

As many of you know, CPC and particularly our elders are in the process of determining who our next Lead Pastor will be. As part of the process, we hired a search firm specializing in helping churches find key staff. They've provided us with a group of candidates they've vetted, and feel are qualified. Then, of course, we've had to do our own work of getting to know them—reading questionnaires, conducting interviews, and trying to evaluate whether they'd be a good fit for us. Of course, prayer is a huge part of this as well. We have to be deeply connected with God and listening to him in this process.

But searching for the right person makes me think of when Samuel was looking to appoint a King for Israel to replace Saul. The Lord led him to the home of a man named Jesse. He had seven sons. When Samuel arrived, Jesse proudly paraded six of his boys before Samuel. But God said to Samuel, *"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7). Finally, Samuel said, "Are these all the sons you have?" And Jesse said, "There is still the youngest. He's tending the sheep." And, of course, that was David, and he was God's choice.

Sometimes the things we look for in a leader are wrong. And I think it begs the question, what should we look for? How do we evaluate whether a person is an authentic servant of Christ, qualified to lead God's people? How do we look deeper than the outward appearance and into a person's heart? I think the Apostle Paul can help us here. In his relationship with the Corinthian church, he'd come under the critic's tongue. A group of would-be apostles had come into the church at Corinth and sought to discredit him and his ministry. He was accused of many things: making plans in a worldly manner; being an imposter with no letters of recommendation; trying to fleece them of their money; being weak and ineffective in his ministry; being a boring speaker. He just didn't fit their image of a powerful man of God.

Many of these charges against Paul come out in chapters 10-13. And it's in these chapters, Paul also chooses to respond most forcefully to his critics. He both defends himself and launches his counter-attack. And one of the things that emerge as he does this is a clear picture of what a true leader ought to be like. And with that, we get a pretty clear picture of what a phony or counterfeit looks like.

We need this today, don't we? Many on the religious landscape claim great things and put on a great show, but they're about as genuine as a three-dollar bill. But how do you spot them? How can you tell? In 2 Cor. 10:7-18, Paul shows us how to tell a true leader from a fake. The principles that emerge create a picture of a leader who serves and a servant who leads.

This applies to every one of us. If you belong to Jesus, you've been called to serve him wherever he's put you. Your leadership is to be that of a servant, but your servanthood is to be that of a leader. This may find expression at home as a parent, a caregiver to the elderly, or it may be in ministry with children, students, or adults. Maybe it's in your job in the marketplace. Maybe it's a ministry of leading a small group or serving to meet physical needs. Consider where God has placed you. As this portrait of an authentic leader emerges, ask how God might use your leadership.

### **They invite examination**

The first thing Paul does in responding to his critics is invite them to examine him. Look at verse 7. He starts out, *"You are judging by appearances"* (v. 7a). I learned this week that's really not the best translation of the original Greek. A more accurate translation says, *"Look at what is before your eyes"* (ESV). Paul is challenging them to examine his life and ministry. Authentic leaders invite examination.

Then he says, *"If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do"* (v. 7b). Those words, "belong to Christ," literally mean "from Christ." He's saying, "If anyone is confident they're from Christ, they should consider we're from Christ as much as they are." Paul's critics were confident they were from Christ, but they tried to supplant Paul by saying they were and he wasn't. So Paul says, "Look at me! Consider who I am. Am I not every bit the servant of Christ as you are? Use the same standards to judge us. Aren't we from Christ as much as you are?"

I mean, Paul had encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He'd spent three years being taught by Jesus in Arabia. He'd devoted his life to preaching the gospel and suffered for it time and time again. And he was the one who brought the gospel to them in Corinth. He's the real thing every bit as much as they were

In evaluating a leader, it helps to cut through all the stuff that's been said or rumored and examine the facts. Look at the evidence of their lives and ministry. Look at the fruit. Years ago, Lynn and I attended a meeting with the new principal at our daughter's elementary school. He was new and meeting many of the parents for the first time. I liked this guy because he said right up front, "I'm not going to talk about my credentials for this job. I'm not going to tell you what a good principle I am. I want you to judge for yourself based on my actions."

I like that. That's what Paul says here, and that is what every leader ought to say. "Judge for yourself based on what you see in my life! Look at the fruit!" Don't talk about your credentials and how capable you are; let your life and ministry speak for themselves!

## They use authority to build others up

We should also look at how they use authority. Look at verse 8. *“So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.”* (v. 8). Ironically, one of the things Paul was criticized for was he boasted about his authority. Paul had authority. He was called as an Apostle by Jesus Christ. Apostles had unique authority in the early church. We respect their authority today by adhering to their inspired teaching found in the New Testament. Paul had that authority. He was quite willing to boast about it. Don't be thrown off by that word boast. We'll see it several times in this passage. He's not talking about a prideful, egocentric, self-exalting kind of boasting, but rather a confidence in what God had called him to. Sometimes he was forced to boast in this way because the truth of the gospel was at stake, and when it was, he'd not be ashamed of it. Again, Paul isn't just a leader who serves, but he's a servant who leads.

The thing you to see here, though, is how Paul used his authority. He says it was given to him by the Lord for “building you up rather than tearing you down.” Authentic leaders use authority to build others up. So how do you discern a genuine servant of Christ? Look at how they use their authority. Do they use it as a club to beat people into submission, or do they use it to build others up? Are they threatened by questions or disagreement? Can they admit when they're wrong? Do they maintain power and control by minimizing others? Do they create dependence on the Lord or dependence on themselves? Do they set people free or place them in bondage? One sad thing about the church today is there's a tremendous misuse of authority—by husbands, parents, elders, pastors, and self-appointed spiritual bullies. The tragedy is there are some Christians who seem to want to be bullied. They want a person who stands up and tells them what to do. Certainly, there are times when a leader has to take a stand and speak the hard truth, but they do it to build up and not tear down.

In a TED talk, Pope Francis said it well:

**The more powerful you are, the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don't, your power will ruin you, and you will ruin the others. There is a saying in Argentina: ‘Power is like drinking gin on an empty stomach.’ You feel dizzy, you get drunk, you lose your balance, and you'll end up hurting yourself and those around you if you don't connect your power with humility and tenderness. Through [Christ-like] humility and concrete love, on the other hand, power—the highest, the strongest one—becomes a service, a force for good.**

Paul understood that. He teaches us to use power and authority to build up rather than tear down.

## They're more about character than competency

Nevertheless, there's no doubt Paul said some hard things to the Corinthians, which caused some misunderstanding.

**I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. vv. 9-11**

As we saw last week, Paul's critics accused him of being different in person than in his letters. His letters were strong, but his personal presence and speaking ability were weak. Paul defends himself by saying when he comes again, they'll see there's no inconsistency. He'll be in person what he represented himself to be in his letters.

You see, part of the problem was the Corinthians were more about competency than they were about character. They were looking at the externals. They were looking at Paul's physical presence as well as his skills as an orator. Paul wasn't much to look at, and he wasn't much to listen to. The Living Bible says, *“He sounds big but it's all noise. When he gets here you will see that there is nothing great about him, and you have never heard a worse preacher.”* But Paul shows us that authentic leadership is more about character than competency.

After Paul died, someone took the liberty to describe what he looked like. They said, “He was a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat hooked.” That was written by one of his friends! I'd like to have heard what his enemies said! “Short, bald, big nose, bow-legged.” At least with that, you'd expect great preaching, but he wasn't even much to listen to.

I remember people coming from all over the country to hear Ray Stedman speak down at PBC. Ray wasn't much to look at. He had scrawny legs and an expanded waistline. He had a weathered old face that could have passed for a road map. If you were looking for a certain kind of speaker—bold, dramatic, in your face—he wasn't much to listen to. He never raised his voice. He'd get lost in his notes. And people would come away saying, “That's the great Ray Stedman?” He didn't look right; he didn't sound right. But if you looked beyond the vessel, there was authenticity, and there was character. There was what I'd call “the authority of obedience.” So don't be misled by the vessel! Don't place competence over character.

## They don't engage in fleshly comparisons

Another thing Paul says about authentic leaders is they don't engage in fleshly comparisons. *“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise”* (v. 12). One of the criticisms of Paul was he didn't have the credentials his detractors had. These other guys had long resumes. They could go on and on about what they'd accomplished for Jesus.

It was standard practice back then for teachers to attract pupils by comparing themselves with other teachers. One writer describes it like this:

**In the cutthroat competition for plaudits and pupils, one had to advertise oneself publicly with**

**audacious praise while impugning the qualities of other contenders for honor. People were constantly vying with others to attain effusive glory and engaged in a constant game of one-upmanship. (David Garland)**

You see, their focus was on commending themselves by comparing themselves with themselves! They measure by the wrong standard. It's like the little boy who told his mother he was six feet tall. When she doubted the statement, he assured her he'd just measured himself. Well, his calculations were right, but his ruler wasn't; it was only six inches long.

We see this all the time today. I'm amazed at the stream of promotional material that shows up in my email every week. There are long quotes by big names commending someone for his or her dynamic, universally acclaimed ministry. Usually, we get some numbers thrown in: how their church has grown, how far they've traveled, how many books they've written. It's all self-promotion. They're just propping themselves up by measuring themselves by themselves.

Then I thought of the wonderful contrast in another Christian leader of the past generation, Cliff Barrows. Cliff was an assistant to Billy Graham, a key administrator in the organization; a leader of Billy's conferences on evangelism; the platform host of the crusades; the choir director and song leader — Billy Graham's right-hand man. Yet he hated long, fancy introductions and wrote a simple four-line introduction he asked to be read for himself. It introduced him as a "servant of Jesus" and member of the organization for 'x' number of years. He wanted nothing more said about himself—what a refreshing contrast to the deluge of self-promotional material I see.

There are times when it's appropriate to market who you are and what you do. But Paul refused to play the self-promotion game. Notice how he says, when they do that, "they are not wise." In essence, he's saying, "They're clueless." Why? Because when you commend yourself by comparing yourself with yourself or others, you end up deceiving yourself, thinking you're something more than what you are because you'll always be able to find someone you compare with favorably.

Instead, look at God's standards. A true servant of Christ doesn't engage in fleshly comparisons. He doesn't promote himself or get others to promote him by using standards of comparison that are according to man and not God. Instead, he quietly seeks God's approval.

### **They don't overstep ministry boundaries**

And for Paul, that meant he'd limit himself to the sphere of ministry God had given him.

**We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of**

**activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory. vv. 13-16**

Throughout these verses, Paul speaks of a sphere or field of ministry given to him by God himself. The church at Corinth was part of that sphere. In coming to them, he's not extended beyond his sphere. The reason he knows that is he was the first to go to them with the gospel. He didn't usurp someone else's work. That's exactly what his critics were doing. Whatever good Paul had done, they took credit for it, and all the while, they undermined his credibility. Paul wasn't being territorial. He welcomed others to work alongside him in ministry. He depended on others with different gifts than his own. He knew it was God's work and not his. In his first letter to them, he says, "*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow*" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

You see, there's a God-given sphere of ministry God gives to each of us. Genuine leaders don't overstep ministry boundaries. Not all growth or expansion is good. An individual's ministry or even a church can grow beyond their sphere. Care must be taken to respect the work of others. Much of the church growth these days is simply one church taking sheep from another church. It's the movement of sheep rather than the birthing of lambs. We should be much more concerned with reaching those who don't know Christ than we are with stealing sheep!

Years ago, in Franklin, Tennessee, a large wealthy church reached out to children in the poorer part of town. They brought gifts and took the children on outings. One day, a staff member named Scott from the church, went inside a much smaller church in the heart of the poorer section of the community. He met Denny, the pastor who said to him, "You can come down here and buy off these kids, but when they get shot in the middle of the night, they're going to call me." The conversation led to tears, repentance, and ultimately a friendship and ministry partnership that lasted until Denny died. But Scott learned his big, wealthy church had meant well but actually crossed the boundaries of another church's ministry, and he repented of his lack of sensitivity.

Paul says he'll not "boast beyond proper limits" and confine his ministry to the "sphere of service God himself had assigned to us." Paul also hoped as the Corinthians grew in their faith, they'd begin to have an impact on those around them, and then he'd be able to extend beyond them to areas where no one had heard the gospel. A healthy church will be concerned for the progress of the gospel. An immature church is ingrown, preoccupied with itself, unable to give and reach out. We're called to be a conduit of God's blessing, not a receptacle. We're called to overflow and bless others! But as we do that, we need to be sensitive to the work others are doing and not overstep those ministry boundaries.

### **They boast in the Lord**

Again, Paul talked a lot about boasting in this passage. He uses the word six times. It seems strange to us, but it all becomes clear in vv. 17-18. "*But, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'*" For it is not the one who

*commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends"* (vv. 17-18). That quote comes from Jeremiah 9:23-24.

You see, authentic leaders don't boast in their own wisdom or strength or riches; they boast in the Lord. We boast in knowing him. We boast in the work he's doing. Genuine leaders boast in the Lord—who he is and what he's accomplished. It's like being a Giants fan. We boast in the fact our team won three world championships in the last decade. We didn't do it. We don't take credit for it. But we do glory in it, and we do boast about. Why? Because they're our team. In the same way, we glory in; we boast in what God has done because we're on his team.

Ramon Piaguaje, a Secoya Indian, born and raised in the rain forest of Ecuador, won the largest painting competition in the world. His painting "Eternal Amazon" was selected from over 22,000 entries by professionals and amateur artists from 51 countries and was on display at the United Nations. As a young man, Ramon was first encouraged in his efforts by Orville and Mary Johnson, Wycliffe Bible Translators working in his village.

The Johnsons recognized a God-given ability and encouraged him to keep drawing. When they left his village, having completed their translation of the New Testament, they took with them 30 drawings by Ramon. Since then, Ramon has met the Prince of Wales and the secretary-general of the United Nations, and "Eternal Amazon" has been viewed worldwide. Ramon is quick to boast in what the Lord has done. "I can't take pride in the gift that I have as an artist, for it's God that has given me this talent, and I want to use it for his glory."

When the elderly missionary couple heard about the exhibit at the United Nations, they decided to surprise Ramon. They entered the exhibition hall and found him surrounded by people. When he saw the Johnsons, he began to cry. They hugged and wept for several moments. In Secoya, Ramon repeated over and over to Orville and Mary, "You're the ones that should be honored, not me...for you came to give us the gospel, and I believe that is why I now can be here."

That's the kind of leader that Paul was, and that's the kind of leader we all want. Someone who invites examination, uses their authority to build others up, cares more about character than competency, refuses to engage in fleshly comparisons, won't overstep ministry boundaries, and boasts in the Lord. That's a leader who serves and a servant who leads.

Perhaps it comes down to this: After a request came to Jesus by two of his disciples to sit in the seats of honor beside him in his kingdom, Jesus said this,

**You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be**

**your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matt. 20:25-28**

If you remember anything from the message today, remember those four words, "not so with you." Don't try to mimic the leadership standards of the world. Look to Jesus. Be a leader who serves and a servant who leads.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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