

THE POWER OF A CLEAN TESTIMONY



TEXT: 2 Cor. 6:4-10

THESIS: To show that Paul's ministry was powerful due to his positive testimony.

INTRO.: A. Paul was a powerful preacher and a great Christian, not because he was an orator, nor because he was handsome, had a forceful personality or was especially ingratiating as a person, but because the **"THE POWER OF A CLEAN TESTIMONY."**

B. In 2 Cor. Paul gives a defense of his ministry and as he does we find out the secret of his power. *His ministry and fruit were his commendation.* He didn't need letters of recommendation from the other Apostles, certainly not from his old acquaintances among the Pharisees nor did he have some public relations firm behind him. His work and its success spoke for themselves. But as he sets forth this defense we learn what the Lord expects of those who would be commended by Him and ultimately rewarded by Him.

C. What we have here is a job description for the ministry. If anyone wishes to measure the success or failure of their ministry for the Lord, let them use these qualifications as their gauge. The one we call the **"Prince of the Apostles,"** by this standard appears more like "a deprived disciple"...

I. A BLAMELESS MINISTRY:

A. Offenceless: (Beware the negative) v.3

1. We need to beware giving the enemies of the cross ammunition to use against the ministry.
2. Every believer is *"in the ministry"* and thus needs to be above reproach and blameless.

ILLUS.: How a Christian conducts himself in his personal life reflects on the ministry and on the Savior he represents. His conduct is a reflection of his character. The way he dresses, carries himself, his speech, his temperament, his attitude, how he keeps his personal belongings (house, car, clothing, etc.), personal cleanliness, his response to trials (later), and how he reacts to problems, burdens and even blessings will determine to a large extent his effectiveness as a witness and as an ambassador (5:20). The way he treats others speaks volumes about his walk with the Lord, and others will notice. Does he act as if he is above others, or assume a false humility? Does he treat everyone with respect and dignity? All of these are factors which will have an impact on his ministry.

B. Approved: (Focus on the positive) v.4a

1. Note the use of the words **"all things"** here; Paul is saying that the true servant of God must be conscious all the time, in everything he does, says, or thinks so that he will be commended or **"approved"** as **"good ministers of God."**
2. In this sense every believer is in *"full time service"* for the Lord.
3. Men may resist our preaching or witnessing, but they will find it hard to resist **"THE POWER OF A CLEAN TESTIMONY."**

II. A BLESSED MINISTRY:

TRANS.: Paul lists 3 sets of nine things which impact on his ministry. They read like a job description for the ministry. However, most of us will never experience the things in the first set, though perhaps it would be better for the Lord's work if we did. He says we are approved if we handle these things with **"much patience..."**

A. Blessings Through Testings: v.4b, 5
(The Power of Commitment)

1. **"Afflictions, necessities, distresses"**: he must be able to go through some trouble, he must be able to live without having all his 'needs' met all the time, and he must be able to deal with some real crises.

ILLUS.: How many TV evangelists, radio preachers, missionaries, and pastors do you know who qualify?! How many Christians do you know who qualify? Very few believers are persecuted for the cause of Christ today or face anything like the trials Paul is speaking about here. Most of us have more than our "needs" met, and the only real crises we deal with are usually of a personal or family nature, unrelated to the ministry.

2. **"Stripes, imprisonment, tumults":** if this is a job qualification list, we don't have many who qualify and there wouldn't be many signing up.

a. Paul had received 190 **"stripes"** with a whip (5 X 39 – 2 Cor. 11:24).

ILLUS.: When I was growing up the state of Delaware still had the whipping post. One day my grandfather got a call from the Del. State Police about one of his sons who was caught speeding. He could either pay a fine or get a couple of lashes. My grandfather say *"Whip him and turn him loose."* They did, and I guess you know that he was a lot more cautious from that time on. Of course this wasn't for the ministry.

b. Paul had been imprisoned on several occasions; most of the time his jail time included beatings.

c. Paul was involved in a number of **"tumults"** i.e., riots, violent arguments, etc.

ILLUS.: What if we only ordained people to the ministry after he had experienced these things?! We might have a few in China, Russia, or in a few areas of our modern world, but there would be many empty pulpits here in America.

Imagine what it would be like if the Apostle Paul were to walk into a Monday morning meeting of the local ministerium, with all those lame duck preachers in their backwards collars, nice suits and polished shoes. Here comes Paul, his clothes soaked in blood, a couple of teeth missing, and not smelling too nice and asks: *"Where did you fellows preach yesterday.!"* (Even fundamentalist preachers like me might cringe and get under conviction! Maybe the worst thing we faced on Sunday was a backslidden deacon, or a lady who got her fine feathers ruffled in the preaching about standards, or some man who decided he couldn't take this kind of *"negative preaching"* any longer, or some parent whose kid got slighted by the youth pastor.)

3. **"Labors...watchings...fastings":**

a. Paul worked to support himself when the Corinthian church wouldn't or didn't see the need.

2 Corinthians 12:12-13 *Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.*

b. Paul admonished church members and ministers to **"watch"** for the devil's working in his life (1 Thes. 5:6), for the pastor to **"watch"** for the souls of his congregation (Heb. 13-17), and to **"watch...in all things"** (2 Tim. 4:5), including our words, works, thoughts, companions, and heart!

c. Paul fasted **"often"** and no doubt sometimes it was not self-imposed fasting! Paul went without food while some of the church members he had led to Christ fared sumptuously; he didn't not only get "double honor" – he didn't get any honor, financially!

B. Blessings Through Triumphs: v.6,7
(The Power of Character)

1. **"By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering..."** the character of the Christian must include keeping oneself pure, getting the right kind of knowledge (doctrine), and by putting up with people, problems and other events.

2. **"By kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned..."**: the character of the Christian is revealed by how kind or unkind he treats those to whom he is attempting to minister, by the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his life, and by the degree and genuineness of the love he shows.

3. **"By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness..."**: the character of the Christian servant is also shown by giving out the Word of God in the power of God while maintaining the armor of God.

C. Blessings Through Paradoxes: v.8-10

1. **"Honor...dishonor; evil report...good report; deceivers...yet true":**

a. We need to be careful about who gives us honor: "Respect from the wrong crowd doesn't speak well of your ministry."
- Ruckman

b. Some will speak well of us, others will speak evil – we don't need to brood over the latter, nor get puffed up over the former.

c. We need to be honest with everyone, but not everyone will see us that way.

2. **"Unknown...well known; dying...live; chastened...not killed":**

1. We are not to seek fame or fortune; if we do right others will know it.
 2. This may be speaking about life-threatening situations or the sacrificial life.
 3. Paul experienced & wrote much about chastening & knew it came from a loving Father.
3. "Sorrowful...rejoicing; poor...making rich; having nothing...possessing all things":

1. Christians can smile on the inside while crying on the outside.
2. We may be poor physically, but the message we have makes others citizens of a fabulously wealthy place with jasper walls, golden streets & gates of pearl.
3. We may not have the title deed to a piece of real estate down here, but we are **"joint heirs"** with the Creator of all things!

CONCL.: Oh, **"THE POWER OF A CLEAN TESTIMONY!"** Paul had it. Do YOU?! Oh, the joy of having a blameless and blessed ministry. Paul had it. Do YOU?!