

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Genuine Versus False Apostles

by Dan Trygg

“...did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; ⁹ and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.”

II Corinthians 11:7-9

“But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

II Corinthians 11:12-13

“For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.”

II Corinthians 12:6

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. ¹³ For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! ¹⁴ Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?”

II Corinthians 12:12-15

An “apostle” was a person “sent forth with orders”, ...a delegate, ambassador, envoy or representative with full authority. The word occurs 80 times in the NT, and 68 of these occurrences are in the writings of Luke and Paul. Jesus chose twelve men from among His many followers, and referred to them as “apostles”. **This was a non-religious word used in Greek culture, but Jesus applied this term in reference to Christian ministry.** He specifically chose these twelve to spend more time with Him, ...to train and equip them to go forth to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons (Matt. 10:2-8; Mk. 3:14,15; Lk. 6:12,13). **An apostle was sent out on a mission, and he was to represent well and appropriately the one sending him.** He was to stay within the bounds and authority that had been entrusted to him, and he was to represent accurately the interests, character and message of his “sender”. Just as a slave was not greater than his master, and could not take liberties or privileges that went against his master’s orders, in the same way the apostle was not greater than the one who sent him (Jn. 13:16). **He was not to change or add to the message given to him to convey, nor was he to act in a manner that was a misrepresentation of the one who commissioned him.** He was *more than a “messenger”*. *He was to be an accurate embodiment and representation of the one who sent him forth.* **Jesus Himself is called an Apostle** (Heb. 3:1). In John’s gospel alone, it mentions 17 times that Jesus was “sent” by His Father. In a similar way, He “sent” His apostles forth (17:18; 20:21).

Understanding what an “apostle” is, it is clear that a “false apostle” would be someone who is **(1.) Claiming to be something they are not.** They may be *claiming* to have been sent out by Jesus as an apostle, but *had this really occurred?* It could be that they were just “name-droppers”, using their letters of recommendation to give them some credibility, and then they used that to claim the highest, most influential position within the early church community. **Had they really been sent out by Jesus Himself?** The apostle Paul’s testimony here is so important. Jesus Himself appeared to Paul, and called him to be an apostle. This story is related three times in the book of Acts, and Paul refers to this experience again in Galatians 1:1,11-24. The other apostles had been hand-picked by Jesus before His crucifixion, but Paul was chosen by the *risen* Christ. This direct, personal call and commissioning by Jesus was an important defense of Paul’s apostleship. It was *confirmed* not only by the fruit of his ministry, but also by the other apostles and the church at Jerusalem. They *recognized* that Paul’s message was the same as theirs (Gal. 2:2), and they could *see* God’s grace effectually operating in his life to bring about fruit among the nations (Gal. 2:7-9). These are four important tests of someone’s claim of apostleship **(a.) Were they personally called by Christ** to be an apostle? **(b.) Is their doctrine consistent with the teaching of the apostles**, as recorded in the scriptures? **(c.) Is there evidence of the effectual working of God in their ministries?** Are people coming to Christ? Are churches being planted? Are there manifestations of the supernatural workings of God? Are there answered prayers? **(d.) Are there miracles, signs or wonders taking place in people’s lives?** This was part of Jesus’ initial call. Paul called them “the signs of an apostle” (II Cor. 12:12). Paul met all four tests. It does not appear that these “pseudo-apostles” did.

The other definition of a “false apostle” would be someone who is **(2.) Not adequately or accurately representing the one who sent him.** Compromising the message, or the mission, ...or using practices and conducting oneself in ways that misrepresent Jesus’ heart, character or instructions... indicate that this person is no longer a representative or delegate of Jesus. They are pursuing a very different agenda. *Like a false scale, which gives an inaccurate reading of weight, a false apostle gives an inaccurate picture of Jesus.* Paul calls them

“deceitful workers, disguising themselves as (or transforming their outward-appearance into) apostles of Christ” (II Cor. 11:13). This is very interesting language. The word for “deceitful” is from a word meaning “crafty, treacherous; to catch with a bait; to ensnare”. **They were not just putting on airs for appearance’ sake. Paul was implying that they were setting the Corinthians up to be used, betrayed.**

In last week’s notes, we saw how Paul pointed out that they made great claims to be important, highly-qualified people, yet *they did not establish their own work*. They did not bring the gospel to *new* territory, rather they came behind Paul and seemed to feed off of what he had done. They harvested where *he* had planted. They set up shop and directed the people away from Paul, and convinced them that they should listen to and serve them. **In contrast to their methodology, Paul reminded them that he had never preached or taught them for pay.** He preached the gospel to them *freely*, i.e., *without charge* (II Cor. 11:7). **This is consistent with Jesus’ instructions** to the twelve, when He sent them out before Him. He told them, “...as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; *freely you received, freely give*” (Matt. 10:7-8). **The word, “freely” is the same word Paul used. It meant “without charge; without paying for it; as a free-gift”** (cf. Rom. 3:24; II Thess. 3:8). Even though he was there, and *in need*, he did not burden anyone (II Cor. 11:9). The word for “burden” meant “a dead weight”. It referred to someone who was idle to the disadvantage and expense of others, someone not “carrying his own weight”. It referred to someone who was lazy or slothful, and “pressed heavily upon others”. By contrast, **Paul said that he kept himself, and will keep himself from being a burden to them.** He actually used the negated form of the word for “burden”, ...“I kept myself without-weight”. Again, in 12:13, he wrote, “In what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself was not ‘dead-weight’ to you. Forgive me this wrong!” He goes on, “Behold! A third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be ‘dead-weight’ to you; for **I do not seek your things, but you!** For the children are not obligated to store up for their parents, rather the parents for the children. **But I myself will most gladly spend-freely, and be spent-out, on behalf of your souls.** If I am loving you *abundantly*, am I to be loved *less*?” Then, he anticipates the charge that he took advantage of them through his co-workers. It is easy to refute. Facts are stubborn things. He throws it right back at them for evaluation (vss. 17,18). “Did we not walk in the same spirit, and walk in the same steps?” **Paul’s policy of proclaiming the gospel without charge was followed by all of his team members.**

How did he do this? How did he manage to preach to people without demanding or expecting payment for his services? Remember, at this time there were many speakers, philosophers, and actors who traveled around and gave recitations for a fee. It would not have been unreasonable for Paul to do likewise. While that was true, Paul was very conscious of the danger of turning ministry into a business, and of being seen as a peddler of the Word. He studiously avoided giving any cause for the ministry to be discredited (II Cor. 2:17; 6:3f.). Even though he knew that it was within his rights to expect to be supported by those he ministered to, he went out of his way to avoid this. Here, we see the wisdom of his scruples. It was clear that the “super-apostles” he was exposing were, indeed, charging money for their teaching, but Paul did not. **How did Paul avoid asking for money?** Well, we know from the book of Acts that, when he first came to Corinth, he made tents (18:1-3). He was a skilled tent-maker, and this was something he could, and did, fall back on repeatedly. In I Cor. 4:12, he says that **he, and all the apostles, worked with their hands**, at times. Paul reminded the Thessalonians about his labor, working night and day, so as not to be a burden to them (I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:7-9). He talked about it later to the Ephesian elders, as well (Acts 20:34). **He not only covered his own expenses, but also that of his ministry team.** Paul, however, makes it clear that he was an exception. He went out of his way *not* to use the rightful authority and expectation that those who preach the gospel should be supported (I Cor. 9:15). He felt compelled to do extra, because he had persecuted the church. Nevertheless, we see that “we apostles ...toil, working with our own hands...” In addition to labor, however, **Paul accepted the support of other believers to enable him to devote more time to preaching the word.** In Acts 18:5, we read that when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself fully to the ministry work. Paul alludes to this in II Cor. 11:8-9, “I robbed *other* churches, taking wages *from them* to serve you;⁹ and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need...” Notice that he refers to this gift as “wages”. Jesus had taught the “the laborer is worthy of his wages” in the context of ministry support (Lk. 10:7). **Jesus’ ministry was supported by the contributions of outsiders** (Lk. 8:1-3). **He advocated this as the normative method of provision for people in ministry** (I Cor. 9:14). Paul looked at this support as “wages” provided by the Lord to be able to do the work of ministry, and offer it without charge to those he was currently ministering to.

Paul was able to demonstrate that his life and ministry were more in line with Jesus’ heart and practices than were those of his opponents. Their self-seeking, superior, dominating attitudes, and their lack of real power and evident fruit in ministry exposed them as false, both phony and deceitful. **Paul was the genuine apostle.**