

Paul's Definition of Ministry (2 Corinthians)

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul is defending his apostleship/ministry and in the process he gives us a glimpse of what it means to be a minister of the gospel - in whatever capacity we find ourselves. Here is an overview of his leadership insights.

- * **Holiness of life** - 1:12 *For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity (holiness) and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.* The way we live, the words we say, the places we allow our minds to go in secret - all of this matters. We are talking about living a lifestyle of holiness.
 - * 2:17 - *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as **commissioned by God**, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*
 - * 6:3 - *We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.*
 - * 7:1 - *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

- * **Apostolic influence "among you"** - For the son of God, Jesus Christ, was preached *among you*. It is impossible to influence others without being "*among them*". We preach as much through our worship and other service as the preacher does through the sermon. Notice the specific content of the preaching: Jesus Christ. This is to be the center of our message. Other "among you" passages include 2:15 (fragrance of Jesus) and 12:12 (signs and wonders)

- * **The aroma of Christ** (2:15) among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. A tangible expression - they know that Jesus is real, and beautiful, because we carry his fragrance.

- * **God is our sufficiency** - Paul asks the humble question in 2:16 "and who is equal to such a task?" He then answers his own question in 3:5-6: *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*
Humility means that I realize that I am not all that - and I don't have to act like I am all that. As a leader, one of the greatest temptations is to forget that I am a Christian first - a sinner in need of grace. We have to remember that worship requires humility and focussing outward.

- * **Ministers of the New Covenant** - 3:6-11 - We are ministers of life. It is possible to be administrators of death, ministers of the law. We have all seen people who claimed Christ but their manner of life and ministry was law-based, performance oriented, and mean or demanding. We are going out carrying something - holding fast the Word of life (Phil 2:16).
 - * 3:7 - Even the ministry of the death (law) was glorious to a degree - how much more the ministry of life!
 - * 3:9 - The ministry of condemnation (vs righteousness)

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- * **Great plainness of speech (KJV)** - 3:12 - Let's not be weird or uncertain in what we are saying in our message. What did you preach with your last platform?
- * **Liberty is in His presence** - 3:16-17 - *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* - Law = bondage; Spirit = freedom
 - A law-based person lives in the land of "I'm not enough"
 - A law-based person always sits in judgment; of himself and of others

What sets our lives and our ministries apart is the foundation and permeating presence of the grace of God. Even in our own lives we can fall into a performance-based form of worship; I have to do a certain thing, worship a certain way, work my way into the presence of God. This is no different from Roman Catholics who say twelve "Hail Mary's" to be acceptable to God. But in truth, I enter by the blood of the Lamb. In truth, I worship because I am already in through the blood of the Lamb.

** Grace-based ministry is rooted in what God has done. WE do not live in the world of pray more, witness more, give more, do more), not what we do, or what we feel at the moment. Grace based ministry means that we do not flail at people's wills to get them to respond.)

What if we were known as the church/ministry that is the most most God-focussed, Christ-centered, Spirit-led in the region? It starts with our own hearts being grace-based.

In 2 Corinthians Paul is asserting his right to be a Father to this body of believers. He is also affirming his apostolic authority. As a true father, he cares deeply for the church and he is fighting for the church to be founded on grace, rather than on what the law-teachers were teaching them. ("For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." - 1 Cor 2:2)

- * **Transformation in His presence** - 3:18 - We can expect to be changed (by soft and sweet renewal or forceful hammering) when we behold him (Psalm 115 - we become like the gods that we make)
- * **The treasure is within** - 4:7 - The treasure of the presence of God is not "out there"; not something we have to call down like fire on some kind of altar. It is within us - we are carriers of the kingdom - in jars of clay, so that God is the one who is glorified.
- * **Death works in us** - 4:8-12 - *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.* This is the way it is for us. We

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have to resign ourselves to it. We can't live like others; we can't be lazy; we have to go an extra mile; we have lay our lives down for the sake of others. *For it is all for your sake (v. 15)*

- * **Ministering in the fear of the Lord** - 5:9-10 - *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. We do all of this with eternity in mind - we minister out of the understanding that we are stewarding gifts that we will increase and one day lay at the feet of Jesus, giving account to our master.*

- * **Ministers of reconciliation** - 5:17-21 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. We are given the glorious and high calling of being God's ambassadors to reconcile others to God through Christ - and people are only reconciled to God through "this ministry."*

* **"This Ministry"** - 4:1-16

Three things about the ministry of the New Covenant from verse one:

- (1) it is centered in new covenant reality and not old covenant law-based fear (having **this** ministry)
- (2) it allows us (the ministers) to be real because we are not trying to hide the fact that we are sinners also (as we have received mercy) and thirdly,
- (3) it is the only basis for a person not losing heart (not become overwhelmed with discouragement and giving up)