

## False Comparisons

“Ye look at the things that are before your Face. If any man trusteth in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that even as he is Christ's so also are we. For though I should glory somewhat abundantly concerning our authority (which the Lord gave for building you up, and not for casting you down. I shall not be put to shame: that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For, His letters, they say, are weighty and strong; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account. Let such a one reckon this, that, what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such also are we in deed when we are present” (2 Cor. 10:6-11).

Paul, in this last section of his book (chapters 10-13) addresses those who are his critics in Corinth, including some who claimed to be apostles, but as he emphatically will write later, are not, but rather are “false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). Certainly, as comes to light further in the letter, there were some who claimed to be apostles, but Paul had other critics who made no claim to apostleship but who had been deceived by these who said they were. So whether it is exclusively to those claiming apostleship that Paul's words here are directed, or to all his critics at Corinth may be difficult to determine, it would be equally true of all that their differences with Paul arose from some comparisons they were making that was no true standard for comparison. “Looking at things before your face” was the error of these critics. Just precisely what did he mean? Some conjecture that the false teachers were from Judaea and had actually seen the Lord and contrasted themselves with Paul who had not seen the Lord. That is a “big stretch” of imagination. Perhaps they had been from Judaea and knew Paul's family lived in Tarsus. One thing we do know: they were using a standard to gauge their own relationship to Christ that would eliminate Paul from such a relationship.

But Paul is quick to point out that his claims were as good as theirs, and if the truth be known, better than any claims they might make. Paul said, even if the critics think they be Christ's, let that critic know that Paul's relationship to Christ was equal to and greater than theirs.

Paul might be reluctant to glory in his authority, but his authority was genuine and powerful. He was a Christ-chosen and a Christ-sent apostle, and while they might claim to speak for the twelve apostles, he had been given the right hand of fellowship by them and they could add nothing to alter the message he preached (Gal. 2:6-9). Paul's authority as a preacher and apostle was to build up, not cast down, those who lived in Corinth.

The gist of their criticism (and perhaps also the foundation for their false standard of comparison) lay in superficial things. The critics said, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and of no account.” We have two letters intact from the apostle to the Corinthians, but one of those two had not yet reached them. So whether Paul actually, as some suppose, had written another letter which was not preserved, or else the plural “letters” include letters Paul addressed to other Christians

as well as the first letter to Corinthians, we do not know. What we do know is that the charge that his letters were “weighty and strong” would certainly describe Paul’s first letter to them. But, according to the critics, while Paul’s letters terrified the recipients, his bodily presence was exactly the opposite, manifesting no authoritative tone or voice. To this latter charge Paul assures them, “Let such a one reckon this, that what we are by word in letters when we are absent, such are we indeed when we are present” (vs. 11).

Without doubt the apostle hopes to bring about complete reconciliation with the Corinthian detractors, which we believe he actually did, but he is going to have to use strong, stern words as he concludes this letter. If the critics characterized his early letter to them as weighty and strong, what words will they use to describe this letter they are about to receive from him?

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