

THE MINISTRY: AN OVERVIEW

2 CORINTHIANS 02: 12–17

Introduction

This is a clear picture of the minister and the ministry to which God has called him. It is a strong challenge for the minister to be just what God has called him to be and to do just what God has called him to do.

- I. The minister is gripped with a passion (vv. 12-13).
- II. The minister always triumphs in Christ (v. 14).
- III. The minister is a sweet fragrance to God (vv. 15-16).
- IV. The minister has stern demands laid upon him (vv. 16-17).

I. 2 Corinthians 02: 12–13 *Passion for Ministry*

The minister is gripped by a burning passion to preach and a deep concern for troubled churches. Paul is still describing his great love and concern for the believers in the Corinthian church (v. 4).

When he was forced to leave Ephesus (See *Paul's Suffering*, 2 Cor. 1:8-10), he had planned to go to Corinth, but the personal attacks against him by some members made it unwise (see notes, 2 Cor. 1:23-2:4). Instead of making a personal visit, he felt it would be much wiser to try to solve the problem by writing a stern letter to them. He apparently sent Titus to Corinth with the stern letter and with instructions to do what he could to help the church in correcting the controversy. After he had done all he could, Titus was supposed to meet Paul in Troas where Paul would be ministering. The point is twofold.

1. The minister had a burning passion to preach Christ. Paul could not sit still; he had to preach Christ. He wanted to minister in Corinth, but the Corinthian church had allowed a clique to form against him. Therefore, it was impossible to minister there. But Paul could not cease to minister; God had called him and he could not fail God. The passion to preach Christ burned within him. The Corinthians might shut the door to his ministering among them, but they could not stop him from ministering elsewhere. Therefore, he changed his plans; he went to Troas. And because he was faithful in seeking opportunities to preach and minister, the Lord opened a great door of ministry for him at Troas.

1 Cor 9:16 ...*For I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

Luke 9:60 *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

Acts 5:20 *"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."*

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

2. The minister had a deep concern for troubled churches. The Corinthian church was in trouble, serious trouble. As with any faithful minister, Paul's heart reached out to all involved. Week after week passed, apparently stretching into several months, and no word had come from Titus about the welfare of the Corinthian church. Paul was anxious and concerned. As he said, "I still had no peace of mind [relief]." The situation got to Paul: he could not stand the suspense any longer. Therefore, he struck out for Macedonia looking for Titus along the great highway stretching across the province.

Acts 20:31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

2 Cor 11:18 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

2 Cor 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

Gal 4:11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

1 Th 3:10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

II. 2 Corinthians 02:14 Minister's Victory in Christ

The minister always triumphs in Christ. Paul found Titus, and he covers the meeting in Chapter 7. The news was glorious: the church had responded and experienced revival. Just the thought of what had happened in the church caused Paul to break forth in thanksgiving. Paul had every reason to thank God, for he had been heavily criticized and attacked by a clique in the church and the church was about to be destroyed by controversy and divisiveness. He thanked God for the glorious triumph which God always gives to His ministers through Christ. God never fails His ministers, and He had not failed Paul. He had caused Paul to *triumph in Christ*.

The picture of triumph is descriptive. It is the picture of a military commander returning to Rome after some great victory. The commander was always welcomed into the city in a great march of triumph. Most people have seen such scenes in films either on television or in movies.

What Paul pictures is the triumph of Christ. He sees God giving Christ the glorious and triumphant victory as the Word of God is proclaimed throughout the world. And Paul sees himself, as a minister of God, being a part of that glorious and triumphant victory.

Note several points.

1. It is God who causes the minister to triumph. God Himself is looking after the minister, never taking His eyes or care off His dear servant. The journey may sometimes get rough, and the minister may even be attacked and abused, but God never forsakes the minister.
2. God always causes the minister to triumph over all attacks and all trouble and problems. The true minister of God will never know defeat — not permanently. Even if he falls and fails for a period of time, God will eventually reach him and restore him and continue to use him. God will *always* cause His dear servant to triumph over all. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that can conquer and gain the final victory and triumph over God’s minister — not if he is truly called of God. The glorious triumph over all is assured.
3. The triumph of the minister is “in Christ” and in Christ alone. The minister must...
 - believe in Christ
 - minister in Christ
 - trust in Christ
 - live in Christ
 - be called in Christ
 - move in Christ
 - serve in Christ
 - be in Christ

The minister is no different from anyone else: his only victory is in Christ. He must trust and live in Christ just as everyone else. He is not acceptable to God apart from Christ. His acceptance before God is based upon the same thing as everyone else’s: faith in Christ. Therefore, to triumph “*in Christ*” the minister must be “in Christ”; that is, he must *believe in* and *live in* Christ. The minister triumphs in Christ and in Christ alone.

4. God uses the minister to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere. This is the reason God causes the minister to triumph: to spread the glorious message of Christ all over the world. God is out to reach every person He can: to see to it that every person knows about the love of Christ. The word “fragrance” simply means fragrance or aroma, like the fragrance of a flower. God spreads the fragrance of His Word through His ministers.

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Rom 8:35-37 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

2 Cor 2:14 *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Rev 2:26 *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.*

Rev 3:5 *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

Rev 3:12 *Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.*

Rev 3:21 *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

Rev 21:7 *He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*

III. 2 Corinthians 02:15–16 *Minister, Fragrance to God*

The minister is a sweet fragrance to God, for he spreads the message of Christ among the saved and the perishing. The picture is that of a flower. The flower is a sweet fragrance to men; therefore, the flower is acceptable to men. The minister is a sweet fragrance to God; therefore, the minister is *acceptable* to God. But it means more than just being acceptable, much more. It means this: to God the minister is...

- acceptable
- precious
- pleasing
- worthy of attention
- enjoyable
- worthy of care
- worthy of preservation
- satisfying
- fulfilling

Thought 1. This is a most reassuring and comforting truth to the minister, especially the minister who is under attack as Paul had been. The minister is precious, very precious to God; he is under the wing of God’s eternal love and care.

Note what it is that makes the minister a sweet fragrance to God. It is the fact that the minister spreads the message (“knowledge”) of Christ, and note to whom he spreads it: to both the saved and the perishing. The minister is the fragrance of life to those who are saved and the fragrance of death to those who perish. Wherever the faithful minister is, he spreads the fragrance of life and death, the message that men can have life in Christ or else the message that men shall die without Christ — die and be separated from God eternally.

Picture the faithful minister in a room with a group of people. The minister’s presence and words give off a fragrance to everyone present.

1. To the saved, the minister represents the life that is in Christ, the fact that our lives are to be dedicated to God and ministering to the needs of people. The minister spreads the fragrance “of life,” that people can live now and live forever.

2. To the unsaved (those who perish), the minister represents death, the fact that one does not believe in the life of Christ represented by the minister. Therefore, the minister spreads the fragrance of death unto death, that people are dead to God now and shall be eternally dead to God in the hereafter.

Thought 1. The message of Christ is either life or death to a person.

- 1) Christ is either counted precious and accepted or counted unworthy and rejected.

1 Pet 2:7 *Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."*

- 2) Christ is either loved as the Light of the world or hated as the Light of condemnation.

John 3:19-20 *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*

IV. 2 Corinthians 02:16–17 Demands Laid upon the Minister

The minister has stringent demands laid upon him. The minister has an awesome responsibility. Just imagine being responsible for a message that involves both *eternal life and eternal death*.

Who is sufficient or qualified for such a task? Is any man? Paul says, "Yes," but not many. The only men who are qualified are those who meet five stringent demands.

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.*

1. The qualified man does not "peddle or corrupt the word of God." The word "peddle" or "corrupt" (*kapeleuontes*) is taken from an old word meaning huckster or peddler. It means to peddle, to adulterate, to whittle down, to contaminate, to tamper with the Word of God. It means to mix other things into the gospel, for example, personal ideas, speculations, the latest religious fads or novel ideas.

Mat 22:29 *Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."*

2 Cor 2:17 *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.*

2 Cor 4:2 *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.*

2. The qualified man "speaks in Christ." He speaks in the communion and fellowship and power of Christ. He does not speak in his own energy and strength, but in the energy and strength of Christ. He lives in fellowship with Christ; therefore, when

he witnesses and preaches, he is able to share the fellowship and presence of Christ under the anointing of the Lord's presence.

John 15:4-7 *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

Mat 28:20 *“And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Luke 24:32 *They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

1 Cor 1:9 *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

Heb 10:22 *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

Psa 145:18 *The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

3. The qualified man lives “before God.” He is conscious and aware of God's presence, knowing that he lives and moves in the sight of God every moment of every day. He knows...
 - that God *sees* him in his every need; therefore, God looks after and cares for him.
 - that God *sees* everything he does; therefore, he walks carefully and righteously so that he can please God.

1 Tim 2:3-6 *This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

Heb 13:20-21 *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

4. The qualified man is “sincere” (eilikrineia). This means that the minister and his motives are pure and unadulterated, that he and his motives have been shaken and

rolled through a sieve. The minister is unstained and untainted when inspected. He is in the ministry to serve God and to help people. He is not in the ministry because he respects it as a profession, nor for any other reason. God has called him, and he is gripped by the necessity to serve God.

2 Cor 2:17 *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.*

Phil 1:10 *So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

5. The qualified man is “from God.” He is called, commissioned and sent by God; and he lives by the grace and strength of God and for God. It also means that he is “of God,” of God’s nature and character, living a *godly life*.

Eph 5:1 *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.*

1 Pet 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” ■*