

The Lord Commends Paul's Authority

2 Corinthians 10:12–18
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It's probably best to begin this evening's message by briefly considering verse 17, which says, *But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.* All boasting must be in our God and Savior; otherwise, it's just vanity. This applied especially to the false teachers in Corinth, who boasted in themselves. Thus, Paul reminded them of their madness in verse 18 — *For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

Every ministry should be judged by the same standard. Is it God's work, proven to be his both by its method and the fruit it produces, or is it the work of someone else who simply wants to make a name for himself?

It's not hard to spot many self-commending preachers. Instead of preaching Christ, they built huge empires for themselves with multiple mansions and private jets. No one should take them seriously, but unfortunately many do. Others are harder to catch. Their messages often sound good, yet somewhere along the road they take a detour and expose their real agenda. They, too, should be avoided. Like the false watchman in Ezekiel, they merit nothing but God's displeasure. But thankfully, the Lord also has an army of faithful servants, who devote themselves to his work and receive their only commendation from him.

A person who used to be a member of this congregation once told me a story about Pastor West. After preaching an especially hard sermon, one he knew some would find disagreeable, he stood at the front door greeting folks as they left. The person who told me this asked him, "Aren't you concerned about how people might receive your message?" Pastor West's only response was, "I don't care." While this might seem somewhat cold in an age in which people take offense at everything, it reflects the fact that Pastor West didn't preach to please the congregation but the Lord. Only the Lord's opinion of what he said mattered.

Every preacher should memorize and recite the words, "I don't care." Maybe it would improve their quality of preaching. They should never go home on Sunday fearing what any man thinks. If they're preaching Jesus Christ and faithfully expounding his Word, nothing else counts.

Odious Comparisons

Comparing one preacher to another isn't much better. Maybe you've heard the saying, "Comparison is odious," i.e., it stinks. That's because comparisons aren't usually very helpful. What good does it do to compare two cooks or two artists or even two preachers? One cook will never make exactly the same dish as another. No two artists will paint exactly the same landscape. And no two preachers will ever write or preach the same sermons.

But the real problem comes when the standard of comparison is itself misguided, as with the false teachers in Corinth. Verse 12 says, *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.*

Who says that the Bible doesn't use sanctified sarcasm and ridicule? Didn't Jesus call the Pharisees whitewashed sepulchers? In the verse before us, Paul, who had been called an apostle directly by Jesus Christ and carried the gospel as far as Greece, said he wouldn't dare compare himself to his opponents, who had set themselves as their own standard. He pretended humility before them to expose their absurdity. They claimed he was a coward, so he admitted to not having their form of courage. He didn't even want to put himself on their level. Why would he? They had settled on their own definition of eloquence, the content of the gospel, and the types of motivation they should use to win hearers. And they did all of this without Jesus Christ. Could Paul measure up to their expectations? He refused to try. The thought of meeting their standards didn't even interest him.

On the contrary, Paul declared that those who measure themselves by their own standards are nothing but fools. They were also liars. Jesus said, *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true* (John 5:31). But that doesn't sound right. If Mr. Smith says he can build a mansion and he really can do it, has he lied just because he said he could? Of course not; that's not what Jesus meant. He meant that we can't necessarily trust someone's testimony if he's the only one telling us about himself. He might be telling the truth, but it's also possible that his opinion of himself is wrong. This is one reason the Bible requires two or three witnesses. So, if Mr. Jones has actually seen one of Mr. Smith's mansions, he can confirm whether Mr. Smith has the skills that he claims to have. Solomon wrote these words of wisdom in the book of Proverbs: *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips* (Prov. 27:2). And concerning our text, Calvin said that the false teachers of Corinth were "starving for true praise ... and falsely give themselves out to be what they are not."

Yet, Paul's opponents in Corinth went beyond judging themselves by their own standards. They also presumed to judge Paul as well, believing they had surpassed him in every way.

Our Measure

Following this, Paul went on to describe the right standard of ministry, viz., doing what God gives a man to do. And his area of labor included planting a church in Corinth. As long as he did this, he could boast in the Lord's work. He could boast in everything the Lord was doing through him because he wasn't boasting about himself.

Paul addressed this in verses 13 and 14 as follows: *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. 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.* He knew that his area of ministry included Corinth because he had ministered there on his second missionary journey. He stayed as long as the church needed him to be established in the grace of God, and he left when his work was done. He wanted to minister the gospel there to free the people from slavery to sin.

Now, this doesn't mean that Paul never considered other opportunities. He certainly did. He wanted to take the gospel to places where it had never been preached. But while he was in Corinth, he gave himself to the needs of that church. Acts 18:11 says, *And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

Every believer has to commit himself to what the Lord calls him to at any given time. Remember Solomon's admonition in Ecclesiastes 9:10 — *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.* And Paul wrote, *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men* (Col. 3:23). We must redeem the time, making the most of every opportunity to serve Jesus Christ and glorify his name.

Other Men's Labors

Paul's opponents in Corinth also trespassed against him in another way: they intruded themselves into his area of labor — the church at Corinth. He didn't mind others stepping in as long as they built on the foundation he laid. According to 1 Corinthians 3:10, he even expected others to build on his foundation. He wrote, *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.* Apollos built on it. Just a few verses earlier, Paul, using a different analogy, wrote, *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave*

the increase (v. 6). Here we see more of Paul's sanctified humility: he knew that neither he nor Apollos could make the church grow. The next verse says, *So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase (v. 7).*

The problem with Paul's opponents is that they had formed a different foundation. Like the thieves Jesus mentioned in John 10:1, they refused to go in by the gate but climbed over the wall. This was unacceptable. Paul hadn't built on their work, not that he would've. And he expected the same courtesy from them. The beginning of verse 15 says, *Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours.*

But the rest of verse 15 and all of verse 16 express Paul's confidence that the Lord would increase his field of labor through the Corinthians, thus allowing him to move on to new areas of service. He wrote, *But having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, 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.* But for this to happen, the church had to grow in its faith. The Corinthians had to learn the value of Paul's ministry and work, drive away the false teachers, fulfill its commitment to helping the church in Jerusalem, and much more. Then and only then would Paul be able to preach Jesus in Rome (Acts 19:21) and Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28), which he longed to do.

The work of gospel ministry and its glory belongs exclusively to the Lord. Listen again to the verse we started with, viz., verse 17: *But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.* This verse summarizes Jeremiah 9:24, which says, *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.* In Jeremiah, the LORD is Jehovah, the covenant God of his people. In our text, it's Jesus Christ. Paul usually reserved the word *Lord* for Jesus. Jesus is Jehovah. It was as simple as that.

But using the word *Lord* in verse 17 for Jesus played a more particular role in Paul's argument. It shows that he depended on Jesus to make his work successful, and not on himself, and therefore Jesus would receive all glory and honor for it. This created an unsurpassable gulf between the apostle and his opponents. They did their work on their own because they wanted the glory for it. They developed plans and programs without consulting Jesus or looking for his blessing. But Paul did the opposite. He devoted his whole life and ministry to serving the Savior who died for his people and rose again to justify us from all sin.

The contrast couldn't be greater. Who should the Corinthians have listened to — the self-appointed preachers who sought their own fame and fortune or an apostle of Jesus Christ who had given up everything to advance the gospel's ministry wherever he went? And who should we heed

today? The myriad of false teachers that lead countless men and women astray, each of whom claims special insight into the things of God, or the inscripturated Word of the incarnate Word? The answer's obvious.

A last question relating to this evening's text is this: whose work will the Lord actually bless? Psalm 127 answers this for us. The psalmist wrote, *Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain* (v. 1). Without God's approval, no one claiming to build his work can succeed.

But wait a minute. What about Mormons? Haven't they been around for a while — more than two hundred years? And Jehovah's Witnesses? And Muslims? And every other cult and false religion known to man? Yes, their lies often endure for a while, but the good news is that they won't last forever. They're all part of Satan's collapsed empire. Jesus smashed its foundation when he died on the cross, and now he's working through the true preaching of his Word to conquer it once and for all. The Son of God marches forward with the sword of truth in his mouth to slay his enemies. And he will be victorious!

The outcome is guaranteed. Jesus' work will stand forever because it alone has his approval. Nothing else can last. Therefore, we submit ourselves and our service to him. It's why we pray and support missionaries. It's why we plead with our family, friends and neighbors to believe in God's appointed Messiah. We need to trust Jesus alone for complete salvation and believe with all our hearts that only his blood and righteousness can give the world hope. Amen.