

### **“...the measure of the rule....”**

In my experience those who oppose what I say, do so on the grounds of my being (supposedly) ‘worldly’ and ‘full of hate’. I am told that it is wrong to ‘attack’ fellow Believers. (If I did that, I would agree, but I have never done that). (2017 note: These charges were made when I spoke against the vile Toronto Blessing. Exactly the same charges have been made when I spoke against Islam, and, before that, homosexuality! Only the subject matter changed!).

Well, I am in good company, because Paul had to contend with the same kind of criticism. In this chapter we read that he was criticised for fighting error ‘in the flesh’, so, once again, he has to resort to defending his position. Those who are not involved in a ‘fighting, sharp-end’ ministry do not understand this, but it is necessary to keep repeating one’s position and stance as being from God, or the criticism takes hold in the hearts of some, destroying the truth.

After being attacked physically and verbally from all quarters, no doubt Paul is weary. He has to fight on two fronts – one by preaching the Gospel and the other by defending his right to preach and what he is saying. I can tell you this takes its toll. Only recently I had to stop corresponding with a man whose letters got ruder and ruder, until he had no respect for myself as a person. I finally had to cut any contact, because my responses to him took many hours each time, whilst all he did was to accuse in a few short sentences. That was when defence became unrealistic and to just shut-up became a virtue!

Paul rightly calls on the Corinthians to look to their own claims to being Christians. Many of us only look at claims and not at lives in detail. We allow too many sins to go unchecked. Where does that anger come from? What about that tendency to show hateful reactions to criticism? And why does that person cause us to be very careful in our approach, as if we must walk on broken glass? These are caused by deep-seated sin in the enemy critics. They are not just caused by our ‘personality’!

It is an error to speak of ‘defects of personality’ as though these cannot be changed. *All* error and sin can be stopped and changed! Otherwise the Bible is wrong to speak of us as being ‘new creatures’ in Christ. There are only two reasons most do not stop their sins – one is that the person is disobedient, and the other is that he is not saved in the first place. Apart from being in a state caused by brain injury or malfunction, there are no other reasons.

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Paul says that perhaps he and the other apostles ought to drive home their authority – but he does not. My own authority to teach has been questioned many times over, by those who wish to remain in their sins, whether physical, mental, or doctrinal (spiritual). Much of what they say is patently nonsense, but on occasions I must state my authority. That is, God has called me to teach and preach and I know it from many tests, inner verifications and the testimonies of others. I have no doubt at all.

Whilst, like any man, I can make mistakes, this does not detract from the fact that I am called to my office. So, like Paul, I resent criticism of the office itself. By all means question what I say, but do not question my office, when it has been given so clearly by God and attested to by those I teach! This is Paul's response, and it is also mine.

Also like Paul, I must admit I am far better in letters than I am in person! Paul says he much prefers to conduct his counsel and teaching by letter, because in person he has no real 'presence'. For myself, I prefer to write, because I have no confidence in my ability to speak face to face. There is nothing wrong with this. Indeed, it accepts a perceived weakness and builds upon a strength. Sadly, there are many in our pulpits today who only have themselves and their peers to say they are great men! As Paul says, they "(measure) themselves by themselves". Rather than be measured by what they say, and their adherence to scripture, they measure themselves by their peers' reactions.

The man of God measures himself by "the rule which God hath distributed to us" and not by the favourable responses of other men. It is always good when other men accept what you say, but this can never be the final seal of approval... the final seal comes from God, not from men, no matter how influential those men may be.

Paul, speaking of his authority and the authority of his fellow apostles, says: "*we stretch not ourselves beyond (our measure)*"

. By this he means they were given a particular task to perform and they cannot go beyond that. If they do, they do so as men and not as God's delegated persons. This is wisdom, though many pastors and preachers tend to think they may speak in any sphere and on any subject, with 'authority', though they only quote their human ideas.

For myself I only speak and write on what I know God has given me to speak and write about. In this way I may glory, but only in the Lord (verse 17). I can glory only when I remain within the boundaries He has set for my ministry. This was Paul's stance and so it is mine.

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Salvation itself is about boundaries, not about human freedom to choose. When we are unsaved our boundaries are set by Satan. When we are saved, they are set by God, and though the boundaries are more extensive, they remain boundaries, or 'measures'. When we stray outside the boundaries (of holiness) we sin. Simple as that. Paul alludes to this fact in the present chapter.

### Verses 1&2

1.

"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence (am) base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

2.

But I beseech (you), that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh."

Here Paul is being totally disarming! How many preachers and teachers will admit to being unattractive to their 'audience'? How many preen themselves, dress in expensive suits and comb their hair to be attractive physically? Paul does not do this. He believes his physical presence is poor and so he relies fully on what God says and does. This poor presence had something to do with his physical self, but it might also be to do with an inability to speak with fluidity before a crowd. Whatever it is, Paul has no confidence in himself, but only in God.

Paul says he can sometimes be bold and outspoken, but, at other times, he is fearful of meeting others, and lacks confidence. It is of utmost importance that any preacher and teacher knows his own self, whether for good or ill. Only when he realises his own strengths and weaknesses can he speak truly, without a false self-image. When he does this he knows when he is sinning or being tempted to sin. Without a realistic attitude toward his own being, he will fail and fall, being filled with his own importance and delusion.

Paul calls on the Corinthians to think kindly of him, with the gentle spirit of Christ, because when he is with them, he is not thought much of. "...in presence" he says, "(I) am base...". The 'presence' is *prosopon*, meaning his face or personal appearance. His appearance, he claims,

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is 'base',

*tapeinos* – lowly or humble, no higher than the ground.

In his former life, as a hater of Christians, his appearance mattered not to him, for he had an human power and authority that caused fear in those he sought after. But, now, he had no authority except for that which was given by God and belonged to God. Paul was stripped of anything that gave him personal power. He was beaten and spat upon. This is why he was now so honest with himself.

He admits he is writing very boldly. In the written word he is bold, *tharrheo* – writing with confidence and with courage. But, when he is face to face he is tremulous and fearful. I can understand this. When I write my pen flows. But, in person, I do not have the confidence of some, who love to speak and to argue. Many who are like this enjoy watching their opponent unable to speak with equal clarity and cutting wit. Thus, they think they have 'won' and are filled with pride. So be it. Paul knows his strengths and with complete candour tells his readers the truth about his weaknesses. How many will do that?

What this shows is that a man called by God is only as daring as God makes him to be. He might be strong in writing but poor in face-to-face situations, as Paul is. If he is strong face-to-face, as he was on Mars Hill, then this is entirely because God gave him temporary courage to do so. Admitting this, Paul begs the Corinthians to remember this frailty. From the text it would appear that Paul is more bold when faced with those who accuse him of acting on his own initiative.

### Verses 3-6

1.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

2.

(For the weapons of our warfare (are) not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

3.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

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4.

And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Paul confirms that the warfare he conducts is not fought on human terms, but on spiritual terms. He and other preachers are human and walk amongst men, but they do not war after the flesh... the way they fight is determined by God and spiritual values. So many I know preach cleverly, using human means and psychological ploys. They learn this from their colleges (and pride)... how to modulate the voice, be loud at that point and soft at this point; use humour at this part and follow with an emotional appeal, and so on. Some (as I once did!) will adhere to the ‘principle’ of having no more than three main points, and others will use a different theory. But, Paul merely speaks as he is led. I assure you, if you are a preacher, this is the best and only truly spiritual way.

It is when we cast away our human resources that we ‘win’. When we place our full trust in God and speak only when He calls us to, using *His* words, our efforts *become “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”*

In today’s preaching market-place, charismatics use human means to ‘catch’ people. In so doing they build up new strong holds and do not bring them down! People are attracted not to Christ but to the

*construction*

of Christ put out by self-elected preachers who use human means and images. The same falsity occurs in other ranks, from Anglican to Roman Catholic, as well as amongst reformationists (those who place their trust in reformed traditions and methods but not in the Spirit).

In stark contrast, Paul only speaks when he is told to speak by God; he only says what he is given to say, and no more; and he speaks only to those God tells him to speak to. In this way, his words are powerful – they *have* to be, because he is God’s mouthpiece and is not speaking from his own mind or heart. God’s word cannot fail, ever.

Those who elect themselves to be preachers resort to human methods and often have popularity and fame (and riches, if they wish). These constitute the majority of all preachers and teachers. They build vast congregations (or not) and prosper, having few enemies. Paul? He has many enemies and little comfort, no money and the barest of necessities, if he has them at all. He is beaten and hounded, hated and despised. How many white-suited charismatics (for

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example) would accept such terms of employment? Beware of the preacher who has few enemies, for few enemies mean a false or depleted message.

When we rely only on God to bring about changes and to defeat evil, there is a “*casting down of imaginations*”

Imaginations,

*logismos*

, are the reasonings and judgements of men that are hostile to Christ and Christianity. The only way to beat evil and men who sin is to preach what God gives us to preach, nothing more.

‘Counselling’ does not do it,

*God*

does! Using words that avoid the root of sin does not,

*God*

does!

Sadly, many preachers today *logizomai* – they speak as they see fit, and not what God gives them to speak. They run away with their own importance, and this status is usually given to them by adoring congregations who think he can do no wrong. Or, they cannot be bothered to search, test and apply truth for themselves.

God’s words also destroy every ‘high thing’, *hupsoma* – elevated persons and things, used as barriers against God and His word.

*Hupso*

*ma*

can be found in countless churches, even the good ones. It can be found in many traditions, including that of the well-known and obvious ‘hierarchy’ within churches, which places the pastor above everyone else. It can be intentional or not. It does not matter, for its very existence is opposed to God’s word.

Some pastors are given material benefits that far outweigh those of the congregation – *hupsoo*, meaning the summit of opulence and prosperity, to raise someone up to a position of high station,

*hupsos*

. There is nothing wrong with a pastor having money, etc., but it becomes wrong when he is showered with such gifts without any true calling or ministry.

We see these particularly amongst charismatics and their opulence is very obvious, betraying a

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form of worship given to them by members whose adoration is misplaced. Paul is a direct contrast to all this. His task is to bring down these strongholds and not to maintain them! He says they oppose *gnosis*, or knowledge of God given to all Christians.

Put simply, *gnosis* is a general understanding of Christian things, leading to depth of spiritual growth and true Christian standards. When we elevate some to a place of undue importance, we deny the simple life of Christ and reject godliness in favour of human pride. Knowledge is based on *ginosko*, the heart to learn and to perceive rightly. Few wish to learn or to be taught, yet many think they know more than they do and refuse staunchly to accept teaching, to their detriment.

When we throw away what is rooted in our own selves and human resources, we “(bring) into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Earlier we spoke of the restrictions imposed by God upon a saved person. Here it is spoken of as the ‘captivity’ of our human thoughts and actions. To bring into captivity is to *aichmalotizo*, to lead ones’ mind into another state of being. This state of being is obedience to Christ, *hupakoe* —

to obey totally what Christ has determined for all our lives, as found in scripture. This involves listening and doing, and is the real interpretation of Christ knocking at the door, *hupakouo*.

Note that every thought must be obedient, not just those we find convenient. As Ananias and Sapphira discovered, we cannot keep our thoughts secret from God. We must hand them all over to Him, to be purified or cast out, as He sees fit. Only then can we claim to be living holy lives. Only then will any ministry we have be powerful and filled with the authority of Christ. Only then will our lives make sense and prosper (in spiritual terms).

When we do this, we will have a “*readiness to revenge all disobedience*”. The word ‘revenge’ is not used in our modern sense. In this text it means to protect or to do justice, *ekdikeyo*

. It can also mean to punish all things we do wrong or, to use a closer meaning, *ekdikos*

– exact a penalty for sin. Taken back to its root meanings, it means to come to a ‘judicial decision’ about ones’ own sin – to condemn it, *dike*

. So, we must condemn our own sins, because it is what God expects and demands. We must not wait to be condemned by others, especially not the world at large. It is better that we are

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always ready and willing to review our own selves and stop sinning because it is the right thing to do.

We will readily do all this when our “obedience is fulfilled”, when our *hupakoe* is *pleroo*, complete; when we are full and overflowing with a desire to be holy. When we are in such a position we will not wish to sin and so the mind and heart will condemn even the smallest offence to God or to others, readily and without enforcement. This concept of personal holiness is far above anything most of us are used to!

### Verses 7-10

1.

“Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ’s, even so are we Christ’s.

2.

For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

3.

That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

4.

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”

Paul asks the Corinthians if they are only swayed by what they can see, *prosopon*. Or, do they think more carefully than that and consider spiritual things? If they think they belong to Christ, then let them know that Paul and the apostles, too, are Christ’s. Paul is alluding to his own perception that his bodily image is poor. Look past what my appearance is like, he says, and concentrate on what I say and do.



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Really, he says, we ought to proclaim more of our authority in Christ, an authority given to us for your edification, oikodome; spiritual growth, happiness, holiness. It also includes the meaning of a building, in this case, the building that is the temple, or the Body of Christ. Overall, Paul is saying that the office of pastor, preacher or teacher, is not given for the benefit of the one with the office. It is given to him so that he can help others to grow in Christian belief and practice. For this reason Christians ought to support their pastors and teachers, not so that the pastor/teacher/preacher gains anything himself, but so that they might benefit!

The whole point of the pastor, for example, is to build up his fellow members, not to destroy them, kathairesis – to pull them down, demolish. The root meaning of this is kathaireo – to detach someone from the cross of Christ. Any preacher who does that is anathema. However, as a pastor I will destroy false beliefs, because they are sinful. If the person who holds them is willing to part from their error, then all is well.

If I do this, says Paul, then I will not be ‘ashamed’, aischuno, dishonouring to God, disgracing His Name. When he wrote his epistles to them, it was not his intention to frighten them away, ekphobeo, but to show them a better way, the path of righteousness. As we know from other texts, those who are frightened away from their obligations by the truth see the truth as a stumblingblock, either because they are living in sin, or because they are unsaved. Those who are Christ’s will listen and obey. Nevertheless, Paul did not wish to scare the Corinthians by words that were merely human in origin.

Yet, despite his best intentions, critics poured scorn upon his physical appearance. They said that his “bodily presence (is) weak” and his “speech contemptible”. This happens in everyday life, and we often hear it in the media; people being attacked not for what they do and say, but because they have the wrong hairstyle or dress sense, or because they are not pretty enough for onlookers! It took a lot for Paul to visit people who thought like that.

Paul’s letters are ‘weighty’ said these critics: they were barus, stern and heavy to bear. They were ‘powerful’, ischuros, forcibly spoken and even violent. (How I recognise such accusations, made against myself!). To emphasise these supposed wrongs, the critics attacked Paul’s appearance (‘weak’, asthenes – sick and impotent) and his way of talking, which they said was ‘contemptible’, exoutheneo, despicable, of no value, to be utterly rejected. These are the charges of people filled with sin, and Paul asks the Corinthians not to be influenced by them.

### Verses 11-13

1.

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“Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in the word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.

2.

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

3.

But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.”

Paul gathers strength and warns that he will display God’s authority when he arrives in person, if the critics do not stop their unwarranted attacks. If they thought his words in letters were strong, then they (the apostles) will certainly show such strength when they arrive at Corinth! This is something I have noted in my own ministry – that when confronted, such critics crumble to dust, because they meet with God and His authority.

Paul says they “dare not” be like their critics, who give themselves praise, because such men take pride from their own judgements. They measure themselves and what they are by their own criteria. Denominations do this. They measure everything by their own standards, *metreo*, and expectations,

*sunistao*

, and cannot comprehend how anyone else can be different.

They compare themselves, *sugkrino*, to themselves, and so interpret what they say and do according to their own rules. By doing this, says Paul, they “are not wise”,

*suniemi*

... what they think of themselves is only in their own minds and cannot be set against God’s standards. The only way a Christian can measure any word or action is against what God says. That is why I no longer look for the interpretation of God’s word from the works of other men, but examine God’s word for myself.

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As for Paul and the apostles, they will not “boast of things without (our) measure”. That is, test what they say and do outside of God’s word, which is the one and only true measure. Rather, they will test their words and deeds by God’s word: “the rule which God hath distributed” to them. The ‘rule’ is the *kanon*, the rod or *kane* used by carpenters to keep lines straight, or the province or sphere of influence assigned to one by God, the divine principle behind all things in the Christian life.

The rule has been distributed to the apostles. That is, *merizo*, divided to each according to God’s desire and will on an individual basis. Each one has a portion, not the whole, and it is bestowed upon them: they did not gain it by their own merits or by prayer, but by gift, as the root, *meros*, signifies. Each portion added together forms the whole, showing that every gift links to all others for the benefit of the Body. Paul assures the Corinthians that whatever rule or portion was given to the apostles will extend also to them, *phikneomai*, ‘to come to’. Behind this statement is the unsaid proviso, that to get their portion they must obey, as is implied in previous verses.

### Verses 14-18

1.

“For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ.

2.

Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men’s labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly,

3.

To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s line of things made ready to our hand.

4.

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

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For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”

We do not go beyond what we are commanded to do, *huperekteino*, when we preach and come to you... it is all within our remit from God, says Paul. Note that throughout this letter Paul is referring not just to himself but to the other apostles, too.

When they came to them they did not glory in their own achievements but only in what *God* was doing through them. Thus, they were not acting “without (our) measure” (outside their remit). They were not boasting of “other men’s labours” – resting on what others were doing, but were speaking only of the things required of them by God. In this they prayed for an increase in faith for the Corinthians, which could only come by being obedient. This would be within their remit, and would legitimately “enlarge” them,

*megaluno*

, cause them to celebrate and to be further known to all men, so that the Gospel could be spread (verse 16).

So, the apostles would not need to boast of another man’s ‘line’ or *kanon*. They would only boast about what God was doing, because they relied on

*His*

*kanon*

, not the claims of men. Always, says Paul, we must glory in God and in what God says and does. We must glory in Who He is, not in who we are. This is sensible and logical, because God gives each his human intelligence. The level of this depends on what God wishes to give to us, so no man can boast about how clever he is. We are made by God, so we are only creatures bound to do His bidding. When we do, and because it is He Who tells us what we are to do, then we cannot claim praise. Everything good is of God, and so it is He Who must be praised.

It is an ordinary axiom in life that a man who boasts about his own achievements is arrogant and proud. Such a man is never accepted by God or commended/approved, and others find him rather boring. If a man is to be commended it is by God alone. Christians who always crave after the commendations of their peers are living in false hope!

For many years I tried to be accepted by my peers. I was even invited to join the ‘elite’ preachers’ fraternal initiated by my pastor. At these meetings the pastor presided and assumed

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overall control, favouring some and lowering others. I certainly did not meet with his approval and was devastated! That was because my efforts were ruled or tested by other men. When I gave up such human aspirations my preaching took on a brand new savour and I no longer needed the applause of other men. (Note: There is a biblical need to have what we say and do approved by fellow believers, but this does not include being favoured by men who themselves are worldly or wrong in their biblical assumptions. Any approval must come from those who 'live the life' and 'walk the walk').

Once I lived by God's 'line' or *kanon*, everything changed, because I was free from human standards and compared my actions only to scripture. It was then that I could see human standards for what they really were – petty and unscriptural. Like Paul, I recommend that you discard human aspirations in life and instead be guided by God's word alone. Let HIS word be your life's ministry, and not mere human desires or needs.

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