

**2 CORINTHIANS: DEFENDING GOD'S SERVANT TO HIS CRITICS**  
**Part XVI: The Spiritual Versus The Carnal Approach To God's Ministry**  
**(2 Corinthians 10:1-18)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. 2 Corinthians was written "to defend the authenticity of" Paul's "apostleship and his message" to a church of believers who were susceptible to heeding false teachers who critiqued him, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552.
- B. The false teachers were not spiritual men, but carnal people, so they operated in their ministry efforts with carnal characteristics in striking contrast how Paul's team that ministered as spiritual men.
- C. This contrast is presented in 2 Corinthians 10:1-18, and we study it for our insight and edification (as follows):

**II. The Spiritual Versus The Carnal Approach To God's Ministry, 2 Corinthians 10:1-18 ESV.**

- A. Paul **tried** to be **nonaggressive toward others**; his carnal foes were **aggressive toward others**, v. 1-2b:
  - 1. Though Paul as an apostle had life-and-death authority over other believers (Acts 5:1-11), he approached the matter of disciplining those who opposed his authority (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to 2 Cor. 10:1) by entreating them by Christ's meekness and gentleness to accept his authority, 2 Corinthians 10:1a.
  - 2. Indeed, he wrote of the charge by some that he seemed humble in their presence but bold while absent by his letters though still humbly seeking to address them in spite of their disrespect for him, 2 Cor. 10:1b.
  - 3. Paul's carnal foes, the false teachers and those who followed them, were aggressive toward him, charging him with being weak in their presence though pretending to be mighty while absent, 2 Cor. 10:1-2b.
- B. Paul **relied** on the **Holy Spirit to overcome false views**; his carnal foes relied on **human reasoning**, v. 2c-6:
  - 1. Admitting his ministry team lived in weak humanity, Paul clarified that they did not make spiritual war in the realm of their humanity, that their weapons were divine in power to destroy the strongholds of every lofty argument that was raised against the knowledge of God and making others captive to obedience to Christ, and being ready to punish every disobedience of the false apostles once the repentant in the Church had obeyed Paul's directives, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 577.
  - 2. To the contrary, the false apostles thought Paul lived by the sin nature since that is what they did, v. 2c.
- C. Paul relied on his **supernatural spiritual gift**; his carnal foes relied on **natural human abilities**, v. 7-10:
  - 1. Paul addressed the criticism that he was mighty in his letters while absent but meek and weak when present by claiming that he belonged to Christ with great power to build up as well as to destroy, v. 7-8. He was seeking to be meek so as not to frighten them even by his letters, 2 Corinthians 10:9.
  - 2. Conversely, the false apostles relied on natural human abilities seen in their criticism that Paul was hypocritically mighty in his absence by his letters while weak in body and speech in their presence, v. 10.
- D. Paul **avoided competing against others**; his carnal foes **competed against others**, 2 Corinthians 10:11-12:
  - 1. The apostle Paul warned his readers that what he wrote in his absence he would do in their presence, v. 11. He was not trying to commend or to measure himself against others as if competing against them, v. 12a.
  - 2. To the contrary, the false apostles measured and compared themselves with one another in carnality, demonstrating a lack of divine wisdom and their carnal state, 2 Corinthians 10:12b.
- E. Paul **humbly served within God's assignment**; his carnal foes **proudly overextended their reach**, v. 13-18:
  - 1. Instead of boasting beyond their limits, Paul's team humbly boasted only in regard to the realm that God had assigned them to minister, that they might reach even to the Corinthians to disciple them, 2 Cor. 10:13.
  - 2. Paul's team did not overextend themselves by ministering in realms not assigned to them by the Lord, but reached as far as Corinth, hoping to see the Corinthians' faith increase that Paul's team might preach the Gospel to regions beyond them in accord with God's will without having to boast falsely of ministering in the realms others had already evangelized (like the false apostles), 2 Cor. 10:14-16. One whom God commends for doing His will is approved; he who does his own ministry and boasts of it is not, v. 17-18.
  - 3. The false apostles overextended themselves, commending themselves outside of God's calling, v. 17-18.

***Lesson:*** *The spiritual approach to God's ministry is nonaggressive toward others, it relies on the Holy Spirit to demolish false arguments, it uses God's spiritual gift, it avoids competing against others and it humbly serves within God's assigned realm. Conversely, the carnal approach is aggressive toward others, it relies on human reasoning and natural abilities, it competes against others and it proudly overextends itself beyond God's calling.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we heed Paul's example and not that of the false apostles in our approach to God's ministry. (2) If we discern from 2 Corinthians 10:1-18 that we minister unbiblically, may we repent to gain God's approval.*