

Concerns Of A True Apostle

Introduction. If you were a “pastor” in today’s religious climate, you would be inundated with a vast amount of material on ministry and leadership, promoting a myriad of different approaches, styles, and techniques. “Pastors” read books, attend seminars, follow programs promoted by church growth gurus, and pattern their preaching style after other “successful pastors.” A lot of gospel preachers have fallen in love with these approaches, but these programs, methods, and gimmicks ultimately will not achieve spiritual results.

Based on the enormous volume of available material, preaching and teaching the gospel would appear to be very complicated. However, it is surprisingly simple. The principles and directions for successful work are laid out in scripture. Methods and trends come and go, and today’s sensational new programs will be tomorrow’s failed experiments. But the principles of godly truth and virtue that characterize an effective worker are timeless.

There is not a better model of a godly worker than the apostle Paul. In this very personal section of a very personal letter, Paul did not share a personal philosophy of ministry or explain a methodology for church growth. Instead, he opened his heart, revealing his spiritual aspirations and motives. His success was the overflow of his godly life.

The backdrop of this section is the devastating assault on the Corinthian church by false apostles. They had savagely attacked Paul’s credibility, forcing him to defend himself by presenting apostolic credentials. This section continues Paul’s sharp delineation of himself from the false apostles, contrasting his correct view of the Lord’s work with their wrong view. He does so by revealing five vital concerns of a true man (or woman) of God (2 Corinthians 12:12-19).

I. ***Paul’s Concern With Regard To The World: Faithfulness***

- A. Unlike the false apostles, who sought wealth, fame, and power, Paul’s goal was to be faithful to the Lord.
 - 1. Because he was determined to be loyal to God’s will no matter what the cost, he performed the signs of an apostle with patience.
 - 2. “Patience” means “to remain under.” Paul endured the pressure of worldly opposition throughout his work without abandoning his position (Romans 5:3).
- B. God’s spokesmen have always faced opposition and hostility (Jeremiah 1:17, 19; Ezekiel 2:6; Matthew 14:3, 10). Jesus predicted that His apostles would be persecuted (John 15:18-21; 16:2, 33), but Paul worked with joy under constant duress (1 Corinthians 15:31; cf. Acts 17:5-9; 19:23-41; 20:19). Not surprisingly, Paul’s affliction was a

constant theme in this epistle (2 Corinthians 1:3-9; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 7:5; 11:22-33; 12:7-10).

- C. On the other hand, false prophets do not face this opposition. Because they do not preach the truth, but deceitful, condemning lies, the world welcomes them enthusiastically. Because they proclaim God's word and call sinners to repentance, the world views true workers of Christ as their enemies (Matthew 10:22; John 3:20; 1 John 3:13).
- D. Because the world has nothing of lasting value to offer them, God's servants seek an eternal reward (Matthew 5:11-12; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Hebrews 11:6). Paul was determined to remain loyal to his calling despite the hostility from the world (2 Corinthians 4:17; cf. Romans 8:18; 1 Peter 4:13).

II. ***Paul's Concern With Regard To The Worker: Sacrifice***

- A. False teachers are greedy, grasping, and self-centered (Micah 3:2-3, 5). True people of God are the opposite; they are selfless and sacrificial. One of the many slanderous accusations the false apostles made against Paul was that his treatment of the Corinthians had been selfishly motivated.
- B. Paul had worked with Corinth in exactly the same way as he had in other churches (Romans 15:19). The only way the Corinthians were treated differently was that they did not get a bill (1 Corinthians 9:14). Paul had the right to take wages, but he chose not to, preferring to distance himself from the money-loving false apostles.
- C. They, of course, took everything they could get from the Corinthians (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:20), and hated Paul for making them look bad. They argued that Paul refused to take money because he knew his work was worthless and that he did not love the Corinthians and did not want to be obligated to them (2 Corinthians 11:7-9).
- D. Paul did not want their money; he wanted their hearts. He wanted their lives for the kingdom of God. He wanted them to live in righteous obedience to the glory of God.
 - 1. Paul illustrated his point with the analogy of parents caring for their children. The Corinthians were Paul's spiritual children (1 Corinthians 4:15).
 - 2. The superlative form of "very gladly" expresses extreme elation. Paul was thrilled with sacrificing for the Corinthians (Philippians 2:17; cf. Colossians 1:23-24).
 - 3. Because he was willing to sacrifice himself until he had nothing left to give, he followed Christ's great example (Mark 10:45).
- E. Sadly, the Corinthians responded inversely to Paul's self-sacrificial love for them, prompting his cry from the heart in vs. 15. The relationship

was going backwards; the more affection he gave them, the less they returned (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

III. ***Paul's Concern With Regard To The Ministry: Honesty***

- A. To get around the difficulty that Paul had not taken money from the Corinthians, the false apostles said that he had not yet sprung his trap. They argued that the money which was collected at Corinth for the saints in Jerusalem would go to line Paul's pockets. After all, that is what they would have done if they were in Paul's place (cf. Titus 1:15)!
- B. To refute these allegations, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he was not acting alone in taking the collection. Not only were the false apostles challenging the motives of Paul, but also of those who worked with him.
 - 1. If Paul had planned to embezzle the funds, he could not have acted alone. There would have had to have been collusion between him and his fellow laborers. That made the allegations even more far-fetched.
 - 2. Titus (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16, 23) was involved in the collection, as well as two unnamed brothers in Christ (2 Corinthians 8:18-19, 22). The idea that three highly respected individuals would join Paul in a plot to defraud the Corinthians was absurd.
- C. The Corinthians knew that Paul had worked among them without deceit (2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2). Honesty is a nonnegotiable characteristic of the true man (or woman) of God (Romans 9:1; 2 Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:7). Blamelessness must characterize the true man (or woman) of God (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Peter 3:14).

IV. ***Paul's Concern With Regard To The Lord: Reverence***

- A. Paul did not want the Corinthians to misinterpret his defense of his apostleship and integrity. He was not on trial before them, and they were not his judges. He also was not making excuses for his character and conduct, as the false apostles charged.
- B. God is the only audience of which the faithful Christian is concerned, and Paul had made that quite clear earlier (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). Because God will judge us, we should reverence and respect Him just as Paul (Psalm 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17).
- C. Paul knew that God alone would render the final verdict on his life -- and that verdict would be, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

V. ***Paul's Concern With Regard To The Church: Edification***

- A. Paul's goal in everything he did in relation to the Corinthian church, both in ministering to them and defending himself, was their edification or upbuilding.
- B. The question naturally arises, since God was Paul's judge, why should he bother to defend himself? He did so because if he were discredited the Corinthians would not listen to him; if they did not listen to him, they would not hear the truth; if they did not hear the truth, they could not grow spiritually.
- C. "Beloved" reminded the Corinthians that though he was at times exasperated with them, Paul nevertheless loved them. It was not his intent to use his apostolic authority to destroy them (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10). He wanted them better than they were (Romans 14:19). When you are around people do you make them better spiritually?

Conclusion. Paul was a good man who did a good work as an apostle. His concern for his spiritual children was strong. If we will look at the work of the Lord like Paul, our congregations will be filled with strong, caring Christians who are zealously committed to the greatest message on earth.

If you need to obey that message today, then do it while we provide this convenient opportunity. The members are hopeful and inviting, and the water is ready. Obey today and have your sins removed by the cleansing blood of Jesus.