

THE MINISTER: HIS BEHAVIOUR BEFORE THE CHURCH

2 CORINTHIANS 12: 11–21

Introduction

How the minister behaves before the church is critical. Few subjects are as important as the minister's behaviour before people, especially before those whom he serves. Why? Because many lives are at stake — their present welfare and their eternal destiny.

- I. The minister seeks only to prove his ministry and call (vv. 11-12).
- II. The minister seeks only people, nothing else (vv. 13-18).
- III. The minister seeks only repentance from wrong-doers, from the carnal (vv. 19-21).

I. 2 Corinthians 12:11–12 Ministry and Call

The minister seeks only to demonstrate and prove his ministry and call. Some false teachers and critics in the Corinthian church had attacked Paul, his call and ministry. They had spread rumour after rumour about him in order to tear down his ministry. The rumours and attacks had caused a severe division in the church. (See *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22.) In the former chapters Paul has been forced to defend himself by talking about his call and ministry and about his own personal commitment to the Lord and His kingdom. Talking about himself had embarrassed Paul and it had hurt him. He said that such was glorying in oneself, and such glorying was foolishness, but the church had forced him to do it. How?

The church had forced Paul to boast in himself by not coming to his aid. The church should have defended Paul, but it had failed to silence the critics when they first arose. Now the situation had gotten out of hand. Therefore, Paul had no choice: for the sake of his ministry and for the protection of the church he had to defend himself and handle the critics and false teachers.

Note the specific charge against Paul: he was either an inferior apostle or minister or not an apostle or minister at all.

Paul answered in no uncertain terms: he was equal to any apostle or minister, and his ministry among the church proved it. The signs of an apostle had been wrought among the church. And note: they had been wrought under the most *severe circumstances* requiring great patience (endurance, perseverance, constancy). What were the signs? They were...

- “signs” (semeia): miracles.
 - “wonders” (terata): the effect of miracles upon the observers.
 - “miracles” (dunameis): great works; powerful deeds.
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Thought 1. Every church should come to the aid of its minister when critics arise to attack him. The leaders especially should come to his aid. No church should ever allow false teachers or critics to arise or to seep into its fellowship. If it does, the inevitable result is division.

Thought 2. Every minister should ask himself:

=> Could I *defend* my ministry if it became necessary to defend it?

=> Is my ministry *proven* by the signs of the ministry?

=> Is the presence and power of God *upon* my life and work?

=> Is my commitment to the ministry *equal to the commitment* of faithful ministers?

Mat 5:16 “*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

John 5:36 “*I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.*”

2 Cor 4:1-2 *Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.*

Eph 3:7 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

2 Tim 1:11-12 *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

1 Pet 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

II. 2 Corinthians 12:13–18 *Minister and Stewardship*

The minister seeks only people, nothing else. Two charges dealing with finances are made against Paul in these verses.

1. There was the charge that he had damaged the church’s image by not accepting financial support from the church. By not allowing the church to support him, he had made the church appear inferior to other churches who supported Paul. By failing to adequately support Paul, the church appeared to be...
 - inferior
 - worldly
 - neglectful
 - non-mission minded
 - carnal
 - unconcerned

- lacking love
- selfish
- miserly
- non-visionary
- self-centred

Paul's answer to the charges and criticism was threefold.

- a. Paul asked the church to forgive him this wrong. He did not mean for his action to reflect so negatively upon them. He loved them too much to deliberately make them appear inferior to anyone.
- b. Paul sought them for Christ, not their money. Paul was soon to visit the Corinthian church for a third time. Note that he planned to continue his policy: he would not be able to personally accept money from them. (See 2 Cor. 11:7-12.) His primary reason is clearly stated: he sought them for Christ, not their money. He must reach them and grow them in Christ. They were what he was after, not their money and possessions. The implication is that if he accepted their money his critics would say that he was mercenary and taking advantage of the church. Note that Paul drew support for his policy from the illustration of a father and his children. He says that he was the spiritual father of the church, and the father was the one who laid up for the children, not the children for the father.
- c. Paul loved the church with an intense love. He, as the minister of God, was the father and they were his dear children. He loved them deeply; therefore, he would gladly spend all he had and was for them:
=> all his money and possessions => all his time and effort
=> all his energy and strength => all his health and life

However, it seemed that the more he loved them, the less they loved him. They were just not showing and expressing their love nor defending him when critics spoke up against him.

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

John 15:12 *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Rom 13:8 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law.*

1 John 4:7 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

2. There was the charge that Paul took money through middle men (v. 17-18). This shows just how mean and unprincipled the critics of Paul were — how they strained to find things with which to criticize and charge Paul. They said that his policy in not

accepting money was a ploy, a crafty scheme; that he wanted to appear sacrificial and disinterested in money in order to keep from arousing suspicion about what he was really doing. What did they think he was doing? Using middle men to take advantage of the church financially. They said that when Titus and others were sent to challenge the church to underwrite special mission projects, Paul was confiscating some of the money. The charge was that Paul had “sticky fingers,” that some of the money given to the poor at Jerusalem was taken by Paul (cp. 2 Cor. 8:20-22).

Paul dramatically declared that the Corinthians knew the truth. He fired question after question at the church:

- => Did I take advantage or steal money from you by the messengers which I sent to you? The implied answer is forceful: You know better!
- => Did Titus take advantage or steal money from you? The implied answer is forceful: You know better!
- => Did not Titus and I have the same spirit of Christ? The implied answer is forceful: We have the same spirit of Christ! We belong totally to Christ.
- => Did not Titus and I walk in the same steps? The implied answer is forceful: We walk in the steps of Christ, living righteously and godly lives, not the lives of two crafty cheats and thieves.

Thought 1. The church is to adequately take care of its minister.

Mat 10:9-10 “Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey or extra tunic or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.”

1 Cor 9:14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

Gal 6:6 Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

Phil 4:14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

1 Tim 5:18 For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”

Thought 2. The minister must always guard against greed and worldliness, against giving any impression that he is a cheat or thief.

Mat 23:25 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”

Luke 3:13 “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

John 10:12 *“The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.”*

Isa 56:10-12 *Israel’s watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. “Come,” each one cries, “let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.”*

Jer 6:13 *“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.”*

Ezek 34:2-3 *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.’”*

III. 2 Corinthians 12:19–21 *Minister’s Concern*

The minister seeks only repentance from wrong-doers, from the carnal within the church. Note two points.

1. Paul had a deep awareness that he stood accountable to God and not to men. For what? To edify (build up) the church. He had not been defending himself before the church in order to have them pass judgment upon him. He was called by God, no matter what some of them thought. They were not his judge; God was his judge. Therefore, he had been speaking and defending himself before God. Why? Because God had called him to edify and build up the church. He had to defend himself before the church because God expected him to keep his ministry clean and clear so that he could minister freely and build up the believers in the church.

Rom 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

Rom 15:2-3 *Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”*

2 Cor 10:8 *For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.*

2 Cor 12:19 *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.*

Eph 4:11-12 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

Eph 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

2. Paul was stricken with fear, fear lest the church fail to be what it should be and reject him and his ministry. Paul feared that the church would fail to deal with the carnal critics and continue putting up with their evil attacks against him. He lists eight evils that were and still are characteristic of divisive critics in the church.

=> "Quarrelling" (ereis): strife, contention, rivalry, competitiveness.

=> "Jealousy" (zeloi): begrudging what others have, whether position, abilities, recognition, acceptance, loyalty, wealth or anything else.

=> "Outbursts of anger" (thumoi): fiery anger, fits of anger.

=> "Factions" (eirtheiai): a party-like spirit or clique that stands as a rival to others, a factious spirit caused by selfishness or self-seeking.

=> "Slander" (katalaliai): backbiting, insult, vilification, attacks.

=> "Gossip" (psithurismoi): behind-the-back talk, spicy rumour, secret and wild imaginations that are passed on to a close friend who has a close friend who has a close friend, and on and on.

=> "Arrogance" (phusioseis): pride, insolence, conceit, arrogance, haughtiness.

=> "Disorder" (akatastasiai): anarchy, confusion.

The point is forceful: the church is allowing such flagrant sins in its midst — all being caused by false teachers and critics. Paul says in no uncertain terms that unless the church and the carnal repent of their sins, he will deal with both when he arrives.

Remember: many in the church had already repented and experienced revival, but there were some who still persisted in their false teaching and in their critical and divisive spirit. And the church was still reluctant to deal with them. The church desperately needed to correct the situation.

Paul closes by adding three more sins from which some must repent:

=> "Impurity" (akatharsia): the impure, unclean, indulgent and extravagant things people do out in the world.

=> "Sexual sin" (pomeia): immorality, sexual vice, premarital sex, adultery.

=> "Debauchery" (aselgeia): sensuality and indecency; uncontrolled, undisciplined and unrestrained lust and passion.

Again, the point is forceful: those living in sin had to repent or else be dealt with and disciplined when Paul arrived. Paul had poured his heart out declaring his deep love for them (v. 15) and doing all he could to lead them to repentance. The decision was now up to them.

Mat 3:2 ... *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

Luke 15:21 *“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”*

Luke 18:10-14 *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Acts 8:22 *Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.*

Acts 17:30 *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

2 Chr 7:14 *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Ezek 18:21 *“But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.” ■*