



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Seven

“WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?”

If you want to see proof of how important leadership is, don't miss the fact that Satan often aims his most ferocious attacks at key leaders. Among all the wicked devices the evil one employs, some of his very favorite weapons are half-truths and deliberate lies that breed rebellion and attempt to undermine the trust people have placed in godly leaders.

Paul masterfully answered that charge by turning it around against his critics. “Who is adequate for these things?” he said ([2 Corinthians 2:16](#)).

[2 Corinthians 2:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶“To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?”

In that very same context, Paul compared the ministry of the gospel to a triumphal procession. When a Roman general or a Caesar won a key and decisive military victory, a formal “triumph” would be held to honor him and commemorate the victory. The triumph was a massive celebratory parade, one of the most important and colorful pageants in the Roman culture. The victorious leader would be carried through the streets with his army marching behind, holding the captured spoils and other tokens of victory aloft. Priests would accompany the parade, waving censers of powerful incense, diffusing a sweet-smelling aroma through the whole city.

When Titus Vespasian sacked Jerusalem in AD 70, he was given a triumph. Bas-relief figures on the Arch of Titus in Rome portray that event. Such celebrations were extremely rare, reserved only for the most critical victories. It was a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence.

But Paul said the ministry of the gospel is like a perpetual triumph. He likened himself to a censer through whom Christ “**manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place**” ([2 Corinthians 2:14](#)).

[2 Corinthians 2:14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴“**But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.**”

Most Roman triumphs also featured a procession of chained captives. These would be enemy warriors who were condemned to die at the culmination of the procession. They would, of course, smell the aroma of the fragrant incense, but to them it signified defeat and death, not victory and life.

Paul said the gospel-incense (“**the fragrance of Christ**” [\[v. 15\]](#)) is precisely like that.

[2 Corinthians 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵“**For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.**”

It has a similar twofold meaning. To those who believe (“**those who are being saved**”), it is an aroma of life; but “**among those who are perishing,**” it signifies death and condemnation ([v. 15](#)).

[2 Corinthians 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵“**For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.**”

So he wrote:

[2 Corinthians 2:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶“**To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?**”

That is where he then raised the question: “**And who is adequate for these things?**” Who is *adequate* to partake in Christ’s triumphal parade and be an instrument through which the incense of the gospel message is diffused to all? Who in himself is qualified to receive accolades from almighty God for service rendered to Him on behalf of Jesus Christ?

He was turning the tables on the false teachers—calling into question their claim that *they* were adequate. He said, in fact, that they were guilty of “**peddling the word of God**” ([v. 17](#)).

[2 Corinthians 2:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷“**For we are not like many [they], peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.**”

They were the insincere ones, making merchandise of the gospel. They were hucksters, con men, in it for money. They were willing to twist or shape their message deceitfully in order to maximize their profits. If it meant preying on people’s fears, they would do that. If it meant trying to discredit an apostle like Paul, they would do that too. If it simply meant tickling people’s ears by giving them whatever message they demanded, here were some ready teachers.



They were the first-century equivalent of today's **“market-driven”** philosophies of church leadership and ministry.

Paul answered the rhetorical question of [verse 16](#) (“Who is sufficient for these things?”) in the **first five [verses of chapter 3](#)**.

2 Corinthians 3:1-5 (NASB)

¹“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?”

²You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

³being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

⁵Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.”

He said, in essence, that the only person who is really adequate to lead is the one whom God has made a leader. Self-made leaders are utterly incompetent. By contrast, Paul said, **“Our sufficiency is from God”** ([3:5](#)).

2 Corinthians 3:5 (NASB)

⁵“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.”

That statement is the key to this brief passage and a summary of Paul's whole self-defense.

Paul was being attacked on several fronts: his character, his influence, his calling, and his humility. The false apostles who had successfully infiltrated the Corinthian church had relentlessly assaulted him by striking repeatedly at each of those targets. Notice how skillfully the apostle replied.