



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

You want a letter? he asks. I’ll give you a letter:

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NASB)

**²“You 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.”**

Paul’s epistle of commendation was better than any letter the false teachers could pull out of their satchels. Paul’s was a flesh-and-blood, living, walking testimony. His credentials as a leader were written in the lives of the Corinthians themselves. The influence of his ministry on their lives was ample proof of the legitimacy and the effectiveness of his leadership.

In **1 Corinthians 6:9–10**, Paul had written,



1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB)

⁹“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Then he added, “*Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” ([v. 11](#), emphasis added).

1 Corinthians 6:11 (NASB)

¹¹“*Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

Remember, the effectiveness of leadership is measured in terms of influence. When you see someone’s influence reflected so profoundly in the lives of other people, you have identified someone who is by definition a leader.

The only testimonial Paul needed outside the evident virtue of his own life was the fact that God had used his teaching and his leadership in such an instrumental way.

God Himself had stepped into the vile Corinthian culture and carved out a church to His glory and His praise. The Corinthians themselves were an eloquent testimonial of Paul’s influence. They were the living validation of his leadership.

By the way, this letter wasn’t stuffed into a satchel. It wasn’t folded up and hidden in a pocket. It was everywhere to be seen. It could be read by anyone, at any time, and in any language ([2 Corinthians 3:2](#)).

2 Corinthians 3:2 (NASB)

²“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men.”

Paul also carried the letter with him, but not in his luggage. The Corinthians were written in his heart ([v. 2](#)). They were precious to him. “You are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” ([2 Corinthians 7:3](#)). If the false teachers had raised questions about his affection for them, Paul here dispelled that uncertainty with an explicit declaration.

2 Corinthians 7:3 (NASB)

³“I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.”

Critics looking for a self-serving plea from Paul would find nothing here that could be denied. Christ, not Paul himself, had written Paul’s letter of commendation in the lives of the Corinthians. It was a letter written without ink and pen from Christ by the Spirit of the living God ([2 Corinthians 3:3](#)).



2 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB)

³“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.”

Could the false apostles produce a letter of recommendation signed by Christ? Certainly not.

Anyone can write a letter with ink. Only Christ can write a letter such as Paul had. The Corinthians themselves *were his letter*, kept in his heart, composed by Christ, and written down by the Holy Spirit. What purer proof of his authentic influence was there?

HIS CALLING

The false teachers had done all they could to undermine Paul’s influence in Corinth. They had questioned his fitness to lead, and to some degree they had succeeded in getting the Corinthians to question his competency as well.

Paul, while vigorously defending his own adequacy, was eager to explain that his confidence was not merely *self-confidence*. So in [2 Corinthians 3:4 NASB](#), he explained the source of his certainty: “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.”

Paul was certain of his calling. That is *why* he refused to abdicate his leadership to the false teachers. His calling was a stewardship received from God. After all, “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” ([1 Corinthians 4:2](#)), so Paul had no choice but to answer this attack on his authority.

1 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB)

²“In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

Again, Paul was not defending himself for his own sake. He did not desire the Corinthians’ affirmation for selfish reasons. And he certainly did not need to convince himself. But God was the One who called him to the role of leadership, and Paul never vacillated about his calling.

This is another vital principle in all wise leadership: *A leader is sure of his calling.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #17 **A LEADER IS SURE OF HIS CALLING**

Those who are unsure of their own vocation cannot possibly be effective leaders. Nothing is more debilitating to leadership than self-doubt. People who have qualms about their own giftedness or calling never make good leaders, because at the most basic level they are uncertain about whether what they are doing is right. They will naturally be racked with indecision,

CH-110 LEADERSHIP 1

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Lecture # 36



hesitant, timid, and fainthearted in every choice they must make. As we have seen, those things are antithetical to the essential qualities of good leadership.

Paul never wavered in his confidence that God had called him to be an apostle. Others questioned him all the time. After all, he was not one of the Twelve. He was a relative latecomer to faith in Christ. He had, in fact, been a notorious persecutor of the church ([Acts 9:13](#)).