

## **Spiritual Authority** **2 Corinthians 10**

We're going to cover a topic today that I don't think I've covered before because I don't think it's really been the main point in the passages I've preached on. But it comes out loud and clear in our passage today, and that topic is spiritual authority.

It seems like we live in a day and age where authority has a bad rap and is seen in a pretty negative way. Much of this is in response to abuses in authority or the mishandling of authority or a superiority complex that can come where there's toxic authority in place. But I also think there's a part of our sinful nature that resists authority and rebels against it because we want to be autonomous and do whatever we want. So there's an underlying resistance to authority in society and government and the home and family and even in the church. Instead of honoring authority, we tend to push it aside and elevate equality instead - which is a good thing and important, but not at the expense of rejecting authority.

Today we're going to see an example of spiritual authority that I think will help us see the gift that it is meant to be and that God has actually established it and uses it to carry out his will on earth - in society, church, and family. Some of us need to have a veil lifted so we can see authority in a positive way and that it's a wonderful blessing.

We're in the book of 2 Corinthians, but we're at a point in the book where things take a drastic turn. The mood of the author changes. He goes from being relieved and encouraged to stern and threatening, and the understanding is that it's because we're probably entering into a different letter that was written a few weeks or months after what we just finished studying - the love offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

Due to the change in tone and the message that's contained in chapters 10-13 it is believed that Titus and two other brothers went ahead of Paul to Corinth and delivered the letter contained in chapters 1-9, but when they got there they found that aggressive false apostles and false teachers had infiltrated the church since Titus was there and were effectively leading people astray. They were claiming that Paul was a fake and misleading people

to believe lies about things he had done in the past, and many of the Corinthians were unfortunately easily led astray.

So Titus, or someone, turned around and went back to Paul to give him the alarming report, which got Paul fired up, and what we're going to get into this morning is the beginning of his response and warning. It makes me think about a fired up mom who finds out one of her kids is getting bullied at school. She ain't happy and she's gonna go in and ruffle some feathers.

Paul is going to ruffle some feathers and we'll get into the first part of that today. He writes a lot about his spiritual authority in Christ over the church in Corinth, and even though that's a different situation than we find ourselves in, we're going to see the values of spiritual authority and that God is behind it and has established it for our good. And I think we can apply what we learn to our own situations where God has given us authority.

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

*I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—<sup>2</sup> I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, <sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*

Paul begins here with a warning to the Christians in Corinth. He begs that he won't have to confront them when he arrives like he knows he'll do to the false apostles. You can see that he has been accused of being "humble when face to face but bold when away" – as if he's a fake and only walking in the flesh. Paul throws in a little reminder of the meekness and gentleness of Christ – meekness and gentleness does not mean weakness, fleshliness, lack of spiritual authority, or cowardice.

This accusation likely comes from what happened during his last visit to Corinth when the church did not support him or remove his opponent. Paul

did not assert his authority at that time or discipline the church or his opponents. He left and went back to Ephesus and then sent a strong letter. He explained why he did that earlier in 2 Corinthians (1:23-2:4). He was being gracious and patient, giving the Holy Spirit time to work. But because of his humble behavior in person followed by the severe letter, his opponents were accusing him of not really having any authority: “He isn’t an apostle of Christ. He has no authority. He’s weak.” So Paul is addressing that accusation and warning the Corinthians not to believe them.

In verses 3-6 he describes what his authority would look like in their situation with the false teachers and those who opposed him and the gospel. He acknowledges that what was going on was ultimately a spiritual battle and he and his team would wage war with weapons that had divine power to destroy strongholds. Arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God by the false teachers would be destroyed, and every thought would be taken captive to obey Christ. I think this means they would use the truth of the Word of God (which is the Sword of the Spirit) to tear down lies and deception and bring clarity. They would also practice discipline against those who persisted in disobedience. Paul had confidence in his team and in the battle and in what would happen when they came to Corinth and he didn’t want the faithful Corinthians to go through it, so he was warning them to distance themselves from his opponents.

Spiritual authority exists because we’re in a spiritual war – we have an enemy who is trying to defeat us. An enemy who is trying to destroy churches and lead people astray, an enemy who is trying to keep people from Christ, an enemy who is trying to destroy families and marriages. He is like a lion looking for whom he can devour. So one of the reasons God has established spiritual authority is for the protection of churches and families. And it works. The authority that God gives has divine power to defeat the enemy, destroy strongholds and deception, and shine light on the truth. All authority has been given to Christ, and with Christ in us, we are able to stand against the attacks of the evil one.

That’s the authority Paul had and would bring into the situation. He continues...

2 Corinthians 10:7-12

<sup>7</sup>Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. <sup>8</sup>For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. <sup>9</sup>I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. <sup>10</sup>For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." <sup>11</sup>Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. <sup>12</sup>Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

Apparently, one of the things the false apostles were doing was comparing themselves to one another and to Paul, to try to prove themselves and discredit others. We're going to see Paul actually do this later on, but he only does it because of the immaturity of the Corinthians and he admits he's being a fool by doing it. Colin Kruse writes this: "*The opponents are Jewish Christians who put themselves forward as apostles of Christ. They highly prized eloquent speech, displays of authority, visions and revelations, and the performance of mighty works as the signs of a true apostle.*" So they were trying to do these things and then comparing themselves with others almost as a competition to rise to the top in their own minds and discredit everyone else. Unfortunately it's the kind of behavior we're all too familiar with right now with campaigning and political mudslinging going on, so we get a taste of what the false apostles were doing in Corinth.

With all of that going on, Paul calls on the Corinthians in verse 7 to open their eyes and look at what's right in front of them. With as much confidence as any of them have that they belong to Christ, they can plainly see Paul is Christ's as well. He had been accused of boasting too much of his authority over them in the Lord in his letters but being weak when he was with them in person and Paul says in verse 8 that even if he did boast too much, he is not ashamed. His authority over them was a good thing – for building them up, not for destroying them.

He's not trying to be frightening in his letters but trying to convey the truth – what he says and warns in his letters is exactly what he'll do when present. His opponents were saying he was just bold when he could hide behind pen

and ink, but in person he was weak. Paul warns them not to believe that. The comparison game these false apostles are playing with all their political mudslinging proves that they have no spiritual understanding.

One of the things I want us to see here is in verse 8 and that is that spiritual authority is given for building up, not to control or crush. It is for our good. This goes for churches, but also for families and for government. That is what God gives authority for and any authority that is crushing or tearing down is failing and disobedient. We reject subversive, domineering, controlling authority – God does too. That’s not what his will is whether you’re a husband, parent, elder, law enforcement, or civil leader.

So we’ve seen that spiritual authority is for our protection in the spiritual battle we’re in and for building us up. We’ll see more of its blessings in the last few verses.

2 Corinthians 10:13-18

*<sup>13</sup> But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. <sup>14</sup> For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. <sup>15</sup> We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup> so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. <sup>17</sup> “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” <sup>18</sup> For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

This is an interesting paragraph that makes it clear that God had specifically assigned Paul an area of influence when it came to his spiritual authority. It was over the Gentile churches he sent him to plant. But it wasn’t over every church – it wasn’t over the churches in Judea or the churches planted by another apostle or missionary. God had given him an assignment and the responsibility of spiritual authority in his area of influence.

So he acknowledges in these verses that there was a limit to his authority. But that limit clearly included the church of Corinth. Boasting about his spiritual authority over Corinth was not an overextension. Paul reminds them that it

was he and his team that planted the church there. In fact, Acts 18 tells us he spent 18 months there on his initial visit. There was no other apostle that came before him. They were within Paul's area of influence that God assigned him.

In verses 15-18 he seems to be telling them that by boasting about his authority in Corinth he wasn't doing what the false apostles were doing, which was coming into someone else's area of influence and claiming authority over it as their own. He tells them that his desire in claiming his authority over them was that by his influence among them they would grow in their faith to the point where he could move on and preach the gospel in distant lands where the gospel had never been heard.

To boast of having authority in another apostle's area of influence like the false teachers were doing was of the flesh/world. So Paul reminds them: "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." God doesn't approve of those who commend themselves as apostles, but of the one whom Christ commends.

So it's clear by what Paul says in these verses that when it comes to spiritual authority, there is an area of influence that has been assigned by God. And when we operate within that area of influence, we can have confidence that God approves. We need to operate within our area of influence.

Each of us has an area of influence when it comes to spiritual authority, and some more than others according to God's will and assignment. The area that all of us have spiritual authority in is of our very own lives. You are not a sitting duck when it comes to the schemes of Satan and attacks of the spiritual forces of evil. You've been bought with the blood of Christ and you belong to him. All authority has been given to him, so when it comes to your life, Christ has given you spiritual authority over the spiritual forces of evil. He's given you armor and weapons with which to fight. We read about this in Ephesians 6 – the armor of God. With this authority we are able to stand firm in the day of evil. Claim truth over your life and don't listen to or believe the lies. Walk in the victory that's yours in Christ and stand firm.

We've also been given some spiritual authority among our brothers and sisters in Christ – to encourage and build one another up, to protect one another from the schemes of Satan, and to pull one another back into

obedience to God. God has commanded us to love one another and that's another way we all have spiritual authority.

But then some have been given more authority. Husbands, Fathers, I'm going to unashamedly remind you that God has given you spiritual authority in your home. He has assigned your family to be your area of influence – Ephesians 5:25-30 says that you are the head of the home. He has called you into the position of headship which means you are the protector and provider in the home - to love and serve and lead your wife and kids, not to boss them around and try to get them to do what you want them to do, but to lead by example, to pray for them and model the life of Christ to them.

Wives, Moms, you share the area of influence in your home in partnership with your husband when it comes to your children. You are the spiritual mother hen and they are the chicks under your wings. They need you and God has put you there for a reason. Teach them, love them, pray for them, protect them.

When it comes to the church, God has raised up elders and assigned them to have spiritual authority over the church family. They are to shepherd the flock of God in which Christ has made them overseers, leading by example, eagerly and willingly. Like an ancient shepherd they are to lead, feed, protect, and care for the flock.

If you are a Christian employer, that is your area of influence. If you are a community leader or governing official, that's your space and these things apply to you. God's design for spiritual authority is all over the place and is meant to build people up and protect them from our enemy. Authority is not something to be ashamed of or rejected. It is something to be embraced according to God's will so that we receive all the blessings he's intended. So walk in that authority in the areas of influence God has assigned to you. And joyfully submit to those in authority over you.