



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Seven

“WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?”

HIS HUMILITY

Paul then made another statement that carries the same argument one step further and makes explicit what he had hinted at throughout his self-defense. Again, this is the theme and a fitting summary of his whole defense: **“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God”** ([2 Corinthians 3:5 NASB](#)).

Although Paul was supremely confident of his calling and quite sure of his own giftedness, he also remembered where those gifts had come from, and he knew they were not from within himself. The source of his adequacy was God. Paul did not for a moment imagine that he was adequate for the apostolic office in and of himself. On the contrary, he knew he was inadequate on his own. About *that*, his critics were right.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing,” Jesus said ([John 15:5 NASB](#)). The converse is equally true. **“I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me,”** Paul wrote in [Philippians 4:13 NASB](#).

Both sides of that truth are equally important. **“I labored more abundantly than they all,”** Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:10](#), **“yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”** (emphasis added); **“By the grace of God I am what I am”** ([v. 10](#)).



1 Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“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.”

In no way did Paul imagine himself intrinsically adequate for the task to which God had called him. And that realization kept him dependent on divine grace in every aspect of his leadership.

Thus he exemplifies another basic principle of all wise leadership: *A leader knows his own limitations.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #18

A LEADER KNOWS HIS OWN LIMITATIONS

Those whom the world holds up as leaders often exude **arrogance, cockiness, egotism, and conceit**. Those things are not qualities of true leadership; they are actually hindrances to it. The leader who forgets his own weakness will inevitably fail.

Paul, by contrast, drew strength from remembering his own weaknesses, because those things made him more dependent on the power of God. He wrote, **“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong”** ([2 Corinthians 12:10 NASB](#)). When he came to the end of his human resources, that was when the power of God flowed through him. God, and God alone, was Paul’s only true source of sufficiency.

People are not effective in leadership merely because they’re naturally talented communicators, because they have creative minds, because they have a flair for persuading people, or because of any other natural talents. In fact, if your own abilities are all you depend on as a leader, your own limitations will be your downfall. From a spiritual perspective, human ingenuity and human cleverness tend to corrupt more than they help.

The apostle Paul had a great mind, but he didn’t depend on it. He had wonderful training and he made use of it (or rather, God used it mightily). But he had no confidence whatsoever in the power of human wisdom when used for its own ends. He reminded the Corinthians that God’s Word says, **“For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”** ([1 Corinthians 1:19 NASB](#)).

For that very reason, Paul’s preaching in Corinth had been simple and plain:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (NASB)

¹“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

²For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

³I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

⁴and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom,



**but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of
God.”**

Paul had both the intellectual and the oratorical ability to hold his own with the greatest philosophers. And we see evidence of that in [Acts 17](#), where he ministered in Athens among the philosophers. But that was not the basis of his ministry—either in Athens or in Corinth. The heart of his message was always Christ, proclaimed with clarity and directness, and he trusted the power of the gospel itself—not his own cleverness—to penetrate hearts and influence people. That’s something many church leaders today would do well to remember.

The truth was not something that resided in Paul. The power for ministry did not lie in his abilities. Take the Word of God away from him and he had nothing to say. Remove the Spirit of God from his life and he could do nothing worthwhile. He knew that. His claim on apostleship was not in any sense tied to the fact that he was a clever speaker, a brilliant thinker, or a powerful writer. He was an apostle because God had called and empowered him. Take that away and he would not have been fit for the task, regardless of his natural abilities and his formal training.

That’s why Paul refused to defend himself by boasting about his proficiency as a theologian or his skill as an orator. There’s not a word in all his self-defense about his talents or his training. His only sufficiency was from God. Therefore, Paul could defend himself with the utmost humility.

Here’s a principle to bear in mind: No competent leader is going to be anxious to impress people with his *credentials*. Leaders who are truly able are qualified because of their *character*. They are easily identified, not by letters of commendation, but because of the influence they have on others. They are people who are confident of their calling, and yet at the same time, they know they are utterly dependent on God as the source of their true power.