



## PART 2

# PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

## Chapter Seven

### “WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?”

#### HIS CHARACTER

Paul’s response to his critics highlights another fundamental principle of leadership: *A leader doesn’t abdicate his role in the face of opposition.*

#### **LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #16**

#### **A LEADER DOESN’T ABDICATE HIS ROLE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION**

That was true in Paul’s day too. The false teachers had placed Paul in a position that seemed impossible. If he defended himself, that would only fuel even more charges against him. But if he ignored the threat, he would in effect be abdicating his leadership. Therefore, Paul wisely answered his accusers in a way that anticipated all their objections:

#### **2 Corinthians 3:1-5 (NASB)**

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

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

<sup>3</sup>being 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.

<sup>4</sup>Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

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

Now, follow the line of his argument: He began with **two questions** directed at the hearts and consciences of the Corinthians. 1) Did he really need to start at the very beginning and prove himself to them? 2) Did he need letters of commendation to establish credibility with them? Both questions are worded in a way that anticipates a negative answer.

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The “**we**” (used throughout the entire epistle) is an editorial “**we**.” It’s not employed to be pompous, like a royal “**we**,” but precisely the opposite. Paul used it as a humble substitute for the first-person singular pronoun. He was sensitive to the accusation that he was heavy-handed, self-commending, and self-exalting. So rather than giving ammunition to his critics who had made that charge, he appealed to the Corinthians themselves. **Did he even need to justify his leadership with such self-commendation?**

He would say similar things in **5:12** (“**We do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf**”) and **10:18** (“**Not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends**”). So this same line of argument runs through the entire epistle.

**2 Corinthians 5:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup>“**We** are not again commending ourselves to you but *are* giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have *an answer* for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.”

**2 Corinthians 10:18 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup>“**For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.**”

Clearly, Paul had no agenda to commend himself. That is not what he was trying to do. He was not setting himself forth as a perfect leader. In fact, in **1 Corinthians 15:9-10** he had said,

**1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup>“**For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.**

<sup>10</sup>**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.**”

And here in **2 Corinthians**, his only aim was to ask the Corinthians to search their own hearts and face for themselves the challenge that had been raised against him by the false leaders. **Did they really need proof of Paul’s character?**

## CH-110 LEADERSHIP 1

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Lecture # 34



The false teachers had evidently insinuated that there was a hidden agenda in Paul's leadership—a dark side, a sinful motive, or a secret life others did not know about. They had attacked his character and were trying to destroy his credibility. So he replied, in effect: **“You mean you don't know me well enough to know that is a lie?”**

The frustration of Paul's heart comes through in the question he asks. **All his labors, his teaching, his preaching, his prayers, his fellowship with the Corinthians and his ministry in their midst, his love for them, the tears he had shed for them—did all of that mean *nothing*?**