

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

We've all met people who seem unable to stop talking about themselves.

Richard Pratt made a hospital visit to a woman who'd been in a serious car accident, suffering from multiple injuries.

While there, a friend came to visit, expressed sympathy, and began to describe at great length how they had stubbed their toe that morning, and how terribly it hurt!

"It's all black and blue now, and I might even lose my toe nail!"

Some people just can't stop talking about themselves.

That's true in ministry too.

Some people get excited about what we accomplish; we can't stop talking about it.

As you listen to Paul talk about the privilege of ministry God has given him, you might think that **Paul** has that problem.

Except as you listen to him, you realize **HE's NOT the subject of conversation!**

It's NOT about him! It's about GOD!

GOD deserves credit for everything Paul accomplishes!

Paul's purpose in talking about his ministry is **NOT self-promotion.**

Theme: The Joy of Serving Jesus

The *privilege* of the ministry 1-7

Distinguishing feature: glimpse into the heart of God's servant.

Paul's motivation, concern for God's people, and joy in serving Jesus are evident.

It's the expression of what Paul's heart feels.

**EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S CONDUCT AND MINISTRY
1-7**

Explanation of his delay in visiting them and of the ministry God called him to.

THANKSGIVING FOR COMFORT IN SUFFERING

1:3-11

Praise to God for the comfort He sends His children when we need it.

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S DELAY 1:12-2:13

When he fails to visit them, some accuse him of taking this trip lightly, of speaking out of “both sides of his mouth.”

Paul answers the accusation by denying that he took the promise lightly.

He does not say one thing and do another.

Paul wrote to spare *them*.

He'd rather go personally to see them.

He knows he'll have to judge them if he goes.

To avoid judgment he writes, to give time to correct the problem.

Paul sends Titus to deal with the problem; he's concerned about the consequences.

He couldn't wait for his return, so he goes to Macedonia to find him.

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 2:14-7:16

THE JOY OF MINISTRY 2:14-16

Abrupt change from Paul's lack of peace over not hearing from Titus, to his spontaneous expression of joy, seems to imply that the good news of their response motivates him to celebrate.

Paul is grateful to God and rejoices in the victory.

The joy of victory stirs Paul to write about the privilege of ministry.

God's servants, who participate in ministry, have been given an incredible *privilege*.

What motivates people to want to serve the Lord?

It isn't the hope of financial rewards.

Paul doesn't obtain prestige.

He experiences abandonment, ridicule and criticism, threats to his life, hardships.

Why would anyone want to go there?

Paul celebrates TWO PRIVILEGES people in ministry enjoy:

Both of these are *GOD'S* doing!

1. GOD always leads us in a victory march with Christ.

A victory parade awarded to conquering generals on return home.

Ostentatious celebrations, filled with valiant soldiers and the spoils of war.

Prisoners are forced to march through town to celebrate their defeat.

They delight in showing off defeated leaders and warriors.

—bound in chains, dragged before the chariot of their conqueror.

In our celebration, God, the Victor, has vanquished His enemies; Paul marches in *God's* parade.

We're on the winning side! There's plenty to celebrate!

Paul reminds us of the importance of *perspective*.

Do we focus on all the terrible things going on around us?

Or, do we focus on what GOD is doing?

Paul affirms: **we aren't VICTIMS; we're VICTORS!**

We're on the winning side!

Contrary to popular opinion, and much popular preaching; doesn't mean God's people never suffer or face hard times!

Paul faces suffering—yet realizes he participates in God's victory parade.

He isn't saying that every time we preach the gospel we'll have "success."

We may fall flat on our faces.

We may face rejection and suffering.

People may laugh at us.

But, **we know how the battle ends.**

God is continually leading us in the great parade—the march to victory.

God uses us in the triumphant accomplishment of His glorious will.

We know who wins; we triumph with him—whatever God allows us to face now

Every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God will be glorified.

HE WINS!

As we remind ourselves of God's victory, we won't see ourselves as victims.

That's cause to celebrate: **we're part of the victory march.**

Second, we can celebrate because, . . .

2. GOD spreads the aroma of His knowledge through us.

He uses us to disseminate the knowledge of Himself in the Gospel. —to spread the fragrance everywhere.

Similar to a victory parade, the aroma of incense is a token of victory and honor for conquering legions—while the defeated know it leads to death.

The gospel likewise has a two-pronged affect:

Messengers of the gospel announce opposite results for two groups:

To those who are being saved, it is the aroma of life.

For people who receive truth and trust Christ, our fragrance leads to life.

To those who are perishing, it is the stench of death.

For people who reject truth and refuse to trust Him, the odor leads to death.

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MINISTRY 2:16c-3:6a

What does it take to qualify for such a task? 2:16c

After celebrating victory, he describes qualifications for people in ministry:

1. True ministers aren't in it for the money.

2:17a

The profit motive drives *false* teachers—it shouldn't drive *us*.

False teachers tell us what we want to hear to keep us—and our money.

That may be the way to grow a big church and earn the big bucks, but it's not the way to develop faithful followers of Christ.

Paul's ministry isn't like that!

2. True ministers are aware we serve in God's presence 2:17b

They speak sincerely.

They speak on God's behalf. Our message is from God—not men.

It's not about pleasing men and making a profit.

It's about pleasing God and speaking as His representatives.

Contrary to false teachers who use their message for personal gain,

God's messengers seek to please *God*.

They produce followers that demonstrate the validity of their message.

The Corinthians are the evidence for his ministry 3:1-3

Paul anticipates that his opponents might accuse him of self-exalting arrogance.

Does Paul need to “toot his own horn?”

When he talks about himself as qualified like this, is he just bragging?!

What evidence can he present to prove that he meets these qualifications?

Their lives demonstrate that God is at work in them.

Their lives affirm that Paul is a qualified, faithful minister.

Letters of commendation were normally presented when traveling from one community to another.

Paul doesn’t need a letter to recommend him to the church at Corinth.

They know him well—they could write the letter for him!

They’re the best “letter of commendation” he could ask for.

Their transformed lives authenticate his message.

When God’s at work, our lives demonstrate the reality of our faith.

God’s work isn’t affirmed by “ABC”s: attendance, buildings and collections, but by transformed lives that demonstrate the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts.

They attest to the value of Paul’s ministry.

Our letter of recommendation . . .

. . . is NOT written with pen and ink.

. . . is NOT written on stone tablets.

. . . IS engraved by God’s Spirit.

. . . IS engraved on the heart.

Requirements for successful ministry aren’t achieved by human ability. 3:4-6a

Paul is confident the fruit of his ministry will be evident.

He's sure he'll pass inspection.

*** NOT because he's competent in himself to pull it off!**

*** We can't produce competence.**

We can't produce that kind of fruit. Only GOD can do that!

This attitude flies in the face of the self-confidence and self-glorification prominent in modern culture.

We can't claim anything for ourselves. *We can't do this!*

*** Only God can produce competence in ministry.**

Corinthians are evidence that God has made him competent for ministry.

GOD ENABLES US

TO STAND FIRM IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY AND TO MINISTER COMPETENTLY FOR HIM. 1:21-

22 – 3:4-6a – 4:7

WHAT LESSONS FOR OUR LIVES DOES PAUL REVEAL?

People who represent God speak sincerely,
as people accountable *to GOD* for what we say.

It's not about pleasing our audience!

When we serve God, we place our confidence in *God* to do *HIS* work through us.

It's about HIM; NOT us!

Whether we're talking about . . .

teens initial efforts to serve God, as evidenced last Sunday and yesterday,

or the pastoral staff's ministry on Sunday morning, *it's NOT about US!*

This is GOD's work and He deserves the glory for whatever is accomplished.

Are we trying to trade *our* efforts to replace work that only God's Spirit can accomplish?

Have we told God, "*I'd rather do it myself, thank you!*"

Are we trying to be competent in *our* strength,
rather than let God produce His supernatural competence in us?

When we serve God, we expect Him to work through us for His glory.

Our youth can expect that, when they seek to serve him.

So can we, as we seek to serve Him each Sunday.

We're participating in His victory parade!

He gets glory for what He does!