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Building Up, Not Tearing Down

10: 7-11

Building up, not tearing down DIG: Why did the Corinthians miss what Paul was doing? Why were they so taken by the false apostles? What did the Corinthians accuse Paul of? How did it backfire on them? What were Paul's credentials? How was Paul's presumed lack of speaking ability and personal appearance exactly what the Corinthians needed?

REFLECT: How can you tell that you have grown in your spiritual discernment? In the past, when were you fooled by someone who appeared to have authority? Was there ever a time in your life when you were spiritually blinded? What did you learn? Have you ever accused someone of something only to have it backfire on you? Who can you build up this week?

Paul used his authority to build up the church, while the false apostles used the church to build up their authority.

One of the most difficult lessons **Messiah's** disciples have to learn is that, in the Kingdom of **God**, position and power are no evidence of authority. **Yeshua** warned **His** followers not to pattern their leadership after that of **the Gentiles** who “**lord it over**” others and to act important. The example that **Paul** followed was that of **Yeshua Messiah**, who came as a servant and ministered to others (**Mark 10:35-45**). But **the Corinthians** were not spiritually minded enough to discern what **Paul** was doing. **They** contrasted **his meekness** with the swagger of **the false apostles** (**to see link click [Af](#) - The Problem of the False Apostles**), and **they** concluded that **Paul** had no authority at all. To be sure, **he** wrote powerful **letters**; but **his** physical appearance was **meek**, and **his** speech unimpressive. **They** were judging a book by its cover, and thus, **Paul** suffered greatly as a result.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being the perfect example of total power and absolute authority - yet also being a gracious ruler. **You** are **the Almighty Great Ruler** of the Universe! **Yeshua, the Word of God**, will return to earth as*

conqueror **with a sharp sword to strike down the nations. . . On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:13c, 15a, 16). You show** amazing patience even when **You** are full of wrath and judging the world for its horrific crimes. **You** still have your arms outstretched in love to welcome all who will turn from their sins to follow **You** in love. **And then I saw another angel flying high in the sky, having a timeless message of good news to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth- to every nation and tribe and tongue and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the One who made heaven and earth and sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:6-7). May we use our leadership positions wisely following Your example. Sometimes discipline is needed, but always even correction is done in love and with the hand of forgiveness outstretched to the one who turns from their wrong to follow You. We love to walk following in Your footsteps. In Yeshua’s holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen**

Here **Paul** addresses **one of the Corinthians** who was especially impressed by **his opponents. He** represents a number of such foolish **Corinthians**, all of whom do not see what should be so plain to **them**, which was lying, as it were, on the very **surface. The apostle** declared: **You are looking at the surface of things. If anyone is convinced that he belongs to the Messiah, he should remind himself that I belong to the Messiah as much as he does (10:7). Paul** points to this misled **church member** what is right before **his** eyes, and lets the simple, obvious, undeniable facts tell **him** what **he** should have seen all along.



Paul’s opponents in the church were accusing **him** of not being a true **apostle**;

for, if **he** were a true **apostle**, **he** would show it by using **his apostolic** authority. On the other hand, if **Paul** had thrown **his** weight around, so to speak, **they** would have found fault with that. No matter what **Paul** did, **they** were bound to condemn **him**. This is what happens when church members are spiritually blinded and evaluate ministry from a worldly perspective. But **their** accusation backfired. If **Paul** was not an **apostle**, then **he** was a counterfeit . . . and not even a believer. But if that were true, then the church at **Corinth** was not a true church. **Paul** had already made it clear that no one could separate **his** ministry from **his** personal life (see **Am - A Time to Boast**). If **he** was a deceiver, then **the Corinthians** were **themselves** deceived!²¹⁷

The best way to avoid being fooled by a counterfeit is to study what is genuine. Banks don't train their tellers to recognize counterfeit money; they teach them to recognize genuine money, so when they see a counterfeit bill, they can recognize it easily. Therefore, **Paul** defended **his** authenticity in these verses by urging this misguided **church member** to take the blinders off and really take a look at **his** life and ministry.

Paul did not deny that **he** had authority, but **he** did refuse to exercise that authority in an unspiritual manner. The purpose of **his** authority was to **build them up, not tear them down**; and it required much more skill to build than to destroy. **For even if I boast a little too much about the authority the Lord has given us - authority to build you up, not tear you down - I am not ashamed (10:8)**. **Paul** used **his** authority to **build up the church**, while **the false apostles** used **the church** to build up **their** authority. Furthermore, it takes love to **build up (1 Corinthians 8:1)**, but **the Corinthians** interpreted **Paul's** love and meekness as a sign of weakness.

Paul also pointed out that there was no contradiction between **his** preaching and **his** writing. **The apostle** did have the capacity to be a firm disciplinarian, who would not avoid controversy or confrontation if necessary – but it was hardly **his** preferred demeanor. **He** was bold in **his** letters because that's what was needed at the time. How much more **he** would have enjoyed being able to write with gentleness. But it would not achieve **his** desired purpose. **My object is not to seem as if I were trying to frighten you with these letters (10:9)**. Even when **he** wrote **his** weighty and powerful letters, **he** wrote from a heart of love. It's as if **Paul** were saying, “**You'd** better prepare for my next visit, because if necessary, **I'll** show you how powerful **I** can be.”

How a believer uses authority is evidence of his spiritual maturity and character. An immature person is quick to use their authority, but a mature person grows in the use of authority, and lets others grow along with him. The wise leader, like a wise parent, knows when to wait in loving patience and when to act with determined power. It takes more true leadership and spiritual maturity to wait than to strike. A mature person does not use authority to demand respect, but uses **servant leadership (Mark 10:45)**, modeled after **the Master. The false apostles** depended on **letters of recommendation** for **their** authority, but **Paul** had a divine commission from heaven. The life that **he** lived and the ministry that **he** did were “credentials” enough, for it was evident that the hand of **God** was on **his** life and on **his body. The apostle** could dare to write: **From now on, I don’t want anyone to give me any more trouble, because I have scars on my body to prove that I belong to Yeshua (Galatians 6:17).**²¹⁸

Paul’s opponents had leveled the accusation against **him** that **he** lacked integrity since **he** presented **himself** as a ferocious lion who would only roar when **he** was far off in the woods, but was a timid lamb who would turn tail whenever **he** was confronted **face-to-face. They** said **his letters are weighty and powerful, but when he appears in person he is weak, and as a speaker he is nothing (10:10).** It was true that **Paul** had been **meek** when **he** was attacked during **his** second visit (see [Ao - Paul’s Painful Visit](#)), but bold when **he** subsequently wrote **his severe letter (1:13, 2:3-4 and 9, 7:8 and 12).** **His rivals** criticized **him** for this apparent contradiction because **they** didn’t understand the difference between **meekness** and weakness. The quality of **meekness** is actually one of careful self-control, composure, and in being able to handle difficulties in a fair way while maintaining one’s cool.

Such a person, like **the spokesman** within the group of detractors **(10:7)**, **should** have **realized that what Paul said in his letters when absent, he would do when present (10:11).** It seems as though **his opponents** were professional speakers. **Paul’s** communication style, in stark contrast, was much more plain speaking, straightforward, and concentrated on preaching the gospel (see the commentary on [First Corinthians Ao - The Cross and the Good News](#)). What **the false apostles** questioned was **his** physical appearance and what **they** considered **his** crude public speaking style. **He** seemed to make an unfavorable impression on **them** as **one** who was physically unattractive and less than articulate. An unpolished and halting oral performance would have given the impression that **he** was uneducated. Either **some** in the church would have liked

him to be more the other golden-tongued orators who were idolized in **Corinth** so that **their** association with **him** would boost **their** own prestige; or **his opponents** latched on to this weakness to advance **their** bid for influence in the church.

It is important to understand that **Paul's** presumed lack of speaking ability and personal appearance were exactly what **the Corinthians** needed to see beyond many of **their** limited human values, and for **them** to consider the example of **Yeshua the Messiah** who suffered and died for **them**. Of **the Savior, Isaiah** had written: **He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2)**. The powerful **Corinthians**, who imagined the Kingdom had arrived for **them (1 Cor 4:8)**, desperately needed a weak **apostle** who resembled **the Messiah** in **his body of death (4:10)**, and yet **lived by faith (5:7)** in things yet unseen. Like the crucified **Messiah**, whom **Paul** followed, **the apostle** was like a mirror to **the Corinthians**, in which **they** could see **themselves** as **they** truly were. At the moment, however, some of **them** were blind to that truth, preferring heroes who matched **their** own imagination.²¹⁹