

2 Corinthians 10:1 – 11:15

Anyone serving God in the church or elsewhere needs to read 2 Corinthians as this is the epistle setting out the pre-requisite and operation of ministry. Much of ministry today is framed in the secular business model and the principles of business such as strategic and operational planning are used.

The Conflict in Ministry

(10:1-11)

There is a change in tone from chapter 10. Before this Paul was talking about comfort and confidence in God, what God was doing in the hearts of the believers and the response therefrom. From this chapter, Paul became harsh and attacked the operations of the other so-called apostles. As a result, many have come to regard this as the second section in 2 Corinthians. Some have thought this to be the third letter to the Corinthians, the severe letter, in between 1 and 2 Corinthians. A reason for taking this stance is that Paul has concluded his letter in chapter 9 with these words, ‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!’ Rather than to see this exclamation as a conclusion to his letter, this should be seen as the foundation of all our giving, and indeed all that God has given to us. Others have argued for the unity of this letter. I suggest that we stick to the latter. We should see the unity of 2 Corinthians this way.

Paul was writing from a pastoral heart. He wanted to put to the Corinthians Christians the truth of the new creation in Christ. This was the result of God’s work in their hearts and so they should respond in the same way, i.e. from the new heart that had been implanted into them. Hence, he told them to enlarge their hearts to make room for others, but at the same time not be enmeshed with those who were not in the faith. It has to be God and God alone who is the author and finisher of our faith. So, what he was saying is that all that we are and have is from God and through us the honour returns to God. Having said all that and being very positive on the matter of ministry, Paul felt the need to point out the other side of the problem, i.e. the errors of others in ministry. In doing so, he did not mince his words. That is the way we should see this section of the epistle.

So, before Paul launched into the harshness, he began gently and explained the nature of his ministry.

Many of us struggled with ministry and so did Paul. There are different approaches and standards in ministry. In today’s culture much of what is standard in ministry have been borrowed from the secular world, i.e. ‘walking (*living*) according to the flesh’ (10:2) as Paul was accused of. That is to say that ministers are judged by their performance. Indeed, some churches have done just that, putting their ministers through a performance profile and presenting that to the church. That is terrible. As ministers we are judged by others according to their standards, which often is of the world, and we need to refute that. Paul did that. In doing so in his letters, he was accused of not daring to argue it out face to face with his opponents. These were the so-called super-apostles (2 Cor. 11:5, 12:11). They adopted the method of the world – fight it out in the open with arguments and counter arguments using conventional assumptions.

Paul acknowledged that ‘we walked in the flesh’, i.e. lived in the world, but against that, Paul said, ‘we are not waging war according to the flesh’ (10:3), i.e. not according to human standards. The divine power in our warfare is the word – the word of God which is ultimately Christ the *logos*. That is why in 1 Corinthians, while dealing with the problems of the church at Corinth, Paul made repeated references to the example of Christ.

It is true that in ministry we are out in front and people will see us and see the things that we do. However, we need to note that ‘the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh’ (10:4). What Paul means is that it is not the way we polish our performance that brings about the result. Of course, we take time to prepare and do the best we can with the gifts that God has given to us. There is a power behind what we do and that is the power of the cross. Paul was convinced that we ‘have divine power to destroy strongholds’, i.e. the strongholds of the devil in deceiving humankind. He continued, ‘we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ’ (10:5). All arguments are weakened when we are anchored to the underlying assumption which is submission to Christ. In other words, we do not engage those who attack us on their terms or on the premise with which they start. We need to get away from

their premise and engage them on our premise, i.e. Christ and all that He has done. Otherwise, they will be doing all the running.

Paul mentioned the weapon of our warfare, but did not give any detail here. However, he had mentioned earlier that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and has given to us the message of reconciliation. This is our weapon to destroy strongholds. This is what we do by the power of preaching, speaking the word of God. Beyond what we are doing is the 'divine power to destroy strongholds' (10:4). There is no other way to see ministry. And it is certainly not by smooth comforting words, though there is a place for that. And it is also not by philosophy appealing to the intellect. It is by the preaching of the word.

'Look at what is before your eyes' (v. 7) is Paul's way of asking them to open their eyes to see what was before them. Could they see the difference between Paul and the other 'apostles'? Paul then went on to point out that we are all in the body of Christ though he did not say exactly that. What he said is this, 'just as he is Christ's, so also are we' (10:7). Yet he is not alluding to an egalitarian oneness. He had authority as an apostle to bring the gospel to all lands and to instruct them in the faith and to correct them. This authority is for the building up.

Paul did not boast of what he had done, perhaps only a little. This is in comparison to the others who commended themselves. Even though Paul might have been a little stern with them, this is for their building up. They should be able to see the difference in the two approaches to ministry.

What we termed as our ministry must of necessity be the ministry of the Triune God. We participate in His ministry. So, the things that we do have to be what Christ is doing. That being so, then the comparison with others in ministry is irrelevant. There is no need to do that. As Paul made clear in 1 Corinthians, there are differing gifts but the same Lord. We are all serving the same Lord in our differing ways, like the different instruments of an orchestra under one baton. No one instrument is better than the other. It is their harmony that produces the music. When they start to compare with one another, they really have no understanding of what ministry is all about.

Some people have seen a contradiction between 'divine power to destroy strongholds' (10:4), and 'the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you' (10:8). I don't see the contradiction here because they belong to one and the same process of building up those who are in Christ. You cannot take the good news of the gospel and try to graft it onto an unacceptable base, eg. a base that depends on human effort. That has to be torn down, destroying strongholds, like dying with Christ on the cross. Only from that point on can the building up takes place. A plant cannot be healthy when put onto a substratum that cannot hold roots and nourish it. One has to throw that soil away and put the plant in a new potting mix.

Boasting in Ministry

(10:12-18)

Comparison in ministry is one of the deadliest things anyone serving God can do. It is self-destructive because the real ministry is that of God, not us. So, Paul continues here.

Paul continued to engage them on the issue of boasting, an attitude which characterized his opponents, the super apostles. There is a place for boasting in what God has called him to do. 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord' (v. 17). In other words, we 'boast' about what God is doing and has accomplished, but not what we have done and accomplished. While we may be proclaiming the gospel, the real work of reconciliation is done by the Spirit in the heart of the hearer.

In this section, Paul continued to address the problem of comparison in ministry. It is common for parishioners as well as ministers to compare size of churches with one another and the underlying assumption in those talks is bigger is better. Salary and status within the hierarchy are also issues in comparison. These are the issues that bother the world.

Ministry should not be measured by arbitrary standards set up by others. Neither should we measure it by standards that we set up for ourselves. The secular bookstores are full of books providing us with the standards of successful management. Our Christian bookstores are catching up with that trend. How then should ministry be thought of? Paul said we should only be concerned with ‘the area of influence God assigned to us’ (10:15). In other words, what counts in ministry is the area that God has called us to participate in His ministry. For Paul, his area of concern was ‘to reach even to you’ (10:13), i.e. reaching out to the saints in Corinth.

Paul also warned against ‘boasting’ – a word that can also mean to rejoice or to glory. It has reference to accounting for the work of ministry. When we ‘boast’ or give an account of ministry, it is not in the work of others and not even in our own works, but in the Lord, i.e. in what God is doing. So, when we report of success in ministry, it must be in terms of what God is doing and not in the success of our methods or efforts. So ‘let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’ (10:17). There is also a sense of transcendence here, i.e. we see beyond the work we do and what everyone is doing to the God who is fulfilling His purpose. So it is not in our own commendation, but in the commendation of the Lord.

Opposition and Deception in Ministry **2 Corinthians 11:1-15**

1. A Different Gospel (11:1-6)

The Corinthian Christians had been deceived by the super apostles, forsaking the gospel of grace and falling for the outward exhibition of power and performance. Though that may be appealing, they should have ‘a sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ (11:3). That is the response to the grace of God.

In the last chapter, Paul said that ‘we are not waging war according to the flesh’ (10:3). The divine power in our warfare is the word – the word of God (the written and preached word) which ultimately points to Christ the *logos*. In these verses, Paul pointed to the false word that came to Eve. He also mentioned the proclamation of another Jesus, i.e. another Word, and another Spirit. While Christ lives in us and the word is preached, yet what is preserved for us today is the written word from which we start. That is why Paul puts the word in such high regard as he has written earlier.

¹⁷For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Cor. 2:17)

If we don’t get the word right, then we will be peddlers and the result is a different gospel from which we will have a different christ. Paul was most intense when he wrote to the Galatians regarding this. He said a different gospel is anathema. This is the reason for his ‘divine jealousy’ (11:2), a jealousy which arises when the bride is wedded to a husband other than Christ. That is why it is so important for us to know who Jesus is and that knowledge comes from the Word.

We need to remember that Paul was dealing here with the so-called super apostles or false apostles. He used both terms interchangeably. Paul wrote a little more about them in the next chapter. These ‘apostles’ were more eloquent and Paul did not deny that. Again, we see that Paul was trying to tell them that ministry is not merely about the external, but about what Jesus has done for them and the Spirit that indwells their hearts.

This is the heart of the gospel – a covenant from beginning to end. Creation results from the covenant of love and it culminate in the marriage of the bride to the Lamb – a covenantal relationship of love. We have different gospels today and some of the points of divergence are the following.

1. A departure from the Triune doctrine.
2. A covenant of works rather than of grace.
3. Law instead of grace.

2. Single-mindedness in Ministry (11:7-11)

Paul accepted gifts from one church, but not another. He did not say why. What may it be? He continued by saying that the 'truth of Christ' (v. 10) was in him and he loved the Corinthians (v. 11). The reason for not taking the support from the Corinthian church is not clear here. We can only speculate here. Paul's calling was to preach the gospel and he did it with fervour. Monetary consideration was not his concern. He worked as a tentmaker to provide for his needs. In the ministry that he was doing he had the right to receive support from them (1 Cor. 9:14). However, not to receive support from them was a choice by Paul. Why? Perhaps he did not want to lose his independence by being financially obligated. Paul saw the situation as a mission that he was engaged in. The mother church supported him in the mission until the believers there were mature and spontaneously of their own accord, i.e. out of the willingness of their heart, come up with some support. This principle seems to have been forgotten in today's church planting. This seems to be built on a business model, i.e. the daughter church needs to be self-supporting by a certain period.

3. The Deception in Ministry (11:12-15)

In this section, Paul referred to the false apostles. He referred to the human element and the deceptive ways by which the people of God might be drawn away from Christ. Note the words Paul used to describe those who set out to deceive – 'boasters', 'false apostles', 'deceitful workers', 'false apostles of Christ', 'angel of light' and even 'servants of righteousness'.

Satan disguises as an angel of light and his (Satan's) servants disguise as servants of righteousness. Both are devices from Satan and as such are similar. Both are very difficult to deal with and often not recognised as such. Both appeared virtuous on the outside, saying and doing all the right things, but hiding a very evil intension. (Give examples.) Be very cautious when someone puts you on a high pedestal. Be very cautious when the deal seems too good to be true. The 'servants of righteousness' could well be the false apostles. They appeared to be righteous and were putting on a good performance. That could very easily draw many people to themselves, rather than to God.

Here, Paul said, 'what I am doing I will continue to do' (v. 12). What Paul was referring to here is that he would continue not to receive support from the Corinthians. This is in sharp contrast with the others who receive support and have their position compromised. We can see the difficult position that Paul finds himself, having to correct them and receiving support from them. He chose the former.