

BaptistWay Bible Series for October 30: Measure ministry by the right standards

October 17, 2011

Magicians are amazing. With their sleight of hand, they dazzle their audiences with astonishing feats that appear impossible to perform. The task of the magician is simple. Create an illusion for the audience. Let them think they are seeing an inconceivable reality when, in fact, they are seeing only what the magician wants them to see.

Everyone knows there is a “trick” to the work of a magician. Only the magician knows the “trick.” The audience enjoys trying to figure out exactly how the magician deceived them.

In 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13, the Apostle Paul defended his change in travel plans. Some in Corinth believed he was not trustworthy since he did not fulfill his promise to visit Corinth. He had deceived the Corinthians.

Nothing less than his authority as an apostle was at stake. If Paul could not be trusted with travel plans, then how could he be trusted in weightier matters concerning the faith, even salvation itself.

In 2 Corinthians 2:17, Paul asserted he and his companions did not “peddle the word of God for profit.” Paul knew he would have to answer before God for his actions and his words. That is why he said he could speak before God with sincerity. His words were true. He was not seeking to sell the word of God for his own personal profit.

The great Protestant reformer Martin Luther said: “There are only two days in my calendar. This day and that day.” He meant he lived today in light of

the knowledge he would face God on judgment day. Believing in judgement should influence every Christian's life every day.

Still, how could the Corinthians believe Paul? His reference to speaking before God as men sent from God could still be part of his sales pitch. In 2 Corinthians 2:1-3, the apostle presented evidence of his validity to speak God's word. The evidence was the Corinthians themselves.

Paul presented his argument in a series of rhetorical questions. He did not need letters of recommendation to prove his apostleship and his authority to proclaim God's word. The Corinthians knew the truthfulness of the word he preached. They had been saved by Jesus, so they had received "the Spirit of the living God" (v. 3) in their lives. Their salvation experiences were Paul's best defense of his apostolic ministry.

In the 1800s with the population of the United States was moving west, towns sprung up quickly. These towns needed everything—shop keepers, blacksmiths, tanners, doctors and more. If a man came to town claiming to be a minister, how did the people of the town know he was who he claimed to be? True ministers carried a ministerial license. This license was issued by a church that recognized the call of God in that person's life. A ministerial license was a sort of letter of recommendation for a minister to prove who he was.

Paul needed no such license. The Corinthians already knew the power of the message he had proclaimed to them. Their lives had been transformed by Jesus Christ, and Paul acknowledged his confidence in defending his apostleship came from God. In 2 Corinthians 2:4-6, he gave God full credit for his effectiveness in ministry. The evidence of the Holy Spirit in his ministry and in the lives of those changed through his ministry was proof enough he was an apostle of God.

Paul concluded his argument defending his apostolic authority in 2

Corinthians 4:1-6. Those who rejected him were “blinded” by “the god of this age.” They were being deceived by Satan and could not see the light of the gospel. At the same time, Paul and his companions were not proclaiming themselves but Jesus. Their proclamation was not made by utilizing deception or by secret ways like an illusionist would use. Instead of distorting the word of God, they clearly taught the plain truth of the gospel.

How can believers measure their own personal ministry and the ministry of their churches? Paul gave guidelines he himself used in defending his ministry before the church at Corinth. The following is a list of Paul’s guidelines for evaluating Christian ministry:

(1) True Christian ministry begins with sincerity before God. Ministry is not performed for selfish financial gain. Rather, it is done fully in the presence of God which eliminates selfish motives.

(2) Christian ministry will see lives being saved. The number of people being saved is not the best way to determine the effectiveness of a ministry, but effective ministries will see people coming to Christ. Those who are saved become living testimonies to a ministry’s validity.

(3) Since salvation comes from God, an effective ministry gives God all the credit. God is magnified in an effective ministry, and the ministers take a back seat to him.

(4) True Christian ministry does not distort God’s word but plainly presents the message of God. Christian ministry is based on Scripture, and Christian ministry clearly teaches Scripture. It is the word of God.

(5) Are you living this day in light of that day?