who sought to tear down and not build up! *They* were the ones without **integrity**! And I’ve noticed that in my short time in the ministry—that those who seek to undermine the integrity of the true servants of Christ are often guilty of the very vices that they accuse in others! And it was true in this case. Chapter 11 verses 13 to 15: These men were false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ when they were really

servants of Satan. Chapter 11 verse 20: They enslaved, devoured, took advantage of, and as it were slapped the Corinthians in the face, all while exalting themselves.

And so you can mark it: there is a manifest **contrast** in the **integrity** of true and false teachers. False teachers are one person on the surface but someone else underneath. There's an artificial exterior to them that you have to penetrate if you're going to get to the real them. There's the necessity to appear to be something that they're not, so they can deceive and take advantage of the unsuspecting. But the genuine servant of Christ is a man or woman of **integrity**. They are the same person in private as they are in public. What you see is what you get. And as Pastor John always says, "Time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time, the truth comes out." Numbers 32:23: You can "be sure [that] your sin will find you out." And so we must always endeavor to be men and women of **integrity**.

Conclusion

How can we discern the true from the false? The genuine servant of Christ from the deceiver who comes to take advantage? There's a contrast in commission. False teachers are self-appointed and appeal to unverifiable subjective experiences for their authority. True teachers are appointed by Christ and can point to the objective evidence of the fruit of Christ's work in their lives. There's a contrast in authority. False teachers *seize* authority for themselves and use it for tearing down. True teachers are *granted* authority by Christ and use it for building up. There's a contrast in methodology. False teachers are enamored with fleshly externals, whereas true teachers are preoccupied only with spiritual benefit. And there's a contrast in integrity. False teachers are duplicitous and two-faced, while true teachers are in private what they are in public. May God grant that *we* all be found to be the latter, by the grace of Christ. And may He grant that His people would be able to discern the difference between the wolves and the true shepherds.