

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Showing Ourselves As Servants of God

by Dan Trygg

“...in everything we show ourselves as God’s practical-servants: in much remaining-consistent-under-pressure-endurance, in pressing-together-afflictions, in hardships, in narrow-and-restrictive-pressures, ⁵ in calamitous-plagues (or, beatings), in keeping-watches (or, being imprisoned), in disturbing-times-of-instability (or, riots), in exhausting-labors, in sleepless nights, in fastings, ⁶ by purity, by knowledge, by distance-from-anger, by gracious-kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by unhypocritical-love, ⁷ by a word of truth, by a powerful-act of God; by-means-of the weapons of the righteousness of the right hand and the left, ⁸ through high-regard and dishonor, through slanderous-report and good-reputation; as deceivers yet true; ⁹ as unknown yet recognized; as dying and look-- we live; as being punished yet not killed; ¹⁰ as grieving yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing yet possessing everything. ¹¹ We have spoken openly to you, Corinthians; our heart has been opened wide. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. ¹³ Now in like response-- I speak as to children-- you also should be open to us.”
II Corinthians 6:4-13

This is a classic example of Paul’s writing style. He loves to pile up images, word pictures, and examples to illustrate his main point. Here, **his main point is that *in everything***, ...in every conceivable situation and circumstance..., **he and his co-workers demonstrated that they were genuine followers and active-“hands-on”-practical-servants of the living God.** There is so much in this paragraph, ...so much to consider and meditate on.

The first point is that Paul is *not* relying merely on his own *claims*, or the *credentials* or *letters of recommendation* that others might write. His opponents, the false apostles who had tried to usurp his credibility and authority relied on such things (3:1,2; 10:12). No, he did not come relying on such things as a basis for his credibility or authority. **He *demonstrated* that he was indeed a servant of God.** How did he do that? **By the way he lived and handled himself** through a variety of circumstances, **and by the obvious fruit of God’s presence** in his life.

The next important observation is that Paul was not interested in showing that he was a religious leader, or a high personage of power. He and his co-workers demonstrated that **they were “servants” of God.** The word refers to a helper, an attendant, one cares for the practical needs of another. In the NT world, a “deacon” was a “table waiter”, not a position of power or authority. Paul was not making a claim, in this passage, of being a person of power, prestige or governing authority. Rather, he was saying that, **by his actions and character, he demonstrated that he was an attendant, practical helper of God in caring for His interests and attending to the needs of His people.** This word would have brought up images of “hands-on acts of service”, not someone telling other people what to do. To be a “servant” was to be a “care-giver” a “doer”, ...not a “teller” or a “boss”. It is important to understand this, because **Paul is making an important contrast in the kind of leadership *he demonstrated*, versus the kind of leadership demonstrated by the “false apostles” who had come in after him.** They were people who *demand*ed respect, *demand*ed to be cared for, *demand*ed to be paid, *demand*ed that others serve them (11:20). **The contrast Paul expresses throughout this letter reflects the teachings of Jesus** in Matthew 20:25-28, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It will not be thus among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you will be a servant (*diakonos*) of y’all, and whoever wishes to be first among you will be a slave of y’all; just as the Son of Man did not come to *be served*, but *to serve*, and to *give His life* a ransom for many.” Paul did not come to *be* paid, he either *provided for himself*, or *brought support from elsewhere* (II Cor. 11:7-9). **In an earlier letter, Paul made the case for supporting those who preach the gospel** (I Cor. 9:1-14), **but they should never become “peddlers of the word”** (II Cor. 2:17) and **to demand payment is to turn things around so that they have become the important ones**, not the people they are supposedly there to serve.

How did Paul demonstrate or show that he was a true “practical-servant of God”? There are three basic themes in the listing of characteristics and activities he gives as support for his claim. **In verses 4 and 5, he lists the kinds of difficulties he endured to carry out the service for God to them.** In case anyone thinks that being a spiritually mature person means that your life will become problem free or trouble free, take a closer look at the lives of the spiritual heroes in the NT. Paul was *not* the exception, either. He writes in I Corinthians 4, “For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ...To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now” (vss. 9,11-13). This is very similar to our passage in II Corinthians 6. Have you ever been in a large mansion that at one time had servants? Are the servants’ quarters as nice, spacious and well

appointed as those of the house owner? No. Often there are also separate stairways, hallways and exits, as well. Like John the Baptist, Paul was *not* living in king's palaces, dressed in soft clothing (Matt. 11:8). He was not dressing for success, or to be noticed by men to receive *their* accolades (cf. Matt. 6:1-6). He was wearing the rough, common clothing of a tentmaker, living wherever he could find shelter, because he was a man on a mission. **He was not interested in accumulating for himself. He was interested in sharing the gospel, starting church meetings in homes, and helping people grow in their faith. To do that, he did not live as a celebrity. He lived a very difficult life, a life full of challenges, discomforts, and hardships.** In fact, this first division of how he demonstrated that he really was what a servant of God is all about that, ...namely, that **he voluntarily endured many afflictions in order to serve His Master and the people he was called to serve.** He lists ten words which describe the difficulties he faced, and the challenges he endured. He remained consistent under the pressure, endured the squeeze of pressing afflictions, survived hardships where necessities of life were cut short or in low supply. He pushed through narrow and restrictive circumstances, and the beat down by either sickness or human assaults (the Greek word is *plēgē*, and can mean either). He either kept-watch over the spiritual welfare of his people, or was thrown into prison (again, the Greek could be understood either way). He went through very scary times, exhausting labors, sleepless nights, and fastings (or, hunger). Why? Because he was sold out for Jesus! **His entire life revolved around the mission he was called to. He demonstrated that he was truly a servant of God** by pressing through or overcoming obstacles, hurdles and road blocks time and again.

That was not the only proof, however. He also showed that he was a true servant of Christ by the character of his life. He lived a life of moral purity. He studied and understood the scriptures. He was patient and long-suffering. He was kind and thoughtful. His life radiated the Holy Spirit. His love was genuine, not hypocritical. He showed he was a true servant of God when he gave a word of truth, or when God powerfully acted through him. He proved that he was Christ's servant by fighting the spiritual warfare that he faced, showing skill and experience with both offensive and defensive weapons. **He demonstrated day-in and day-out that he was consistent, filled with life, wisdom and power from God.**

If that were not enough, there is one more line of evidence that Paul introduces here. This one is a little more difficult to understand. **There are nine contrasting couplets. In each of these extremes, there is still evidence that Paul is a genuine servant of Christ.** *By glory and dishonor* – Both of these have to do with one's reputation. Some hold Paul in esteem, because of his life; while others disregard him *for the same reason*. The first people *value* what Paul is doing, and therefore esteem him; the others also see what he is doing, but they *think little of it*, and so disregard him. *Through slander (Gk. – dys-fame) and good report (Gk. – eu-fame)* -- The negative report to discredit or a good report to substantiate both are evidence of genuineness. If they spoke against Jesus, they will speak against us (Jn. 15:18-25). *As deceivers yet true* – **The grammatical structure changes to contrasts, ...the first term a claim or misperception, but the second term is the reality.** So, here, Paul was accused of leading people astray, yet he was leading them in the truth. *As unknown yet recognized* – Paul was an unrecognized nobody to many, until they “recognized” him through an *epiginōskō* revelation from God. *As dying, and behold-- we live!* – More than once, people thought Paul was going to die, yet he kept coming back! *As punished, and not put to death* – **Paul was persecuted, beaten, scourged, but he survived, and persisted in his mission!** *As being-grieved, yet always rejoicing* – There is an underlying joy that overcomes sorrow and grief, which others noticed, and which testified that he was truly a servant of God. *As poor, yet making many rich* – Paul was an enigma. In spite of not having great wealth, he seemed to always be helping others. This is a mark of a righteous person (Psa. 37:21; Prov. 21:26). More importantly, he enriched people with spiritual riches (I Cor. 1:5). *As having nothing, yet possessing all things* – **Paul demonstrated that the reality of God was greater than wealth. Whatever he truly needed, God provided.** Many times, he had nothing in hand, but the provision of the Lord was right on time, over and over. **This testified to others that he must be a genuine servant of God. God provided for His servants, so they could do His will.**

Paul ends this section by challenging his readers to open their hearts to him. He had been honest and open with them, sharing his heart, his vision, values and intentions toward them, as they have already seen lived out in his life when he had been among them. **He had demonstrated that he had been a genuine servant of God in their lives.** They probably knew that already. **Then what was the problem? Why were they holding back?** Jesus had given Himself for them, laying down His life for them on the cross, so they could be saved and have a new life. **Paul had brought that message to them, at great personal sacrifice and cost to himself. He had spoken openly from his heart to theirs.** He points out to them that there is nothing he or his co-workers had done that should cause them to restrict their hearts toward Paul. **He plainly tells them, “You are not restricted by us; you are restricted in your own affections. Now, in like response, open wide your heart to us.”** The word for “affections” means “inner emotions”. Fear, hesitancy, uncertainty can keep us at a distance from Christ. **We need to make a choice to respond to God, to open our heart to Him, and set our course to follow Christ.**