

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 27 May 2007

No. T0471

Speaker: Mr. David Pulman

The marks of a Minister - in the Lord - 2 Corinthians 10-11

Introduction

As I prepare for this talk, the leaders of the “Anglican Communion” gather in the wonderful area of Dar es Salaam in another debate over homosexuality. If a person is a Christian, then their handbook for Christian living is the Bible. One of the central themes that run through Scripture is obedience to God as revealed in His word. There is a need to “bite the bullet”. As we will see in Chapters 10 and 11, Paul was more than ready to do so concerning the problems of his day!

As we move to consider chapters 10 and 11 this morning, we embark upon a change in 2 Corinthians. Paul is being opposed by some who have arrived at Corinth saying that there is no way that he looks or behaves like an apostle. 10:10 states, “‘For his letters,’ they say, ‘are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.’” Their criticism was the contrast between the letters that Paul wrote to them “weighty and powerful”, meaning that they contained serious matters on Christian teaching and conduct, but when in their presence he looked totally the opposite, his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible. The critics of Paul were saying that he was a pathetic figure and not worth listening to. As they opposed Paul, the critics presented themselves as worthy persons to be held in high esteem. Verse 12 shows their false logic of comparing themselves with themselves! “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” It is this last part of the verse, which shows what kind of people they were. Paul counters this at the end of chapter 10 with these words, “For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.”

Paul, as with all those who have a genuine concern for the welfare of other believers, did not look for approval from his brethren but served to gain the Lord’s approval. In the end, it is only what the Lord approves of that will last and have value, both now and in the future. Paul affirms this attitude to Timothy in his 2 Timothy 1:12, when he states, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day”.

It will be helpful to consider the marks of a minister under the following headings:

- A minister’s authority
- A minister’s conduct in the Gospel
- A minister’s commitment

A minister’s authority – God appointed (key verse 10:13)

Let us look in some detail at Paul’s comments in this chapter 10. In the opening verses, Paul indicates that his manner towards the Corinthians would be of the same character as that found in Christ – “meekness and gentleness”. Paul had a genuine concern for them. He did not want to come to them with a rod of discipline; much better that they responded to his strongly worded letter and adjusted their ways into right Christian living before he came. Therefore Paul pleads with them to respond positively to his teaching so that when he comes, he will have joy as far as they are concerned and reserve his condemnation and discipline for his critics. As we find in verse 2, “But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh”.

Here Paul points out that he and his companions did not operate in the flesh, that is, according to nature as one of Adam’s race. Yes, Paul was a real person in the flesh. However, concerning spiritual matters, Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul taught God’s word as revealed to him in prayerful dependence upon God. Paul would have Christ and Christ only exalted in their lives, not himself or any other person.

In verses 4-6, Paul states, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your

obedience is fulfilled.” Here Paul states that in the Christian warfare we do not use natural ability. We have to use those weapons provided by God. Examples of weapons available are listed in Ephesians 6:11-18, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

The armour is described in graphic terms, based on the Roman soldier of that day. The spiritual armour described is detailed as follows; truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, the knowledge or protection of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and prayer. Let us notice again that in this list there is no place for self and natural ability; it is the armour of God. This was how Paul would deal with his critics. Such mighty weapons are both a defence and solution regarding those with wrong Christian teaching and practice, see verse 5. Paul desired that every thought would be under the control of Christ and, where there was disobedience, then appropriate discipline would be applied, verse 6.

Paul totally belonged to Christ. This had been demonstrated time and again by his concern for other believers. In verse 8, Paul speaks of the authority the Lord gave him. What was the reason that Paul had authority from the Lord? It was “for edification and not for your destruction”. It is very easy to be a demolition expert when dealing with believers, a wrong word or action and much damage may result – sometimes irreparable. In spiritual matters, a tremendous amount of effort goes into building up believers. This was Paul’s objective as far as the Corinthians were concerned.

Now Paul’s strongly worded letters were not intended to upset the Corinthians, but to bring them round to what was right. In verse 10, Paul clearly affirms that just as he was in his letters he would be when he arrived at Corinth. Paul would deal strongly and decisively with the critics and if necessary with any wrong Christian ideas that might have gained a foothold in the Corinthian assembly, see verse 11. Paul was not like those who self congratulated themselves, as verse 12 states.

In verses 13-18, Paul reminds the Corinthians that it was he and his companions who first came to Corinth. They brought the Gospel, which the Corinthians believed, verse 14. To this end, Paul had a right to be concerned about them. Paul’s work did not stop with the preaching of the Gospel. He followed through with sound Christian teaching, desiring their establishment in the faith, verse 15. Unlike those who were causing trouble among the Corinthians, Paul did not boast about the achievements of other apostles as though they were his own. Our boast should be in the Lord, that the Lord may show His commendation, verse 18.

A minister’s conduct in the Gospel – free of charge (key verse 11:7)

Let us move on to chapter 11 and consider further Paul’s great concern for those whom he had brought to faith in Christ, as stated in 1 Corinthians 4:15, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”

As we look at verses 1 and 2, we see Paul’s strong concern for them, asking them to bear with him. In verse 2, “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ” (English Standard Version). In this expression, we see how Paul desired them to be untainted from sin and failure. If this was not enough, Paul goes on in verse 3, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” The teaching of those who opposed Paul was bringing in error, which fundamentally was disobedience to God’s word.

Paul, in verse 4, outlines what was happening. The Corinthians were accepting or, at the very least, allowing the propagation of wrong teaching: “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough” (English Standard Version). Yet, in relation to Paul, their father in the faith, they readily accepted the slanderous reports made by those who would divert them from the simplicity that is in Christ. No wonder Paul was grieved to see the work of God corrupted in this way.

From verse 5, Paul begins to show the Corinthians in very plain language what he was to them. In verse 5, Paul declares he was not inferior to these so called ‘super or eminent apostles’; no doubt a reference to those who opposed him. In verse 6, Paul acknowledges his lack of training in speech, yet Acts 14:12 shows us that his speech was powerful when he proclaimed the Gospel. However, Paul lacked nothing in the knowledge of Scripture. Further to this, Paul appeals to the Corinthians themselves and states that he and his companions in this work were open or

manifest to them, not hiding anything from them. There was no deceit or guile with Paul. Paul preached what he believed and put the same into practice.

In verse 7, Paul declares that he did not exalt himself when with them. He humbled himself that they might be exalted. Paul did not take a penny from them as he worked and preached the Gospel free of charge. The Gospel is God's free proclamation to this world. If a price had to be paid, then God paid it at the cross when the Lord Jesus Christ died for sin. In verse 8, Paul uses strong language to highlight the benefit freely given to the Corinthians. "I robbed other churches..." In other words, Paul and his companions were supported by other assemblies; no burden was placed on the Corinthians. This was how much Paul cared for them! The Macedonians were one source of help to Paul, see verse 9. See also Acts 18:1-3, which tells us that Paul worked at the occupation of tent maker when at Corinth.

As we come to verse 10, Paul insists upon his right to boast of his work of God at Corinth. Why? Because, Paul had a love for the Corinthians. A love that sought to protect and instruct them in the right ways of the Lord. Those who opposed Paul were seeking to take the glory to themselves concerning the work of God at Corinth. Paul was determined to cut them off from this activity because, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ", verse 13. Paul now exposes them for what they are and exposes the true source of the opposition to himself, the Corinthians and the work of God. Verse 14, "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (English Standard Version).

It is important to verify what is taught in the churches, assemblies and fellowships we attend: is the teaching according to the Word of God? No matter how wonderful the preacher may be, let us emulate the Bereans, who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so", Acts 17:11. Down through the centuries, the Christian profession has been damaged repeatedly by those who have deviated from the Scriptures, importing their own ideas into their teaching. Let us beware of that which is false, however insignificant or plausible it might seem. Verse 15 tells us, "Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers (i.e. Satan's) also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

What Paul speaks about in verse 15 would imply that those who were troubling the Corinthians were not believers at all, "Satan's ministers". There is no mistaking what Paul is saying. I am sure that "Satan's ministers" have been active since Paul's time until now, deceiving people as regards salvation and leading believers astray regarding correct Christian living. However, it is possible for Christian teachers to be found doing Satan's work because of wrong motives or the wrong understanding of Scripture. Therefore, not only do those who listen to God's word need to be careful, but those who teach have an equal responsibility to ensure the Word of God is faithfully represented in what is taught. Teaching must come from the Scriptures and not simply be a repetition of the thoughts of others without verifying the scriptural accuracy.

A minister's commitment (key verse 11:28)

We now come to the last section of chapter 11 from verses 16-33. This section mainly covers the commitment of Paul. The dangers and opposition that Paul encountered for the sake of the Gospel highlight that commitment. In verses 16-20, Paul speaks in a sarcastic manner in order to show the folly of the Corinthians and the deceitfulness of the so called "ministers of righteousness". I think Paul carefully prefaces his remarks by saying the Lord would not act in this way, verse 17. Paul takes up the challenge by saying he is going to speak in the same kind of foolish way. Paul also states that he can boast according to natural ability and birth. This we will consider in a moment. Then Paul shames them by his remarks in verses 19-20, "For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face." I am sure these remarks would be very cutting. How could they be wise and put up with these false teachers. Could they not see the bondage they were in? They were being abused and robbed!

From verse 22 Paul begins to show his credentials. It would appear that these false apostles were claiming that they came from the original group of apostles at Jerusalem and boasted of their natural standing as Israelites. Paul with confidence proclaims his pedigree. Paul was a Hebrew, an Israelite and a descendant of Abraham. As was common in eastern societies, the ability to trace ancestry was important. In the days when the people of Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity, if they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy then they could not eat of the most holy things, see Ezra 2:59 and 63. As a Hebrew, Paul's family had not married outside of the nation of Israel, in other words the 'blood line' was pure. As an Israelite, he claimed a relationship with the covenant keeping God and all the promises given to Abraham and his descendants. Finally, in stating that he descended from Abraham, Paul made specific claim to be able to trace all his ancestors.

In verse 23, Paul challenges the Corinthians by stating, "Are they ministers of Christ?" Paul definitely was and the conscience of the Corinthians would affirm this. Let us read verses 23-28 to show the suffering Paul endured as the Lord's servant, discharging his commission to the Corinthians and others. "Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one - I am talking like a madman - with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often

near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches" (English Standard Version).

What deprivation Paul suffered and yet his concern for suffering fellow saints is further highlighted in verse 29, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" Paul took to heart when fellow saints suffered and he identified with them as well as feeling angry with the persecutors who attacked the babes in Christ. Finally, in verse 31 Paul makes his appeal, not to others, but to "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying." Paul could not call upon any greater witness to the veracity of his statements.

The last two verses of the chapter bring before the Corinthians an example of suffering which would be easily verifiable as he closes this section of his credentials as a true apostle of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

What lessons do we learn as to the features of a Bible based minister?

- Totally subject to the Lord Jesus Christ
- To be a devoted spiritual father to all believers but especially those who are the objects of our ministry
- Responsible evangelists ensure follow through teaching
- Committed to the defence of the truth
- Deal with problems on a scriptural basis
- Use God's weapons, not our own ability.
- Look for the Lord's approval, not that of fellow believer.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.