

Compelled by the Knowledge of His Glory

by Jon Chase

If you have ever done any serious study on the book of 2 Corinthians, and if you're able to read between the lines, you probably picked up on the fact that, underneath the surface issues, there is a very intimate, personal relationship between Paul and the Church at Corinth—and there also appear to be some deep wounds in that relationship. You can almost *feel* the tension and the caution and the sensitivity in the way Paul writes.

One of the big issues that Paul feels he needs to address is the issue of Christian ministry, and what Christian ministry is all about. From what we can tell, there seems to have been a group of influential apostle-like figures that moved into Corinth sometime after Paul had left, and these individuals apparently attracted a good number of followers in the church. Evidently, these so-called “apostles” had no shame about the fact that their ministry revolved around their own personalities, and they were perfectly content to sow division into the church if that served their purposes. An “us vs. them” type of ministry is always sure to gain numbers, because rivalry is such a deep-rooted human impulse. Worse, not only did the Corinthians get on board with these so-called “apostles,” but they even started thinking about Paul the same way.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul speaks directly to this underlying issue, and seeks to drive home the point that his ministry, together with that of his colleagues, is not like that *at all*. So he says in verse five: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” In other words, there’s two kinds of ministries here: the one is to preach ourselves (my ministry is all about me, and I’m highlighting my wisdom and my

abilities); and the other is to preach *Jesus Christ* as Lord; and then, yes, ourselves also, but in a different way: as nothing but *servants* for Jesus’s sake.

The first way of doing ministry is what these “super-apostles” were doing, and apparently what the Corinthians figured Paul was doing too. They carried letters of recommendation, they highlighted their credentials, and they tried to gather a following after themselves. And since that’s what they were doing, it seems that the Corinthians assumed that Paul must be doing the same kind of thing.

So Paul has to correct this major misunderstanding. He says, in essence, “if you think that’s what we have been doing all along, then you’ve totally missed what we’re about.” We’re not interested in preaching ourselves *at all*. Christian ministry is not *at all* about the minister. What we’re proclaiming is that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And then he explains this in verse six. He says, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Let that settle in for a moment. What is Paul saying? He is saying that the *reason* that they’re preaching Jesus Christ as Lord is because God has shone in their hearts to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory. The reason they’re preaching Christ is because God, in his sovereignty, has shown them something that, if you were shown it, you would be compelled to tell others about it.

And that something is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In other words, he’s saying, “we are in this ministry

because God has given us the gift of *seeing* his glory, and that compels us to *speak* of his glory.” We are not in this ministry to make ourselves look great. That is what these super-apostles are doing, but that has *never* been what we were doing. *They* are trying to glorify themselves, and *we* are trying to give you the truth that we have seen for ourselves. It isn’t *us vs. them*, or *our ministry vs. theirs*; it is the *Truth of God vs. a group of imposters* who are only interested in making much of themselves. Paul says, we are in this ministry because God has shown us the truth of this Gospel, and we have seen the glory of Jesus Christ that you needed to know—and *that’s* why *we* came to Corinth. True Christian ministry is compelled by a conviction of the truth.

We can notice from verse 2 that the *motive* for why someone gets involved in ministry also determines the *way* that they go about it. These “super-apostles” were interested in highlighting their own abilities, so they would do all kinds of fancy things with the text to show their own cleverness and astuteness, and win the following that they wanted. They were skilled at making the word of God obscure and impenetrable.

Paul calls this methodology “secret” because it made the truth inaccessible to the average person. Nobody could understand how the preacher arrived at the conclusions that he arrived at, so they would always be totally dependent on him. It would give the preacher an elite status. His methodology would be totally obscure, but he sounded so smart, so perceptive, so profound.

He calls this methodology “shameful” because it would rob the people of their security and simple trust in the word of God. They could no longer depend on the Word, because they needed the special interpretations of these apostles to get at the “true meaning” of the Word. They would have had a very mystical and

complex theology that was accessible only to themselves, the elite apostles, and to those who played along with them. Claiming to show people the truth, they obscured the truth!

On the contrary, Paul says, look at how he and his colleagues have brought the Word of God to them. “By setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” This is what true preaching ought to look like: plainly setting forth the truth, and commending oneself and one’s message to everyone’s conscience.

Honest preachers recognize that they are *servants* of the Word. Their task is simply to point people to the truth that is there in the Word. They explain the Word and demonstrate its clarity rather than obscuring it. They do so because, in the Word, they see the glory of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God (verse 4). They do so because God has shone into their hearts with the light of that knowledge, and written that conviction on their hearts. In Christ, they see the beautiful, irresistible, glory of God—and that *compels* them to speak.

