

MARKS OF AN APOSTLE

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Few things can ruin a family visit more than quarreling.

Instead of enjoying our time together,
we end up fighting over old hurts
or falling into old habits of bickering and complaining.

Parents try to control their adult children;
children act disrespectful of their parents and criticize one another.

As Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians,
He wants to go back and enjoy fellowship with his brothers and sisters.

But he's concerned about going home to a quarrel.
He hopes to have a wonderful time of celebration with the family,
rather than face a family feud.

If the Corinthians prepare for his visit by listening to his instructions,
they will have a great visit.

If they ignore him, it will be a time of anger and bitterness.

VINDICATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 10-13

Paul responds to those who attack his ministry as inferior to others.

He demonstrates his God-given, apostolic authority.

Paul has adequate basis for boasting about himself,
if that's what they want to hear.

He doesn't enjoy bragging,
BUT—circumstances force him into it.

After responding to man's perspective which focuses on strength
as the indicator of greatness, Paul points to God's perspective
on greatness:

God's power is made perfect in weakness. 12:5-10

When people see how weak we are, they see how great
God is!

PRESSURE FOR FOOLISHNESS 12:11-13

Paul feels he should apologize for his prolonged boasting.

They should be commending Paul. 11

¹¹ *I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.*

“You forced me to be foolish! You should be commending me!”

He shouldn't have to boast.

They have sufficient evidence to boast for him.

Earlier Paul observed that *their changed lives* are the best evidence of the value of his ministry.

It's due to his ministry that *they're growing* in Christ.

Instead of boasting about him, they're boasting about “super-apostles.”

Paul isn't inferior to their “super-apostles.”

Though he isn't placing confidence in *his* strength.

He approaches them with a godly balance.

He's confident of his God-given authority.

Yet he demonstrates God-produced humility.

He is nothing. It's not about him! He's but a servant.

They have witnessed the marks of an apostle in him. 12-13

¹² *The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.* ¹³ *How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!*

He reminds them of some of the proofs they have seen.

List includes supernatural evidences of God's seal of authority.

Sign gifts were given to the apostles to verify their message.

Paul was no less in that area than their “super-apostles.”

BUT, that's not what makes him an apostle.

Paul points to additional evidence of an apostle.

He cared enough to bring the gospel to them in the first place.

He established the church in their community.

He ministered faithfully and taught them God's Word for years.

He persevered in ministering in spite of persecution and suffering.

When they go astray, he cares enough about them to tell them the truth, whether they appreciate it or not.

His ministry among them demonstrates his calling as an apostle.

They aren't treated as inferior to any of the churches.

The only way they've been treated as inferior is that

Paul consistently refuses to place a burden on them.

He refuses to insist on his *rights* as an apostle.

PAUL PRESENTS THE EVIDENCE OF A TRUE APOSTLE

The work he does is in no way inferior to any of the apostles.

They witnessed God's supernatural work through Him.

So THEY should be speaking up for him.

Yet he doesn't insist on His rights as an apostle.

He doesn't tell them he won't work among them

unless they pay him a salary worthy of an apostle!

PREPARATION FOR A VISIT 12:14-18 14-16

¹⁴ Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? ¹⁶ Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!

As Paul gets ready to visit his family at Corinth, he tries to prepare them to enjoy the time of celebration together.

PAUL SHARES THE ATTITUDE OF A TRUE APOSTLE

[He reminds them how . . .]

He refuses to be a burden to them.

In 1 Cor. 9 Paul indicates that he could impose a burden on them, but he refuses to do that.

He refuses to allow his needs to get in the way of serving them.

3 times he says that he refuses to be a burden **13, 14, 16**

¹³ *How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? . . .*

¹⁴ *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, ...*

¹⁶ *Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. . . .*

He's refused in the past.

On this new visit, he still won't be a burden to them.

He won't be. His messengers won't be.

Rather than seek personal benefit from them, he's committed to invest in them.

True ministry selflessly seeks the welfare of others.

—on any level—Sunday School teachers, ushers, pastors or missionaries!

Paul refuses to exploit them for personal benefit.

He isn't willing to let anyone accuse him of serving for money.

They misunderstand: "he must not be *worth* as much as the super-apostles—who are well-paid and serve for profit!"

Paul isn't seeking their possessions.

He doesn't want their money, or their things.

Paul is seeking them.

He won't let them think their money is more important.

[He uses a common illustration from family life:]

Parents don't collect money from their children.

Parents spend their resources for their children.

"I'm willing to spend all I have for your sake!"

Children often don't appreciate how much parents sacrifice.

Parents want children to be grateful. *Corinthians don't get it!*

Rather than appreciate servant attitude, they look down on him. He demonstrates love for them.

They follow leaders who seek their own benefit.

Some may actually be thinking Paul is a "con man."

He's serving them selflessly to manipulate them and make them think he's a man of integrity, so they'll follow him.

Everything he does contradicts that assumption, but they have to come up with *some* way to discredit him.

The false leaders accuse him of the very tricks they're using to manipulate people and get them to follow them.

Paul's godly character and unwillingness to exploit them is also evident in those he sends as his representatives.

17-18

¹⁷ Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?

They reflect the character of their leader.

They've learned from his example.

They imitate what they've seen in him.

CONCERN BEFORE GOD 12:19-21

PAUL FEELS THE CONCERN OF A TRUE APOSTLE

After several chapters of defending himself in the light of the critics' accusations, they might assume that Paul's interest is to defend himself to them. **19**

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.*

His concern isn't what THEY think about his ministry.

His concern is about what GOD thinks.

We give account to God; not to man.

Grammar emphasizes "to you" and "before God".

Our ultimate defense is not before you.

Our ultimate defense is before God.

He's saying these things for their edification; not to defend himself.

He's concerned for their welfare.

He's afraid their response will lead to negative attitudes, and, ultimately, to judgment.

He wants them to experience God's *blessing* and mutual enjoyment

–NOT negative, critical attitudes that will ultimately destroy them.

Paul is afraid *they* won't fulfill his expectations. **20**

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 quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.*

Paul is afraid *he* won't fulfill their expectations.

That difference will lead to tension and struggle

Descriptions depict frustration

when people don't match our expectations.

When we don't get what we want or expect, . . .

We fuss at each other, complain and criticize.

We talk about people behind their back.

We become angry and bitter.

We gossip about people who disappoint us or disagree with us.

Not a pretty picture; too often that's what church looks like!

—it ultimately destroys the church!

In light of his plan to visit,

Paul wants them to turn from their sinful attitudes. **21**

²¹ *I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

Paul is afraid God will humble him in front of them.

He's humbled because, with all he invested in them,
he can't stop them from going their own way.

We like to think that if we can just help people see truth,
we can convince them to live a godly life.

When they don't respond as we hope, we feel WE've failed.

It's humbling to realize we can't convince people to do right!

Paul's afraid he'll mourn because of their condition.

He may come and find some who are still going their own way.

These descriptions correspond to the fruit of the flesh in Gal. 5.

When we try to do it ourselves,

when we struggle to make things come out our way,
the result is ugly!

Their doctrinal error—thinking we must perform well and do it ourselves—ultimately leads to the fruit of the flesh.

If they continue to pursue the ways of the flesh—their own desires

—Paul will grieve over them, rather than enjoy them.

Getting together will not be a source of pleasure.

What principles for our lives does Paul reveal?

1. We ought to imitate that godly balance between acknowledging God's calling to serve Him and humility.

God has called and gifted each of us to serve Him.

We haven't been given *apostolic* authority.

WE don't have the "marks of an apostle."

But we do have "the marks" of people called to serve Him.

God has called each of us to serve Him in some way.

We recognize His calling, and represent Him faithfully.

Yet we ought to represent Him *HUMBLY*.

We're *nothing!* *It's not about us!* We're but servants.

2. We ought to imitate that attitude of sacrifice, refusing to seek personal benefit for ourselves.

Are we more concerned about getting something for ourselves, or about the welfare of those we serve?

Are we trying to get more for ourselves, or investing in others?

Are we just trying to exploit people to get what WE want?

3. We ought to reflect concern for the welfare of others.

Not trying to obligate others to conform to our image.

Not trying to obligate others to live up to our expectations.

Not complaining when others don't do what we want them to do.

But rather, seeking to build up others, that we together might become all that God wants us to become.

Paul has the marks of an apostle.

A confident, but **humble**, assurance of God's calling, affirmed by signs of God's work through him.

An attitude of **willingness to sacrifice** our rights and desires, to see people built up to become all God wants us to be.

A concern for the welfare of others motivates us to grieve when people fall short and experience the frustration, judgment, and self-destruction that comes from not following God's pattern for His people.

We may not be "apostles" in unique sense that qualified the twelve and Paul. But how about God's work through each of us today. Are these marks of God's work evident in our ministry, however He may have called us to serve Him?

- * **Assurance of God's work**

- * **Willingness to sacrifice**

- * **Concern for others**

These were unusual qualities among leaders in their day.

They're still strange in our self-promoting culture!

But they are appropriate among those who realize that when we are WEAK we are strong, because God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Are they marks of OUR lives?