I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— 2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.
12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. 15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, 16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. 17 “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

—2 Corinthians 10 (ESV)

Paul was personally attacked in his absence, to include being ridiculed, by false teachers and prophets who sought to disrupt the church and create their own followings.

v 1 – “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”
Paul was “flipping” some of the criticism/ridicule that when he was in person, he was not so bold and authoritative and impressive as he was in his writings
His point here is that Christ Himself was meek and gentle with His disciples in His work with them, and that in being accused of the same thing, Paul was following the example of Christ.

“I who am humble when face to face with you…”
Paul was probably quoting the criticisms and mockery of others (v 10)
“He’s not so tough when he’s here in person!”

Also, because of Paul’s background—a leader of persecution of the churches—he probably especially desired to avoid anything like that approach in his work as an apostle.

When a person comes to Christ, Christ often changes them seemingly most completely—and uses that change for Himself—in what appeared to be their worst behaviors:
- The stingy, greedy person becomes a generous giver
- The person with a violent temper becomes gentle and kind
- The person with an immoral background becomes an example of pure living

v 2 – “I beg of you…”
I plead with you that when I’m present again, I will not have to act boldly with the confidence with which “I reckon I’m going to need to challenge some people who reckon that we are walking according to the flesh.” (East Texas Paraphrase)
Paul did not want confrontation—and he sought to avoid it—but he was willing to enter into it for the sake of the Gospel of Christ and the peace and unity of the Church.

v 3 – “For though we walk in the flesh…”
The nature of this battle is spiritual—not against “flesh and blood”
This is not a figure of speech or a diversion from reality—this is the true and accurate description of the nature of man’s conflict

v 4 – “For the weapons of our warfare…”
Even as he enters into this description of the warfare, the apostles writing takes on a completely different tone.
“…have divine power”—lit. are “powerful to God”
God Himself is engaged in this warfare
“to destroy stronghold”
- Strongholds of lies
- Strongholds of sin
- Evil has spiritual origins

“overthrowing arguments and every lofty opinion raise against the knowledge of God..”
A continuation
The verbs here are “warfare” verbs—strong, unequivocal
There is no compromise between God’s truth and the lies that oppose it
“Against the knowledge of God”—Paul is not advocating going to war over differing views that can exist among sincere Christians
This is a war over truth—for beliefs and confessions over which people will be saved or lost forever

“taking captive every thought into the obedience of Christ”
This is the goal—and this is the outcome where truth is proclaimed
“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father except by Me.”
The hope of the world is Christ. The Savior of the world is Christ. And there is no other Lord and Savior but Jesus.
The call of the Gospel is unto the obedience of Christ—complete submission to Christ.
He is Lord.

v 6 – “having a readiness to punish [avenge] every disobedience, when your obedience might be fulfilled.”
Possibly, Paul means here that once he has gotten the Christians who have been misled back on track (when your obedience might be fulfilled), then the apostles will be ready to discipline and thoroughly repudiate those who caused the trouble and have opposed the Gospel.

vv 7-12—a continued defense and appeal
Anyone who is claiming that they are “in Christ” as a basis of their actions should be assured that the apostles and also, definitely, “in Christ.”
cf. if someone said “Well this is my point of view, and I know I’m right, because I’m a Texan!”
Paul emphasizes that he does have an apostle’s authority, and that what he writes, while not intending to upset or frighten [terrify] people, is from God.
He also emphasizes that the apostles “practice what they preach,” and that they are prepared to be as forceful as necessary, when present, with those who are attacking them.

In v12 he definitely goes after their opponents, essentially saying “Not that we could ever dare to claim to be as great as some people there are claiming to be”!
And then, “but these people… among themselves, measuring themselves and comparing themselves with themselves—they are without a clue! (ETP)

vv 13-16 – “But we will not boast…”
Apparently the apostles were criticized for being outsiders and for trying to unduly influence the church in Corinth (even though they started the church!)
Some of this resistance may have also been tied up in the resistance to participating in the offering for the poor in Jerusalem
Paul’s response is that God Himself sent the apostles to Corinth—and that they were the first there with the Gospel.
He also points out that those who are making such claims and taking such credit for themselves in Corinth were, themselves, benefiting from and building on the labor of others—in this case, the labor of the apostles—the very people they were criticizing!
Paul also says, essentially, that not only did God send us to Corinth, we hope that He will send us even farther with the gospel, continuing to take it to those who have not
heard. And he adds that they do not boast or need to boast about work done where others have already given great influence.

vv 17-18—“Let the one who boasts…”
Paul summarizes by pointing out that no matter what people claim for themselves, it is ultimately the Lord’s commendation that matters.

23 Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”—Jeremiah 9:23-24