

# **A Study of Second Corinthians**

## **Week Eight**

2 Corinthians 10:12-11:12

### **Day One**

12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. 13 We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. 14 We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ.

v. 12 – A bench mark is a term in business that establishes a standard of excellence or performance that an organization wants to achieve. Another term is “best practices,” where a business studies other businesses to learn from what they are doing well. The church could benefit by incorporating those two terms. Too often, we are guilty of “spin” in the church. By that I mean that we explain away what *didn’t* happen. Because we are sincere and don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, we find excuses for poor or ineffective performances.

When that happens, we are guilty of measuring ourselves against ourselves. We use the excuses, “We’re a small church. We only have volunteers. We don’t have much money, so this will have to do.” We as Christians need to be aware of what is going on in the world of the church and learn from one another, not settling for mediocre results or performance. **Is this realistic? Am I being too hard on the Church and its leaders?**

Paul concluded that we lack wisdom when we commend ourselves for (or excuse and ignore) poor performance. We must constantly strive for excellence and not settle for mediocrity.

vs. 13&14 – Paul determined that he was going to confine his comments to his field of work, and part of that field was Corinth. Whether he was a world-class apostle or not, whether he was a “super-apostle” or not, he had successfully established the church in Corinth. As I have stated in earlier studies, it isn’t pride to say what you have done. Keep in mind that God helped you and probably other people did as well. All in all, however, it’s permissible to say what you did.

I have written six books. I have delivered 1,000 messages on purpose in 15 years. I once organized 104 worship conferences in four years on five continents. Is that pride to tell about those things? It would be pride to say that I did it myself or there is no one else who can do those things like I can. But to deny that I did them would be foolish, don’t you think? Or to refuse to accept compliments when they go well is another source of silliness. I did them. God helped me. Others helped me. I thanked them all, but I helped make them happen!

**What have you done that you are hesitant to talk about? Why are you hesitant? Why is it so hard for Christians to talk about themselves, their gifts and their accomplishments?**

## **Day Two**

15 Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, 16 so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory. 17 But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

v. 15 – Paul understood that God had used him to start the work in Corinth. If the work was to expand, however, it would require that those in Corinth help make that happen. Their faith would need to grow if the work was to increase. I know many church leaders, and I was among them, who worked harder and harder to get results. As I did, the church became increasingly dependent on my efforts. Instead of equipping the saints for ministry, I was doing the ministry for the saints! I was borderline burned-out my entire time as a pastor.

What's the answer? I think it is team ministry. Paul had already written about this to the Corinthians in his first letter:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26-27).

I don't think this principle only pertains to the public meetings of the church. People have something to say, do and contribute no matter what the job or meeting. The pastor and leaders are only one among many members of the body of Christ. They are not the body of Christ in its entirety.

**Are you doing your part to see God's work expand in your fellowship? As a leader, are you doing all you can to incorporate others in the work of the ministry?**

v. 16 – Paul knew that he had a sphere in which God wanted him to work and produce. I think this principle can be found in Proverbs:

He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty (Proverbs 28:19).

Each of us has a piece of land, figuratively speaking, on which we are to work and bear fruit. To dream of another piece of land is a fantasy and leads to reduced productivity for the Lord. I can dream of pastoring, but I am not a pastor! I can wish that I had work to do in Europe, but most of my work is in Africa. If I work my land, then I will have plenty of results. If I spend time envying someone else's work or assignment, then I will

be in trouble. My land is purpose; that is what I write about and my business is based on that “piece of land” that God gave me.

**What has God given you to do? Are you doing it? What is hindering you? How can you be more effective?**

v. 17 – It was important to Paul that he talk and “boast” about what God had given him to do. He did not want to take credit for what others had done. I knew a man who would jump out in front of a parade, walk in front of it and then call the parade his own! Do you understand what I mean by that? He talked like he was the one who started and led the parade, but it was the work of others. Paul didn’t want to be like that; I don’t either.

### Day Three

18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. 11:1 I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. 2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

v. 18 – What a concise and poignant summary this is! It’s not what anyone else thinks about you; it’s what God thinks that counts. We should be looking for God’s commendation, not the commendation of the people around us. Peter wrote about this kind of commendation concerning Jesus:

For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain (2 Peter 1:17-18).

God’s promises to commend us if we fulfill one critical requirement:

Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained (1 Samuel 2:30-31).

Work to honor God. If honor from men comes, that’s all well and good. If honor from God comes, however, you will be truly blessed. **Which one will you choose? If you choose to honor God, how can you do that practically and effectively?**

v. 1 – Since Paul’s authority had somehow been challenged, he felt compelled to do something that he didn’t feel comfortable doing. He had to talk about his credentials and proof of his apostolic calling. He asked the Corinthians for their indulgence, but they had brought this on themselves by allowing his pedigree to be questioned. Even Paul had a difficult time talking about himself! But he did.

This church caused Paul a lot of grief and pain. It was not a model church by any means. Yet he did not turn his back on them, nor did he ignore the problems and come to preach

a “good message” as some are apt to do today. No, Paul faced the problems and refused to yield anything to the enemy. Paul was a good apostle and pastor. He wasn’t perfect, but he left a legacy that I am challenged to follow and live up to.

v. 2 – Paul compared the Corinthian church to a young virgin that he promised to Christ. He was determined to present that church as an acceptable bride. That meant that he had to battle to preserve the integrity and doctrinal purity of the church there. Thus Paul was willing to struggle and fight to see an acceptable outcome—that the church would stand firm in Paul’s apostolic teaching.

**What are you willing to struggle to preserve? What has God given you to do that you are willing to go through what Paul went through to see it through to the end? Don’t for a minute think that this will be easy. You will need God’s help and will have to draw on all the resources you have to see the job to the end. I pray that God will make you equal to the task!**

#### Day Four

3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

v. 3 – Paul believed the creation story. For him it was factual. It wasn’t a myth or something that was made up to parallel other stories among other peoples about how the earth began. Paul obviously accepted the fact that sin came through the serpent deceiving Eve, nothing more, nothing less.

The first ten chapters of Genesis don’t tell us a lot about our beginnings, but we must accept that they tell us all we need to know. If we needed any more, God would have given it to us. **What do you think about the first 10 chapters of Genesis? Are they factual? Story? Myth? If Paul and Jesus referred to these accounts as fact, can we do any less?**

What was the objective that Paul had in mind for his converts and ministry? The goal was the sincere and pure devotion to Christ. The New King James refers to it as “the simplicity that is in Christ.” **How simple is your love, devotion and doctrine where Jesus is concerned? How can we describe this simplicity? Is “He speaks and I obey” too simple?**

That is what we are all working for. If something I am doing or something done to me doesn’t contribute to the pure and sincere devotion, then I need to reevaluate that activity or doctrine.

v. 4 – Isn't that the way it seems to go? When someone preaches anything other than Jesus, people seem to respond. Is this what Jesus was referring to when He said the following?

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:13-20).

Fruit is the deciding factor in whether someone is a true prophet or not. That requires time to see what fruit will come from any ministry. Too often I have been guilty of responding to a new message without waiting to see what fruit it will bear. Paul was jealous for Jesus; he did not want to see the glory that belonged to Jesus given to another person or to a "false Jesus."

**How can you be kind yet discerning? Who is the true Jesus? Where do we draw the line between legitimate new insight and biblical tangents? These questions are hard to answer. I think I must stay close to God's word and trust Him. I pray regularly that God will protect me from error, delusion and deception. Please join me in that prayer.**

### Day Five

5 But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." 6 I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. 7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?

v. 5 – Was this a term, "super apostles," that Paul coined or was it a term that others first used? I'm not sure, but there must have been some who were considered or considered themselves to be special, in a class of their own. I think we have super apostles in the Church today, if I am to believe their websites, promotional brochures and television programs. They heal the sick, raise the dead and are the keepers and dispensers of God's special blessings.

These super apostles appoint themselves bishops while over only a few or even no churches, command large honoraria for speaking and are defensive when asked to justify or verify their claims. Yes, I think it safe to say that we have super apostles today.

v. 6 – It appears that Paul was criticized in his work for his lack of speaking skills. Remember, there were men trained in rhetoric who had speech schools or who traveled,

making a living off their ability to make speeches and draw crowds. They probably watched Paul and saw him as a threat to “business,” so they tried to pull him down in the eyes of the people. As a Pharisee, Paul probably had no formal training as a speaker so he didn’t make a great impression when he spoke.

Does the church need skilled speakers or men and women who know God and have His heart for the people? Skill is good and I work hard to be the best speaker I can be, but skill doesn’t release God’s power—anointing does. God sent Paul to do what he did, and God empowered Paul to be successful. How could anyone compare the results from Paul’s ministry to those from another? That is foolishness, but even the disciples were guilty of arguing as to who was the greatest among them. That debate has continued through Paul’s day into the modern church.

I have been guilty of judging a teacher and speaker based on their speaking skills and not their content. Yet that doesn’t excuse speakers from not improving their skills. The bottom line, however, should be content and not style. **Do you agree or not?**

v. 7 – The traveling speakers and rhetoricians charge for their services. That is how they made their living and that practice probably carried over the church world. Undoubtedly some came to Corinth and wowed the people with their insight and speaking skill, charging for their services. Paul came with great power, performing miracles, but with less speaking skill than others and some dismissed him as insignificant. That wasn’t smart on the part of the people. Paul reminded them, a bit sarcastically, that he had ministered to them free of charge! That is how committed Paul was to the message and mission that Jesus had given him. Could his opponents match his commitment and generosity?

**Are you judging anyone in ministry who doesn’t have great or polished style? Do they have a good heart? Is there content accurate and biblical? Then perhaps you need to reconsider your judgment and repent.**

### Day Six

8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. 10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.

v. 8 – Paul could be so sarcastic and use it as a means of getting his point across. I’m not sure I’ve ever considered it a valid style of communication, but I’m glad Paul used it. I have been told that I have a sarcastic wit, but oftentimes, people misunderstand the point or what I am trying to say. I just attended a seminar where we were taught that all sarcasm is veiled hostility and is not a legitimate style. Here I see Paul using it effectively. Does this mean that God endorses sarcasm? I’m not sure, but the point remains that Paul used it from time to time.

Paul received support from churches to do his work, and he commented on one such gift when he wrote to the Philippians. I think the following passage speaks for itself:

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (Philippians 4:14-18).

### **How many fragrant offerings and acceptable sacrifices have you given lately?**

v. 9 – It seems that Paul received help from Philippi while he was with the Corinthians. This Philippian church regularly helped their favorite apostle. You can understand why that church was Paul’s favorite. We have discussed Paul’s choice not to receive any financial support from the people among whom he was working at the time. Instead he worked as a tentmaker and relied on the generosity of the other churches to meet his needs.

Paul had made a decision that he would not allow anyone to conclude that he preached the gospel as a means of financial gain. Paul understood that he had a right to such support, but he chose not to take advantage of that right. This must have put Paul under tremendous pressure at times, for he had urgent work to do in building the church, but he had to devote time to meet his needs and those of his team.

You are probably tired of reading me write this, but Paul was truly a great leader. He always kept his eye on the end prize, and that was establishing as many churches in as many places as quickly as possible. He knew there would be opposition and he never did anything to add to the problems that came with the territory. I want to be a leader like Paul. **How about you? What steps can you take to do so?**

v. 10 – Paul was sure of the truth that was in him and of the calling that he had. It is interesting that many others doubted both, but Paul never doubted his call. He never agonized one minute over whether Jesus had called him to preach. He agonized to see the churches formed and mature, but not over his call. Even now in my own life, I still doubt at times, asking myself, “Did God call me to do this? Is this message from Him? How aggressively should I pursue this open door before me?” We never see that Paul had those kinds of questions.

**What has God called you to do? Are you doing it? How can you do more of it? What are your greatest fears and limitations where that work is concerned?**

## Day Seven

11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! 12 And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

v. 11 – Has someone also accused Paul of not loving the saints at Corinth? Was there no end to the defense that this man had to make about who he was and how he conducted his business? This should give you some encouragement, if you are under scrutiny or attack for what you did or are doing. If they did this to Paul, if they subjected Jesus to the same vicious attacks and questions, then the same will probably happen to you and me. Jesus Himself taught us with these words:

Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason'" (John 15:20-25).

**God will use you to reveal what is in men's hearts and sometimes what's there isn't pleasant or pretty. Are you ready to be vilified for Jesus' sake? If not, then reconsider whether ministry is for you.**

v. 12 – So that's what it was all about: People were trying to put themselves on a par with Paul, so they were trying to convince people that they were as good as or better than Paul. What foolishness! Aren't we all on the same team? Why is there such rivalry? It is part of our fallen state, and it began shortly after the Fall when Cain killed his brother due to religious jealousy. God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's, so Cain's way of dealing with the problem was killing his brother. That was exactly what was happening between Paul and his rivals. They didn't like it that God blessed Paul's work so they tried to pull him down.

**How do you respond when God blesses someone else's work, business or ministry? Are you able to rejoice or is there a touch of envy? Why can't you be happy for their success? What is the root of this jealousy?**