

Article of the Month – July 2011

Missiological Observations in the NT (3) – 2 Corinthians

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Paul had found an open door for ministry in Troas, but left the city when he had no peace of mind because of Titus' absence.¹ Later in this letter we understand why. He was less worried about Titus than about the situation in Corinth, where he had sent him. The reason was his own strained relationship with that church. When Paul went to Macedonia and met Titus there with good news from Corinth, his peace of mind returned.² Relationships under stress prevented even him from being able to enjoy God-given open doors

for ministry!

There is comfort for missionaries who struggle to learn a local language and are still unable to express themselves well. The solution is to be Christ's aroma.³ If our attitudes, characters and behavior are friendly, loving and compassionate, people can 'smell Christ' in us before we can explain about Him and His work in words. A similar analogy is: being 'a letter of Christ ... legible for everybody'.⁴ It shows that *being* precedes *doing* and *walk* precedes *talk*. People will notice the Spirit's work through you, even without words.

When as missionaries, we have maneuvered successfully through the minefield of complicated cross-cultural challenges, we can only say that our competence is God's work in us,⁵ and His gifting. It is a miracle and not something to boast about.

Missionaries have to realize that, after all was done to lead people to Christ, there will still be those whose eyes are veiled against spiritual things and harden their hearts.⁶

Remember who the real enemy is to blind the unbelieving mind: the god of this age,⁷ who inspires all opposition against Christ's Kingdom. Spiritual warfare must not be neglected,⁸ especially where the Kingdom's borders are extended by reaching the unreached.

In preaching Christ, we affirm His uniqueness and only way of salvation.⁹ There is no other way. Compromising that truth equals destroying the need for world missions.

Related to this, Paul shows an analogy with creation. Light drives away darkness, like Christ, the Light of the world, drives away the darkness from people's hearts, and re-creates them

¹ 2 Cor. 2:12,13

² 7:5-16

³ 2:15

⁴ 3:2,3

⁵ 3:5,6

⁶ 4:3

⁷ 4:4

⁸ Eph. 6:10-20

⁹ 2 Cor. 4:4b; John 14:6

into His image. Similarly, He sends His missionaries into the darkness: ‘As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you’.¹⁰ This verse links the letter’s Christology with its missiology.

‘Since we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade man’¹¹ plays down ‘compromise outreach’. *Presence-evangelism*, (just being around as Christians) will not do. Neither is *proclamation-evangelism* (just preaching) enough. Relationship-based *persuasion-evangelism* is needed. This is dialogue, almost arguing with people, trying to persuade them. Of course only the Holy Spirit can really persuade people.¹² But if we fear the Lord and are convinced of His right, we will try harder to save people. Paul states that Christ’s love compels us:¹³ He died for us and therefore we should take evangelism and missions more seriously, imploring people to become reconciled to God through Christ. This ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to us.¹⁴

We must urgently wake up to the ‘now-aspect’¹⁵ of world missions. The era of grace will not last forever.¹⁶ Countries are closing for the gospel. Persecution increases.¹⁷ Certain judgments occur already. We must prioritize eternal matters as long as ‘now’ lasts.

Genuine repentance shows by people’s grief over their sins.¹⁸ Emotional conversions are not wrong; it is logical that people who see themselves and their sins in the light of God’s holiness burst into tears. Yet, tears do not prove true repentance. Fruit seen afterwards, does.¹⁹

Christ, rich before His incarnation, *became poor for our sakes* by becoming man, and to identify with the poor.²⁰ Why then do many missionaries today think they cannot do their work without plenty of material means? The poor often have a hard time identifying with missionaries who live on much higher levels of affluence than they do. These missionaries, especially those who pump much money into their fields regularly, may confuse *the Good News* with that of the monetary relief they bring. Christ’s miracles of provision were occasional, not structural – in fact He *refused* to be structural in that respect.²¹ Paul worked according to the same principle.

Paul describes the personal responsibility for a ministry:²² in this case he rejoices that Titus has the same enthusiasm and initiative as he has himself. Paul had not imposed that on Titus; the Lord put it into his heart.

Paul hopes that the faith of the Corinthians will grow, so that his area of activity from them will expand. In other words: when the faith of the Corinthians grows, quality is added to Paul’s ministerial accomplishments. This means that there is less need for him to work among *them*, and he can concentrate on the evangelization of areas *beyond*.²³

¹⁰ 4:6; Gen. 1:3; John 1:4,5,7,9; 8:12; 12:46; 2 Cor. 5:17; John 20:21

¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:11

¹² John 16:8

¹³ 2 Cor. 5:14

¹⁴ 5:15,19,20

¹⁵ 6:2

¹⁶ John 9:4

¹⁷ Matt. 24:9,21

¹⁸ 2 Cor. 7:9

¹⁹ Matt. 3:8; Rom. 10:9,10

²⁰ 2 Cor. 8:9

²¹ John 6:27

²² 2 Cor. 9:16,17

²³ 10:15,16

Paul is as concerned about preaching the gospel where it had not yet been preached²⁴ as about his quality of work. This is expressed in ‘I promised you to ... Christ ... as a pure virgin’.²⁵ He was concerned, because the Corinthians were so easily deceived and urged them to aim for perfection – a desire that he turned into prayer.²⁶

Paul accepted no funds from the Corinthians among whom he worked.²⁷ He worked free of charge, ‘not being a burden ... in any way’. But he gladly accepted support from *Macedonian* churches, when working among *Corinthians*, or from *Corinthians*, when working in *Ephesus*.²⁸ ‘Free of charge’ seems largely forgotten today. It means: do not count on or ask for human support; rely on the Lord alone for all personal and ministerial needs. Be a burden to none, especially people you minister to, so that the gospel may spread unhindered.²⁹

The principle of ‘more suffering’ pleads *for* the legitimacy of true apostolic ministry, *not against* it.³⁰ In human *strength* God’s power cannot manifest itself but in *weakness* it does.³¹ Human weakness is the *basis* for God’s operative power, *not a proof against* a ministry’s legitimacy. This is what the false apostles failed to understand and accept.

Greater knowledge of and intimacy with God³² has a price. The more we participate in His resurrection power, the more we share in His sufferings.³³ These may come in the form of satanic oppression. If prayers for relief are not answered, we know that God has His reasons.³⁴

The marks of an apostle are signs, wonders and miracles.³⁵ Too many people love to call themselves apostles, in whose ministries these characteristics lack. They make a joke of the Lord and of themselves. The world is not helped by such conceit.

Materialism has contaminated missionary thinking. Can we truly say to the people we minister to: ‘what we want is not your possessions but you’? Paul was willing to *spend* his funds on the Corinthians, not *gain* from them and expected the same of his co-workers. Yet, some think they can follow materialistic ways with impunity. Is our main concern to live from the gospel as is our *right*, or is it *rather* never to hinder its spreading by *attaining* to that right? Preaching the gospel free of charge is a reward in itself. There is nothing against receiving *unsolicited* gifts – in fact, allowing people to give adds to their spiritual accounts. Also, gospel ministers should be the first to testify by their own experience that ‘*God* is able to make *all* grace abound ... so that in *all* things at *all* times [they] have *all* they need ...’.³⁶

Finally, Paul speaks of his authority:³⁷ exercising discipline among his church members. He would rather *not* use it, but at the same time not shun confrontation when necessary. What

²⁴ Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 10:15,16

²⁵ 11:2

²⁶ 11: 3,4,20,28; 12:9b,20,21; 13:11a

²⁷ 11:7-10

²⁸ 1 Cor. 16:8,17

²⁹ 9:12b

³⁰ 2 Cor. 11:24-27

³¹ 12:9

³² 12:2-4

³³ Phil. 3:10

³⁴ 2 Cor. 12:7-9

³⁵ 12:12

³⁶ 2 Cor. 12:13-18; 1 Cor. 9:12,14,15,18; 2 Cor. 2:17; 6:3,10b; 11:7,9; Phil. 4:17; 2 Cor. 9:8 (italics mine)

³⁷ 13:2b,10

about us? Are we so peace-loving that we would let injustice have its way rather than confront its perpetrators? Or leave it to local leaders? Neither the fear of man³⁸ nor our non-confrontational cultures should jeopardize the less popular parts of our ministries.

³⁸ Prov. 29:25