

MARKS OF AUTHENTIC MINISTRY – 2 CORINTHIANS

SYNOPSIS

This essay identifies the marks of authentic ministry which can be inferred either directly or indirectly by Paul's correspondence in 2 Corinthians. It is first established that given the occasion and purpose of the letter, 2 Corinthians is a good place to look for authentic marks of ministry. Dividing the data into three main categories, it is suggested that firstly, marks which do not necessarily confirm nor deny the authenticity of a ministry include (1) Jewish pedigree, (2) claims to have had visions and revelations, (3) use of fine sounding rhetoric, and (4) one's ability to draw an income from their ministry. Secondly, decisive marks which identify a ministry as authentic include (1) that rather than being divisive, the ministry has the effect of building up the church, (2) the minister shares in the sufferings of Christ, (3) the minister reflects the nature and character of Christ, (4) the minister boasts only within proper limits, and (5) rather than distorting the gospel, the ministry preserves and proclaims the true gospel. Thirdly, marks which are indicative of an unauthentic or counterfeit ministry include (1) a primary focus on making profit, (2) use of deception and 'worldly' or ungodly techniques of persuasion, (3) reliance on worldly boasting and self commendation, and (4) equating hardship and suffering with failure. In light of these marks of authentic ministry, some contemporary applications are identified with particular reference to what has been commonly termed 'prosperity doctrine'; modern day styles of worship and preaching; and the often unchallenged identification of suffering with failure.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This essay will examine Paul's perspective in 2 Corinthians on the marks of authentic ministry. In order to provide a basis for that which follows, Paul's purpose for writing 2 Corinthians will first be explored. The discussion will then proceed in three main sections. First, the marks which do not necessarily authenticate a ministry will be identified, followed secondly by the more decisive marks of authentic ministry. Thirdly, the marks which are indicative of *unauthentic*, or counterfeit ministry will be explored. Having then summarised the conclusions from these three sections, the essay will finally explore some practical issues relating to how Paul's perspectives in 2 Corinthians can be brought to bear in contemporary ministry situations.

2. PURPOSE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

There are a few key references in 2 Corinthians where Paul indicates his purpose for writing. An explicit statement of purpose is found in 13:10 where Paul suggests that he is writing in preparation for his next trip to Corinth, so that he will not have to be harsh in his use of authority which was given for building up the church. In the previous verse, Paul highlighted that his prayer for the Corinthians is for their perfection (13:9). Similarly, in 12:19, likely referring in part to the writing of the letter which is now drawing to a close, Paul says that everything he and his co-workers do is for the strengthening of the Corinthians. This further bolsters a previous statement by Paul in which he identified his authority as having been given by the Lord for the purpose of building them up rather than tearing them down (10:8). These references begin to build the picture that Paul's *primary* purpose in writing (certainly chapters 10-13 and most likely also including chapters 1-9) is to build up the

congregation. The other issues addressed in the letter can be seen to be subordinate to this primary purpose.¹

Paul's purpose in writing can be rounded out more fully by looking beyond these specific statements to the occasion for writing, and the overall thrust of Paul's arguments. The reconstruction of the events leading up to the writing of Second Corinthians is quite complex and won't be repeated here, however in summary it can be said that Paul is responding to a difficult situation in Corinth where people have emerged, possibly from among the fringes of the congregation, to attack Paul and his authority as an apostle.² Much has also been written on the identity of these opponents, however due to the nature of the data, it is probably best not to go beyond broadly identifying them as some sort of Jewish Christians.³ The heart of Second Corinthians is a response by Paul challenging the fundamental criteria by which the opponents assess his (and their own) ministry – a set of criteria which the Corinthians seemed to have accepted as valid. Carson summarises this criteria as being primarily *triumphalistic*.⁴ Broadly speaking, triumphalism boasts in strength and despises all forms of weakness. Therefore, given the occasion of the letter and Paul's purpose for writing, Second Corinthians is a good place to look for Paul's perspective on marks of authentic ministry, since the question of authentic ministry lies at the heart of Paul's purpose for writing this particular letter.

¹ For example, Paul is at pains to defend his authority as an apostle among the Corinthians, but when one asks why Paul is defending his authority, the answer yields the primary purpose: so that that Corinthians are not led astray, and ultimately that the church in Corinth is strengthened and built up.

² For an analysis of the situation behind chapters 10—13 and how they relate to chapters 1—9 see Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1986), xxxvii – li.

³ Key options put forward include: Jewish Christian Gnostics, Judaizers, Palestinian Jewish Christians, and Hellenistic Jewish Christian Sophists. Rather than trying to be too specific regarding the *identity* of the opponents, a more helpful avenue for analysis is probably to identify the *nature of the attacks* of the opponents or their behaviours. However, again it should be noted that this is achieved by a mirror reading of 1 & 2 Corinthians, and thus has the limitations associated with this method.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10—13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 49.

3. MARKS WHICH DO NOT NECESSARILY AUTHENTICATE A MINISTRY

Pau's opponents seem to have used a wide range of criteria by which they evaluated Paul ministry. Yet, perhaps one of the more subtly undermining methods of the opponents was to draw attention to marks which accompanied their own ministries which seemed on the surface to validate their ministry. There are at least four in this category, including appeals to Jewish pedigree; claims of visions and revelations; use of fine sounding rhetoric; and an ability to sustain one's own ministry financially.⁵

3.1 Jewish Pedigree

One of the key criteria to which Paul responds is his opponents' claim to Jewish lineage as authentication of their ministry (11:22). Paul refers to the three categories: Hebrew, Israelite, and Seed of Abraham. Witherington sees a distinction between the three categories as referring to language or ethnicity, spiritual allegiance, and ancestry respectively.⁶ Whether or not Paul in fact had these nuances in mind is not clear, however the main thrust can be affirmed: on the basis of this criteria, in all three respects Paul can equally claim to be a servant of Christ.⁷ As such the Corinthians cannot differentiate between the ministries of Paul and his opponents on the basis of this category. Further, given that Paul refers to these men as false apostles (11:13), it can be concluded that an appeal to Jewish pedigree is not necessarily a mark of authentic ministry.

3.2 Visions and Revelations

From a mirror reading of chapter 12, a second criteria can be inferred, namely the claim of his opponents as having experienced visions and revelations (12:1-10) and that these function as a validation of the authenticity of their ministry. Paul

⁵ These marks could not be said to be 'bad' or 'un-Christian', nor described as marks of an *unauthentic* ministry, however while they may be good, they do not necessarily prove that a ministry is authentic.

⁶ Ben III. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 452.

⁷ Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC; Downers Grove: IVP, 1987), 195.

painstakingly responds to this criteria which seems to have been accepted by the Corinthians (12:1, 11). He cannot even bring himself to refer to his surpassingly great vision in the first person (“I know *a man...*” 12:2), he can only bring himself to identify with the suffering and weakness he experiences as a result (“a thorn in *my* flesh ... to torment *me*” 12:7). Yet Paul is forced to respond to the fools according to their folly, and – though he doesn’t want to – he affirms that in this respect also he is equal, if not superior, to his opponents. So again this criteria cannot be used for them to claim superiority over him. As such, given that the ministry of the false apostles is marked by visions, and revelations it can be concluded that these ‘spiritual’ claims cannot necessarily be considered decisive marks of an authentic ministry.⁸

3.3 Fine Sounding Rhetoric

Paul captures a key criticism of his opponents, that “in person he [Paul] is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing (10:10). Also, in comparing himself with the ‘super-apostles’, which is likely an ironical reference to those who are later termed ‘false apostles’,⁹ Paul concedes for the sake of his argument that he may not be as well trained in Hellenistic oratory as his opponents (11:5-6). These references reveal that the opponents, as well as the Corinthians, place value on fine sounding rhetoric, perhaps more so than the content of the message itself. It seems that one of the proofs of apostleship had become impressive speaking and powerful presence.¹⁰ Carson suggests that to Paul’s opponents “stylised rhetoric mattered more than truth”.¹¹ He goes on to make the cutting observation that

⁸ In this case it is difficult for the believers to make any objective judgement as to the validity of Paul’s opponents’ claims regarding visions and revelations. Paul has already cleared the way and given the Corinthians a category with which to classify these men who are making such claims. Paul has labelled them as false apostles, deceitful workman masquerading as apostles of Christ (11:13). Further, he implies that these men are servants of Satan who himself masquerades as an angel of light (11:15). It would not be a stretch for the Corinthians to think Satan capable of counterfeit miracles, and as such the Corinthians are now in a sense given permission by Paul even to interpret signs and wonders performed by his opponents as counterfeit. This gives further weight to the view that visions and revelations, as well as signs and wonders, on their own may be evidence, but due to their subjective nature should not be considered as ‘proof’ of, or to use consistent terms, a decisive mark, of authentic ministry.

⁹ So, Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 185; and Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 446.

¹⁰ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 218.

¹¹ Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 101.

although infants are distracted by the wrapper, no one else should be.¹² Paul does not allow this criteria to have any bearing on his standing as an apostle and does not attempt to size up to it,¹³ and in so doing Paul implicitly rejects the notion that this criteria is a necessary mark of authentic ministry. Though of course, the *presence* of fine oratory does not *invalidate* a ministry.

3.4 Ability to Draw an Income from One's Ministry

A fourth basis on which Paul's authority was questioned was his refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians (11:7-12). The implied allegation is that since Paul preached without charge, he is not a true apostle.¹⁴ This allegation is likely because of two factors. First, those captured by the sophistic movement held that if teaching was given for free it was worth nothing.¹⁵ Second, a typical sentiment of the Greek upper class was that no free citizen, and certainly no philosopher, should be involved in manual labour.¹⁶ As such, given the social context of Paul's ministry, engaging in manual work, such as tent-making, included a loss in social esteem, and to outsiders this may have called the validity of his message and ministry into question. In addition, Paul himself highlights the biblical principle that ministers have the right to make a living off their ministry (1 Cor 9:6-18). Yet despite potentially valid cultural and scriptural reasons for accepting support from the Corinthians, Paul chose to wave this right (1 Cor 9:12, 15). Perhaps Paul did not want to be drawn into a patron-client relationship with the Corinthians. He was also likely aware that this criteria of the Sophists was a stumbling block for the Corinthians. Paul uses the analogy of a parent-child relationship to justify his expending himself for them (12:14-15). Further, his actions in this regard are the same as that of Christ (8:9), so in this way Paul's ministry draws support from Christ's paradigm for ministry. Whatever the reason, by refusing to accept support from them, Paul rejects the notion that drawing an income from a ministry is a mark

¹² Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 101.

¹³ Though with his training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), one would be surprised if in fact he was an inferior orator.

¹⁴ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 344.

¹⁵ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 344.

¹⁶ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 344.

of its authenticity. What can be said is that if a person's demands of a fee, or makes of a living off their ministry, this neither confirms nor denies the authenticity of that ministry.

4. MARKS OF AUTHENTIC MINISTRY

Having identified the marks which, though perhaps outwardly impressive, do not necessarily authenticate a ministry, the discussion now turns to examine the more decisive marks, which when present, signify the authenticity of that ministry.

4.1 Authentic Ministry Builds Up the Church

If Paul's primary purpose in writing 2 Corinthians has been correctly identified as: *to build up the congregation* (see §2 above), then it should not be surprising that one of the key marks of authentic ministry is that it builds up the church. Paul boasts somewhat freely that authority was given to him by God for the purpose of building up the people of the church rather than tearing them down (10:8; 12:19; 13:10).¹⁷ As such, those who rise up to cause division are seen to lack this mark of authenticity, and thus can be seen for who they are (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-13; 3:3-16).¹⁸

Further evidence that Paul uses to authenticate his ministry is the very existence of the Corinthian church (3:2-3; 10:14). Responding to the question raised by his opponents regarding the matter of letters of recommendation, Paul responds that the existence of the Corinthian church is evidence that God is working through them. They are his letter of recommendation (3:3). They are a kind of living document for all to read. Rather than a letter written by apostles in Jerusalem, as much authority

¹⁷ In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes similar remarks, that the gifts of the Spirit are given to believers for the purpose of building up the church (Eph 4:11-13).

¹⁸ However, sometimes in the midst of the difficult situation, it would have been difficult to discern which actions were divisive and which were building up the church. When offending parties arose in the Corinthian church (eg. 1 Cor 5:1-5), the discipline of those parties by Paul, via the 'sever letter' may have seemed to be dividing the church (7:8). Yet the proof that this was the work of the Spirit through Paul was both in its intent (2:9), and its result (7:9). Paul's discipline was for the ultimate purpose of building up the church, and this purpose was achieved. The new opponents which arose, to whom Paul is responding in chapters 10-13, also seek to divide the church, and Paul seeks also to deal with them for the ultimate purpose of building up the church (13:3, 10).

as that carries, here Christ is the author of the letter and Paul functions as a scribe.¹⁹ Authentic ministry bears good fruit, in this case the birth of the Church in Corinth, but more broadly, the building up of the church.

4.2 An Authentic Minister Shares in Christ's Sufferings

There are a number of facets to the authentic minister's sharing in Christ's suffering. It is functional in that Paul suffers vicariously for the Corinthians, while at the same time, in the midst of Paul's suffering and weakness, Christ's strength is on display.

Paul constantly refers to the sufferings he has endured and stresses that far from calling his authority into question, they actually validate his ministry since the message of Christ crucified is embodied in Paul's own experience of suffering. From the outset, Paul identifies that the sufferings of himself and his co-workers are for a purpose (1:5-7). As pioneers for the gospel, they experience Christ's comfort in the midst of trials, and pass on that very practical comfort to the Corinthians when they likewise experience suffering. By referring to carrying around the death of Jesus (4:10), Paul is likely referring to concrete experiences of suffering as resulting from carrying out the ministry of an apostle.²⁰ The term νέκρωσις (death), used here by Paul, in contrast to the other option of θάνατος (death), likely points to the process which leads to death.²¹ The suffering they experience for the gospel is for the benefit of the Corinthians, so much so that Paul can say that "death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (4:12). The clear implication of suffering lists such as 4:8-12 and 6:4-10 is that "*the true servant of God is a suffering servant.*"²² Also in 11:23-29, the long list of sufferings are endured in obedient service to Christ. This is what Paul boasts about. "Instead of talking about his exploits and his victories, Paul details his sufferings, loss, shame and defeats. It is almost as if the primary (if not the only) incontestable criterion of true apostleship is massive suffering in the

¹⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *New Testament models for ministry, Jesus and Paul* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1985), 111.

²⁰ Kruse, *New Testament models for ministry, Jesus and Paul*, 112.

²¹ Kruse, *New Testament models for ministry, Jesus and Paul*, 112.

²² Kruse, *New Testament models for ministry, Jesus and Paul*, 113.

service of Christ.”²³ So, far from invalidating their ministry, as would be understood from a triumphalist perspective, this sharing in Christ’s sufferings is a decisive mark of authentic ministry.

Yet in the midst of their sufferings, Paul and his co-workers embody not just the death but also the resurrection of Christ, displaying God’s strength in their weakness. God’s help in the midst of Paul’s suffering is evidence of God’s powerful work in his life (1:8-10; 4:7-12). Responding to correct the triumphalist leanings of the Corinthians, Paul doesn’t shy away from suffering nor interpret it as failure; rather he notes long lists of suffering, and draws attention to the fact that Christ’s power in the midst of that suffering brings God’s all-surpassing power into sharp relief (4:7-12). Perhaps this is nowhere stated more clearly than in the context of Paul’s boasting in weakness: “for when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:9-10). Paul may even *boast* in his weakness, because through his weakness God is seen to be strong. Kruse highlights that Paul’s weakness is not *replaced* by the power of God, but paradoxically Paul’s weakness is *accompanied* by God’s strength.²⁴ That is, the two operate in parallel. In this way, Paul simultaneously manifests both the weakness of Christ in his crucifixion, as well as the power of the resurrection which God exerted in Christ. Sharing in Christ’s suffering is thus a mark of authentic ministry because only in the midst of this difficulty and weakness is Christ’s resurrection power made visible.

4.3 An Authentic Minister Reflects the Nature and Character of Christ

Beyond sharing in Christ’s sufferings, Paul points more broadly to reflecting the nature and character of Christ as a mark of an authentic minister. This is seen for example in 6:3-10 where Paul provides a list as a means of self-commendation. Stegman observes that the basis of Paul’s self commendation is the ethos of Jesus.²⁵ That is, Paul claims to be emulating the character of Christ. In the list in

²³ Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 125.

²⁴ Kruse, *New Testament models for ministry, Jesus and Paul*, 109.

²⁵ Thomas Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: the Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2005), 68.

chapter 6, the key character traits with which Paul identifies include purity, understanding, patience, kindness, sincere love and truthful speech (6:6-7). Outside of this, Stegman notes faithfulness as another key character trait of Christ embodied by Paul (4:7-14; 12:9-10).²⁶ In his difficult situation of having been accused of being forceful in his letters, but unimpressive in person (10:10), Paul appeals to the Corinthians with the Christ-like qualities of meekness and gentleness (10:1). Throughout the letter, Paul appeals to his personal integrity, that is, that his character (or ethos) matches that of Christ, and this is the basis of his authority. In this way Paul indicates that a mark of an authentic minister is that they reflect the nature and character of Christ.

4.4 An Authentic Minister Boasts Within Proper Limits

One of the key issues which required a response from Paul in 2 Corinthians was the boasting of his opponents. Again Paul was forced to respond to the fools according to their folly, however in so doing, he refused to boast beyond proper limits (10:13). Where his opponents were content to boast in mere words, Paul would boast in his actions (6:3-10).²⁷ Paul's boasting lists, such as that found in 6:4-10 and 11:21b-29, have been identified as being of a form which would have been familiar in the first century. Though while the form may have been familiar, Paul turns this genre on its head by that which he provides as the content for his boasting. Witherington notes the parallels, but more significantly the contrasts between Augustine's imperial *res gestae* and Paul's catalogue of sufferings.²⁸ Rather than boasting of victories and bestowed honours, Paul boasts of his sufferings (11:21bff). Yet, just like Augustine's imperial *res gestae*, Paul's catalogue functions as a claim to his rightful authority over the group of people given his accomplishments.²⁹ Although Paul employs this literary form (albeit against his will, 11:21b), he ultimately affirms that it

²⁶ Stegman, *The Character of Jesus*, 247-49.

²⁷ Stegman highlights that this is congruent with a key aspect of Aristotle's teaching on rhetoric. To those who suggest that "the worth of an orator in no way contributes to his power of persuasion", Aristotle's teaching responds by affirming that "on the contrary, moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof." Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2.4; quoted in Stegman, *The Character of Jesus*, 69.

²⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 451-52.

²⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 451-52.

is not a person who commends themselves who is approved, but one whom the Lord commends (10:17-18). As such, whenever Paul boasts about himself, he only boasts in his weakness, because, as discussed above, it is in his weakness that God's strength is made known (12:9-10). Paul's refusal in this letter to boast beyond proper limits is a mark of an authentic minister.

4.5 Authentic Ministry Preserves the True Gospel

One of the distinctives of Paul's ministry in comparison to that of his opponents is that he was not prepared to distort the gospel (4:2). While his opponents likely overemphasised certain aspects of the word of God in order to suit their triumphalist categories, Paul and his colleagues elect to plainly set forth the truth. The distortion of the gospel propounded by the opponents had the potential of luring the Corinthians away from their devotion to Christ (11:3). In fact, Paul refers to the gospel of his opponents as 'another gospel', and the Jesus of his opponents as 'another Jesus' (11:4; cf. Gal 1:8). Paul's preservation and proclamation of the true gospel is a decisive mark of his authentic ministry.

4.6 A Note on Authentic Marks of an *Apostle*

Paul affirms that he is in no way inferior to his opponents in performing the apostolic marks of signs, wonders, and miracles (12:12). These marks function here as evidence that Paul is indeed a true apostle. The pertinent question here is whether or not these are a necessary accompaniment to *all* authentic ministry, or if they are a necessary sign more particularly of an authentic *apostolic* ministry. The distinction made here between apostolic ministry, and other ministries is not foreign to Paul (Eph 4:11). Also, Barnett suggests that Paul's careful choice of the words τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου (lit. "the signs of the apostle") in 12:12 suggest that there was a certain class of person known as 'apostles' who were demonstrated to be so by these signs.³⁰ While this could possibly be argued on other grounds, it is perhaps making too much of the phrasing here. Nevertheless, it is tentatively

³⁰ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 579.

suggested here that while these signs and wonders are the necessary marks of *apostolic* ministry,³¹ they need not necessarily be present for a non-apostolic ministry to be considered authentic.

5. MARKS OF AN *UNAUTHENTIC* MINISTRY

To circumscribe more fully this issue of authentic ministry, the discussion will now briefly identify the marks which are indicative of an *unauthentic* or counterfeit ministry.

5.1 Driven by a Desire for Profit

When a ministry is driven primarily by a desire for profit, this is a telling mark of its unauthenticity.³² Paul contrasts his ministry with that of so many who “peddle the word of God for profit” (2:17; cf. 12:14), saying that on the contrary Paul and his co-workers speak in Christ, and before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.³³ The implication which can be drawn from this comparison is that those who peddle the word for profit are not in Christ, and are not sent from God. However, one must be careful not to claim support for this point from Paul’s refusal of financial support from the Corinthians (11:7), since he does accept support from other churches (11:8; 12:13), and does elsewhere argue in favour of a minister having the right to make a living off their ministry (1 Cor 9:7-18, see especially v14). So a distinction must be drawn between (1) a minister who lives primarily for the sake of the gospel and who receives financial support, and (2) a minister or ministry being primarily driven by a desire for profit. It is the latter which is a mark of unauthentic ministry.

³¹ This suggestion is not in contradiction to that put forward in §3.2. There it was argued that visions and revelations, as well as signs and wonders, on their own may be evidence, but due to their subjective nature should not be considered as ‘proof’ of authentic ministry. That is, these marks will always accompany claims to apostolic ministry, but on their own they are not decisive, since they could be counterfeit.

³² This is not to say that any ministry which makes profit is unauthentic, rather that the apostle Paul would likely offer a stinging critique when profit is a primary objective.

³³ It seems from this verse that it was quite common in the first century for people to peddle the word of God for profit. In further support of this, *Didache* actually uses a specific noun to describe such people: *χριστεμπορος*, literally ‘Christ-trader’. *Didache* 12.4.

5.2 Use of Deception and Worldly Techniques of Persuasion

A second mark of unauthentic ministry identified by Paul is the use of deception or worldly techniques of persuasion. Paul states quite explicitly that he has renounced secret and shameful ways, and that he does not use deception (4:2). It is likely that this mention of deception is an example of 'shameful ways'. Paul also later describes the false apostles as 'deceitful workmen' masquerading as apostles of Christ (11:13), and he further warns the Corinthians that the servants of Satan masquerade as servants of righteousness (11:14-15). This is very powerful language warning of a very powerful deception. In addition to deception, Paul implies that there are worldly techniques of persuasion. Paul fervently engages in persuasion, but within proper limits (5:11; 4:2). The 'weapons of this world' (10:3-5) which Paul refers to are not to be understood in terms of guns and bombs, but rather in context it can be seen that Paul is referring to worldly techniques of persuasion, in this case potentially methods of emotionally manipulative oratory and showmanship employed by Paul's opponents who were likely Sophists, or had Hellenistic Sophist influences.³⁴ The weapons Paul uses are not σαρκικὰ (*worldly*), where σαρκικὰ here means "pertaining to being human at a disappointing level of behaviour"³⁵ or "not under the control of God's Spirit".³⁶ Paul implies that the use of such worldly weapons is a mark of unauthentic ministry.

5.3 Reliance on Worldly Boasting and Self Commendation

Given that the discussion has already traced the issue of *boasting within proper limits* (§4.4), it need only be noted briefly here that its opposite, that is: a reliance on worldly boasting and self commendation, can be inferred from 2 Corinthians to be a mark of unauthentic ministry (10:12; 10:17-18). This is also supported by the

³⁴ Carson effectively captures what is meant here by 'weapons of this world' suggesting that they are "the kinds of tools of the trade relished by the intruders: human ingenuity, rhetoric, showmanship, a certain splashiness and forwardness in spiritual pretensions, charm, powerful personal charisma. Such weapons they will not find in Paul's arsenal." Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 56.

³⁵ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 914.

³⁶ Barclay M. Jr. Newman, *Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1993), 161.

degree to which Paul is reluctant to engage in the type of boasting employed by his opponents (11:1, 21b; 12:1, 11). It is likely that this reluctance stems from his belief that such boasting is indeed a mark or an unauthentic ministry, and he does not want to endorse the practise, nor be seen to be engaging in it.

5.4 Equating Hardships and Suffering with Failure

Finally, another topic which has been addressed above in some detail and only needs brief mention here is the relationship between suffering and success (see §4.2). Given that it has already been suggested that an authentic minister shares in the sufferings of Christ, the opposite point is made here: that equating hardship and suffering with failure (as was common among Paul's opponents who evaluated ministry using triumphalistic categories) is a mark of unauthentic ministry. The fact that Paul's opponents viewed hardship and suffering as a sign of failure is to be inferred from the great lengths Paul goes to in order to reverse this category (1:5; 4:10-12, 16-17; 5:14-15; 6:4f; 8:9; 11:23-29; 12:10; 13:4). His primary technique for reversing this category was by underlining that Christ's ministry (which is a paradigm for his own) was a ministry of suffering. As such, to continue equating suffering with failure would also require making the judgement that Christ's ministry was a failure.

6. CONCLUSION

As an occasional letter for the ultimate purpose of building up the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians responds to the difficult situation in Corinth whereby opponents have emerged and undermined Paul's authority and ministry. Paul's response both identifies erroneous criteria which have been used to assess him and his ministry, and also proposes more appropriate criteria with which to assess his ministry. Firstly, from this letter, marks which do not necessarily confirm nor deny the authenticity of a ministry include (1) Jewish pedigree, (2) claims of experiencing visions and revelations, (3) use of fine sounding rhetoric, and (4) one's ability to draw an income from their ministry. Secondly, decisive marks which identify a

ministry as authentic include (1) that rather than being divisive, the ministry has the effect of building up the church, (2) the minister shares in the sufferings of Christ, (3) the minister reflects the nature and character of Christ, (4) the minister boasts only within proper limits, and (5) rather than distorting the gospel, the ministry preserves and proclaims the true gospel. Finally, marks which are indicative of an unauthentic or counterfeit ministry include (1) a primary focus on making profit, (2) use of deception and 'worldly' or ungodly techniques of persuasion, (3) reliance on worldly boasting and self commendation, and (4) equating hardship and suffering with failure.

7. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY TODAY

Given that Second Corinthians is an occasional letter and not a theological treatise on 'marks of authentic ministry', the list provided above (§6) is not exhaustive for all Christian ministry, but reflects Paul's response to the given situation. Given the time, language, and cultural separation between Paul's situation and that of today's ministry in Australia, some of the points Paul makes are more relevant today than others. The following comments focus on some of the more pertinent applications for ministry in the current cultural context.

Certain pockets of the church today are in danger of making the same mistakes as Paul's opponents who evaluated ministry and Christian life using triumphalist criteria. Perhaps the more extreme view represented by what is termed 'prosperity doctrine' is illustrated by the title of Brian Houston's infamous book "You Need More Money." However, providing a critique of this book is not difficult for even the less discerning Christians. What is more dangerous is the *subtle* ways that this sort of thinking is present in today's churches. **Many Christians subconsciously hold the unchallenged view that Christ suffered so that they won't have to**, and the idea of picking up one's cross daily is often limited to having a daily devotion or 'quiet-time'. In response to these dangerous luke-warm perspectives, Paul would

likely re-emphasise that “we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” (2 Cor 4:11)

Regarding the Corinthian penchant for fine sounding rhetoric and showy orators, there is very real danger today of the church evaluating ministers in similar ways. Carson notes that “many modern Christians have become so enamoured of the styles of leadership found in politics or the entertainment industry that they are unwittingly transferring these essentially secular criteria to the church.”³⁷ **There is a danger in contemporary services that better sounding songs are equated with better worship, and that better singers are better worship leaders.**

In a conversation with the owner of the local music shop,³⁸ he revealed that when his nephew was dying of leukaemia more than one key leader of his church told him that the boy was sick because of sin in his life. Sadly, accounts such as this are not all that uncommon. While perhaps they are not as overt as this, **many people in the church today still interpret sickness and hardship as failure in one way or another.** This is the very kind of thinking that Paul is working against in 2 Corinthians. Suffering is not necessarily a mark of failure, rather it is in the midst of weakness and suffering that God’s power is made manifest. Christians have the opportunity to be distinctive from their surrounding culture in the way they view suffering, yet this is only made possible by trusting that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

³⁷ Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity*, 83.

³⁸ A more specific source is withheld for reasons of confidentiality.

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