

Comparing Oneself With Self

“For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves: but they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding. But we will not glory beyond our measure, but according to the measure of the province which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves overmuch, as though we reached not unto you; but we came even as far as unto you in the gospel of Christ; not glorying beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope that, as your faith groweth, we shall be magnified in you according to our province unto further abundance, so as to preach the gospel even unto the parts beyond you, and not to glory in another's province in regard of things ready to our hand. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth” (2 Cor. 10:12-18).

Some see in the phrase, “For we are not bold to measure ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves,” sarcasm on the apostle's part: certain of his critics had said of him that in their midst his presence was weak and his speech contemptible and thus would not dare to compare himself with his critics. Perhaps this is the correct view. One thing is certain — his critics were without understanding (not wise) in their boasting. They were highly critical of him who had founded the Corinthian church of which they were part — through his sacrifice and persecutions that came to him he had steadfastly withstood extensive opposition there, being God's instrument in imparting spiritual gifts to them, as well as nurturing them as a father would a child. And what had the critics done? They came and sought to lay hold of a work they could claim no credit for either in its existence or success in reaching others. They measured themselves by others of the same mind set as theirs, or else their measuring stick was themselves.

Paul would not glory beyond his measure, he would glory in the position God placed him in. As “one born out of due season” yet every much as apostle as the twelve, which of them Paul said “he labored more abundantly than they all,” God had commissioned him to preach, giving him both the message he preached and the miracles to attest its truth and that he was “God sent”. That “province” to which God had appointed him included Corinth, yes and even beyond that. His critics could deride his bodily presence and speech as they wished, but they could not remove to themselves the apostolic authority and power God bestowed on him. They were usurpers — taking hold of the work Paul had done, and claiming as their own, no doubt despoiling the Corinthians some of whom allowed themselves to become pawns in the hands of these false teachers. He wrote to such brethren, “For ye bear with a man, if he bringeth you into bondage, if he devoureth you, if he taketh you captive, if he exalteth himself, if he smiteth you on the face” (2 Cor. 11:20).

It was Paul's hope that as these brethren's faith matured they would give him the rightful position in the church that was his due: that they would recognize the sphere of his apostolic authority not only reached (included) them, but stretched even beyond them

— that his authority as an apostle stretched to distant lands and cities just as the gospel was designed to be preached to all nations, to preach into the whole world.

Yet, although his was a Divine appointment and an honored one, he would not glory in himself. He would, as Jeremiah had commanded, “But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (2 Cor. 10:17; Jer. 9:24). Boasting (glorying) was highly distasteful to the apostle and though he would later glory, it would be in his weaknesses: “... but on mind own behalf I will not glory, save in my weaknesses” (2 Cor. 12:5).

Paul closes this chapter with a sobering thought, especially to those “would be apostles” so critical of him: “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but who the Lord commends” (2 Cor. 10:18).

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