

2 Corinthians 2

Written by K B Napier
Sunday, 01 January 2017 13:12

“...we are... a sweet savour...”

Paul did not want the Corinthians to think that he, or his fellow apostles, wished to lord it over them. Every Christian must live his or her life as he sees fit, within the boundaries of truth and love set out in scripture. Other Christians cannot force us to live as *they* see fit. Nor can we live as *we* see fit, if *how* we live is against scripture.

It is our duty to live according to God's word. It is also an act of love on the part of genuine Believers. Christ says this. He says – as I have noted many times before – that the proof of our love for Him is that we obey His commandments. This includes loving those whom we consider to be our enemy. (This is not primarily about romantic love). Thus, if we do not show this proper love, even for those we think are our enemies, then we do not love Christ. And if we do not love Christ, we are not His followers and, by definition, are not Christians.

Love for others is a vital and obvious measure in our lives. Without it, we fall and fail. If we cannot show love for others (as per scriptural demands), then any claim we make to being a Christian is false. I base this on what Christ says.

Throughout my Christian life I have come across vicious people in the churches. Some are vicious all the time and look only for trouble and an opportunity to be malicious toward others. Some are only vicious toward particular people. It does not matter – just *one* incidence of habitual viciousness or hatred is sufficient to cast our entire Christian status into doubt. As is wrongly loving people we should not be communing with.

It does not matter if the one we show hatred toward is a Christian or not. According to scripture, God displays *agape* toward *all* people, saved or unsaved. He shows the utmost respect to all of His creatures, even if they hate Him back or reject Him. This does not clash with His intent to place them into hell if they remain unsaved at their death. Nor does it stop having righteous anger against them. But, as fellow creatures, human beings do not have the right to hate anyone. We cannot hate others on God's behalf! After all, we were once unsaved and we once lived by sin. Only God may hate.

What this means is that we must be impartial and love, *agape*, *all* people*, whether or not they

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are saved. This is not a sugary love, but an acknowledgement that all of us are fellow creatures, but that by God's mercy we have been saved from sin. How can we possibly say we are saved from sin when we hate those who are unsaved unless God regenerates them? By showing hatred for someone else, we are actually showing hatred for God! That is how scripture puts it. (*Note: But, God prevents us from respecting what they believe).

Knowing all this, Paul tells the Corinthians that he does not wish to lord it over them. No doubt many pastors *wish* they could somehow *make* people they pastor live holy lives. I watch as they struggle to balance sin with purity and I sometimes wonder why I bother to teach them, week in, week out. Yet, I know, inside myself, that I am no better. I am equally a sinner saved by grace. Only by God's mercy can I live a holy life... or, if I am honest, a life that swings from holy to sinful throughout my life. Knowledge of my own sinfulness is what causes me to have love for others. Remember, this is respect, a basic kind of love that each human being ought to have for another human being; the same love that God shows toward those who are saved. (Note that His love is conditional, and that he says He hates certain human beings).

I cannot demand others should display a holiness that I do not have myself. And, as my own holiness is often marred by sin, how can I demand something greater from those I teach? To do so would be duplicity, hypocrisy.

But, I *can* demand that we *all* comply with God's commands. This means striving toward the goal. God does not say that once we are saved we will be instantly and totally holy in everything we do. He says we are already holy in terms of our salvation – meaning we will enter Heaven because God sees the holiness of His Son. But, we are not totally holy in our everyday lives. This is why Paul speaks about a struggle between good and bad, sin and purity, a striving toward the goal. I have no time for 'holier-than-thou' Christians who are always shocked at the sin of others! We all sin. We must all struggle to subdue the 'old man'. There are no exceptions.

Practically, we must face our sins openly and seek to be rid of them immediately. We know some sins are kept secret and some are retained because they seem delicious to us. Some are kept in our lives because of a twisted idea of their usefulness or perceived 'rightness'. Some are kept because we simply enjoy doing them, or because they feed one of our base desires... revenge, hatred, greed, lust, and so on. It does not matter what the sin is, how strong it is, or how long we have known it. It *must* be got rid of *immediately*.

In scripture, we cannot find any example of God giving human beings time to get rid of sin.

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Rather, He demands that we get rid of it NOW. No excuses and no putting it off. Sin separates us from God and prevents a Christian from knowing true peace and joy. But, far worse, sin is offensive to Almighty God. It can also bring His wrath upon us suddenly and perhaps perpetually in this life. At times, He will even put to death a person who continually acts out the same sin, despite warnings to stop it and repent. Thus, if YOU have a sin that you keep acting out, stop it right now... for you do not know if you have time left to do so. I do not wish to lord it over you either... my concern is that we all run the race and win the prize.

Verses 1-4

1.

“But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.

2.

For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?

3.

And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.

4.

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”

Paul no longer wants to see, or write to, the Corinthians in ‘heaviness’. He does not want to speak to them in **lupe**, sorrow, pain, grief. His words previously were designed to give the Corinthians a short, sharp shock. They were meant to bring pain, the pain of realisation of sin. He wanted them to feel afflicted by his words, because when a person feels pain or affliction, he wants to be rid of it.

Paul was, then, being the schoolmaster who teaches the exactitudes and requirements of the law, that men must repent. I often have to sternly cause others to take notice of their sins (as I

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do with myself), not that I am superior or claim to be better, but that they may repent and return to a righteous path, for their own sakes as well as to honour God. In so doing I look also at myself and put right in me what I see in others. This is also Paul's attitude.

So, although Paul could easily have continued to write to the Corinthians in *lupe*, he decided not to do so again. They had received a warning and now Paul must move on in his teaching. They knew what was wrong and must put it right. Paul can now proceed in another direction, showing love and support. In my own ministry I often have to tear down what is sinful, before I can go on to rebuild. I cannot cook a tasty broth in a pot containing rotting meat! I cannot build a tall building on top of a sand hill! Firstly, I must identify and throw out what is bad. Only after that can I start to build what is good and proper. And this is what Paul has done.

No-one likes to be told they are sinning, or wants to be found out. This, though, is a way of putting things right again. Why should we feel embarrassed by having our sins pointed out, when every one of us is the same? We should reserve our embarrassment for times when we refuse to repent and when we reject warnings to change!

Having our sins pointed out is an opportunity to change our lives and to return to righteousness. We must ever be thankful when faithful Christians, or other means, show us our sins. It does not matter if we think something is sin or not – if it is shown from God's word that something is sin, then we must obey and repent.

In my own life as a pastor I do not keep repeating to others what their individual sins are. If I have already pointed them out, that is sufficient. I cannot and will not repeat, time and again, what their failings are. Instead, I must move on and teach the whole counsel of God, assuming that they have also moved on, as Paul is doing here. Of course, if a man continues in a direct and obvious sin, then I will return with dire warnings. Until then, I will continue to progress – it is up to the sinner to repent, not for me to continually come to them with *lupe*.

There may be times when sin is hidden, but that is not my concern if I have warned the person. If he or she wishes to deceive me, then that is up to them. It is not up to me to dig out secret desires. I can only speak of those things I can see or perceive.

Paul says that if he makes the Corinthians continually sorry – *lupeo*, rooted in *lupe*, meaning to

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make someone sorrowful or uneasy (this can also mean to offend: it is not always wrong to offend another person), how can they make him feel glad? To be glad is to be

euphraino

, joyful, delighted, even merry. If we always concentrate on someone else's sins, how can we see what is of God in them?

We must balance what a person does and says with what God has made them to be. They are our fellow Believers, members together of the same Body of Christ. Because they have a specific function in the Body, if we do not treat them as fellows, then we lack something as a Body. Even the most lowly or sinful Christian is a fellow member with a part to play in the life of the Body. So, once we have highlighted a sin we must then go on in praise and joy. (If a Christian, however, refuses to repent of a continual and publicly-serious sin, and change, then we must cast him/her out of fellowship).

Paul tells them this so that they might put matters right before he arrives. Then, he will have nothing to cause them grief over. He will not need to rebuke them again. He would much rather greet them fully than know he will have to be stern. As we saw in the first epistle, some of the Corinthians were acting in a foul way. Paul wants them to repent before he comes to them, so that they might all meet as true brethren, without impediment. Dealing with sin in others takes up so much valuable fellowship time!

Paul wants to be sure that all the Corinthians, including those who ought to repent, will share his joy in Christ. Indeed, he says that he has 'confidence in (them) all', ***peitho***, trust, persuaded that they would repent and live righteously. We can only go by what we see and hear, not by what we suspect (unless we are given direct discernment).

It is possible that we suspect a man has not truly repented or that he is 'up to something'. We may well be right in our perception. But, we cannot act as though it has been made evident! In my work and ministry I often have to stay silent about the motives of others. I know they will let me down or sin again. But, until they manifest the sin I must remain quiet, though I might provide teaching of a warning nature.

Until sin is made evident I must treat the person as I would treat anyone else. In my secular work I know that some workers speak against me behind my back. That happens in every workplace against a 'boss'. But, so long as they do their work, I do not let it get to me. In the Christian life, I cannot let the possible or non-evident sins of others put me off my stride. Until

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the sins are made plain I must treat everyone equally. My perceptions can remain silent, and will merely give me a 'buffer', making me not surprised when sin occurs. If I have spoken with the person about my perception, that is all I can do. Until then, like Paul, I must have 'confidence in you all'.

I know in my own ministry how people misconceive my intentions. Their own sinfulness causes them to see what I say as a personal attack, rather than as a direct act of godly concern prompted by the Holy Spirit in order to save them from their own errors. This same concern often causes me "affliction and anguish of heart... with tears..." (verse 4).

The 'affliction', **thlipsis**, is a deep-rooted tribulation, a burden. I know from long experience that my burden for the sins of another is far greater than their own burden, which may not exist at all! The anguish felt, **sunoche**, is distressful. Yet, the one sinning usually feels elated by his or her sin, enjoying every moment of its forbidden delights. They do not realise that their sin is not good or beneficial, but damaging to their faith.

They do not understand that they 'lie sick of', **sunecho**, their sin. I have hypertension. Hypertension is life-threatening if untreated, yet the sufferer does not usually know he has it. In the same way, sin is life-threatening though the person might enjoy doing it.

Sunecho

is to lie sick of, or to fall to pieces. It is to deliberately stop yourself from hearing, or to stop rain from falling from the heavens. It is to be surrounded like a besieged city, or forced into a position one cannot get out of. In short, it is to be a prisoner of Satan and sin. It is to be made ill of soul.

This is why Paul, and any pastor, calls others to repentance. Sin robs us all of peace and love, truth and proper spiritual action, causing the whole Body to be deficient. The sin of one affects another. Which is why casting out of fellowship is a rare but necessary judgment, for it stops the spread of the same sickness.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians sternly before, not to make them miserable, but to cause them to repent and turn back to God. Do not think, when I have to rebuke, that I do so out of malice or because I enjoy inflicting pain on others, or because I want others to comply with my own idea of things. I do it because I must, and because there is a sickness to be rid of. Paul **loved** the Corinthians and that is why he wrote as he did. He was showing *agape*

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, affection and good-will, not a hard heart mouthing harsh words. A man who does not love another will not bother to rebuke!

Verses 5-9

1.

“But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.

2.

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

3.

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

4.

Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him,

5.

For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.”

Paul tells those who were sinful that they only caused him a partial grief, ‘in part’. That is, their sins did not make him think badly of them, or to grieve for them. Thus, Paul did not attribute the sins of some to everybody, making him think badly of them all. He wanted to think only good of the whole fellowship. In our own lives we should be able to do this – think good of a local church until and if it gives cause for concern. When it does, we must then rebuke those who need it, and then move on once they have repented.

I say they must repent because this is the sense of the text. We cannot simply overlook the

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sins, or say 'love is all we need'. Paul speaks of forgiving the sinner. This implies the sinner has repented and asked for forgiveness, for we may not forgive those who do not seek it... and a man will not ask for true forgiveness unless he has been convicted of his sin and has repented! Therefore, when Paul says we must forgive someone in the fellowship, he means that the man has repented and has asked for forgiveness, according to scripture. Such a man had been castigated by the whole congregation and so he has had his punishment.

Once forgiveness has been given, we must comfort the repentant Christian. That is, pray for him, go alongside, instruct in better ways, and generally encourage him to stay on a righteous path. This is to **parakaleo**, which involves active teaching in the ways of holiness. The man who has repented will see this as a welcome and necessary activity. The man who is not truly repentant will resent it as an imposition. Paul, however, sees it as necessary. The activity is agreeable and pleasant, not a thinly-disguised act of bitter reprisal. It is to throw our arms around the person in delight that he has returned to the fold.

If we do not do this, the man may become despondent, 'swallowed up with overmuch sorrow'. There is a rightful sorrow for our sins, and an over-extended one, **perissoteros**, which exceeds what is required by God. When we have repented we need not dwell on what we have done, but must go forward in grace and hope. Many Christians continue to punish a man who has repented, reminding him always of what he has done. This is nothing but petulance and sin on their part. They are being restrictive and punitive when God has already forgiven. It is, then, *they* who need to repent and seek forgiveness!

Also, a sinner who has repented can sometimes enter into a depressed state as he thinks only of what he has done in the past, instead of going forward. This is a fresh sin, for he is rejecting the forgiveness given by God and treating it with contempt. God has forgotten the sin, so why is the man reminding himself of it? Paul regretted what he had done to the Christians before he himself was saved. But, he did not wallow in his past – he moved on and gloriously saved thousands.

We must not be 'swallowed up' by guilt when we have repented. We must not be **katapino**, destroyed, devoured, by our guilt after God has forgiven us. Such feelings are excessive and unnecessary in God's eyes. Repentance automatically washes away any remembrance of our sin in the Father. It is gone! It cannot have any force in us – unless we continually let it do so, eating away at our peace and joy. To use an human analogy, one can imagine God shrugging his shoulders and asking “

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sin are you talking about? I have no memory of it!”

So, do not reproach a man who has truly repented. Do not continue to shun. Do not cause him to always remember what he had done. Instead, “confirm your love toward him” (verse 8). Confirm it, **kuroo** – make it valid publicly and show that pardon has been granted. This must be wholehearted and not restricted or partial. If the man later repeats the same sin, then so be it – but for now, he has repented and must receive love and support.

After all, says Paul, this is why I wrote to you in the first place. I wanted to see the evidence that you were obeying what I said... because what I said was from God. Note this – Paul demanded ‘proof’, **dokime**, a specimen of worth. That is, they claimed to be Christians, so Paul wanted to see *evidence* for their claim. Without such evidence, he could reject their claim. We have already said what evidence is needed – that we obey Christ’s commands. This includes love for all. It is not sufficient that a man *says* he is a Christian – he must *prove* it in his life and obedience.

Therefore, a Christian who accepts the claim to salvation of another, even though that other person does not uphold truth or is openly disobedient, is himself being sinful. He is supporting and condoning the other man’s sins. As Christians we have every right to ask a man to prove his Christian character. If he cannot, then we must treat him as a heathen. Really, it is very simple! If a man refuses to comply, then he cannot be treated as a Christian. Note that Paul says he must be obedient in “all things”, not just in some things. For us, it means complying with all of scripture and with any Christian who legitimately demands proof of our claim to salvation.

Verses 10&11

1.

“To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also; for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

2.

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

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Paul advises the Corinthians that if they forgave someone, then so did he. Paul endorsed any forgiveness they granted. This implies that they forgave according to scripture, of course. As I have said elsewhere, a Christian has no right or warrant to forgive anyone who does not repent and seek forgiveness. We read or hear of Christians who 'forgive', say, a murderer or terrorist who kills, when the killer has not repented, sought forgiveness, or even shown remorse.

God does not forgive such people, and we have no right to do so, either. Christians who do this are in error, and are trying to comply with human expectations, not with God's commands. Perhaps some are trying to come to terms with their innermost feelings of hatred by covering them with 'forgiveness'. Perhaps they feel they *must* offer forgiveness. Perhaps they are still in a state of shock and say they forgive in an effort to gain some kind of comfort. It is all in vain, for we cannot forgive when the essential elements are missing – remorse, repentance, and a request to be forgiven.

Paul forgives so that others might learn and follow his example (verse 10), and he forgives "in the person of Christ". What does this mean? It means that his personal expression of forgiveness is the judgment and action of Christ, *prosopon*. As Christ forgives so does Paul because it is evidence of his own reliance on the Lord. Remember always the elements of forgiveness before you grant it to someone. If the elements are not visible, then forgiveness must be withheld.

Once these elements come together, we have no option but to forgive, otherwise "Satan should get an advantage of us" (verse 11). He will *pleonekteo*, make a gain, have a greater portion of us for his own use and in order to defraud us of our rightful faith. There are those who claim Christians cannot be overtaken by Satan. I think that the first epistle, and this text, says otherwise! It is foolish to think that Satan will not overtake us. He is always waiting for us to make the wrong moves so he can come and wreak havoc in our lives.

However, his best ploy with Christians is not so much to make us do obvious sins, but to make us devious and clever in deceiving others, or in dishonouring God. This is to his advantage, *pleonektes*

. Nothing we do for Satan is for our own benefit. That is why we must rethink why we sin. Any perceived advantage is temporary and illusory. It is just not real, but destroys. So, what is the point of sin? Satan uses it to gain control of our minds,

echo

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We are familiar with the idea of possession of the body, as in, say, the demoniac filled with demons. But, perhaps we are unfamiliar with the idea of Satan taking over the mind. Why else should an otherwise rational Christian refuse blankly to comply with God's commands? Paul says we are not ignorant of this – but evidently many *are* today.

Are YOU ignorant of Satan's 'devices'? His **noema**, evil purposes deep in his own mind, **noieo**, which not only warp his own thoughts,

nous

, but also the thoughts of his victims. Never underestimate Satan! He was created more powerful than us. He is so powerful even archangels dare not oppose him in their own name and rank. He can outwit and outmanoeuvre us any time he wishes, except for God's protection warning us through the Holy Spirit and unless we rely on God in the first place.

Verses 12-17

1.

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

2.

I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

3.

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

4.

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

5.

To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

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6.

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.”

Also, continues Paul, when he reached Troas he was saddened not to see his friend and co-worker, Titus. Troas ('a Trojan'), or Alexandria Troas/Alexandria, was the city Paul sailed from on his first journey and was under Roman law. Today it is known as Eski-Stamboul, with extensive ruins. Paul went there initially to preach the Gospel where, he says, God opened a door to him, indicating that many were saved.

Though he found this to be wonderful, he was agitated because Titus was not there before he travelled on to Macedonia. Titus ('nurse') was a Greek highly esteemed by Paul, and a companion when Paul and the apostles went to Jerusalem. This second epistle was taken personally to the Corinthians by Titus. One historical document (by Zenas, a lawyer) says he was a bishop of Gortyna, and another says his name was a watchword when Crete was invaded by the Venetians. In other words, his influence was great and widespread.

Paul thanked God because He always causes us to triumph in Christ. This is an interesting word to use, 'triumph', *thriambeuo*; originally it was a hymn sung at a festival procession in honour of the pagan god, Bacchus. Here, it is used to describe a triumph over evil, but in Christ. This is important, because so many charismatics speak of having 'triumph' over Satan, when clearly they do not.

This causes Reformed Christians to reject use of the word 'triumph' because of its link with 'triumphalism', though both are different. The triumph in this text is 'in Christ' and this is the key. Whenever we act 'in Christ', that is by His prompting, we will *always* be triumphant. It *has* to be this way, for Christ cannot ever be unsuccessful! Triumph is shown, too, in the "savour of his knowledge... in every place." (verse 14).

The 'savour', *osme*, is the smell or 'good' odour, *ozo*, of God's knowledge or *gnosis*. That is, saving knowledge and deeper knowledge about and from God, in every place the Gospel is taken to. This tells us that preaching the true Gospel in every place always leaves its mark or

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smell or 'savour'. It cannot vanish, but always has an effect, though not always unto salvation. Those who are saved will view it all as a 'sweet savour',

euodia

... sweet smelling, satisfaction, something pleasing God immensely.

Those who reject the Gospel (who 'perish', **apollumi**, to be lost) will also smell this sweet odour when preached to, but they will smell only death,

thanatos

(verse 16). This is consistent with the word

ozo

, which can mean either a good smell, or the smell of a decaying corpse, bad. To those who are saved, however, the same smell or word is good and sweet and an indicator of eternal life ('life unto life',

zoe

, possessing true life in all its fullness and belonging to God). From

zao

, meaning to be among the living or not-dead. Paul asks. "who is sufficient for these things?", or who is

hikanos

, worthy?

There are many, says Paul, who corrupt the word of God. This refers not to all the unsaved, but to those who deliberately corrupt the word, **kapeleuo**: people who are 'hucksters', **kapelos**, peddling the Gospel for their own ends. They make money by selling the word. They preach only to get gain for themselves, thus adulterating the word of God. They defile,

phtheiro

, the truth of the Lord and so destroy it.

See how there are 'many', **polus**, who do this, a large number. We can include all who are in the cults, including charismatics. The leaders amongst them grow rich beyond imagination by their preaching, and every class and session they hold must be paid for in cash. Not just to pay for basics but to line their own pockets. Those they teach are not free of guilt, for they condone such evil trade and delight in their words, paying vast sums in the process!

I have no problem with someone receiving payment to preach full time, or to be given expenses, but cannot hold with preachers who make huge sums on the back of the Gospel. These men corrupt, destroy, and do so deliberately.

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On the other hand, genuine Christians, says Paul (verse 17) preach “of sincerity”, **heilikrineia**, purely and sincerely, unpolluted by human greed or power, **heilikrines**

. This word is delightful; it means that when something is unfolded, it shines as pure in the sun’s light. This is bound to be the case if it is of God. By contrast, the work of charismatics is evil and dark, allowing no sun to shine into its blackness.

Paul says purity is assured in their own preaching and in the lives of the Corinthians, because they speak “as of God” and “in Christ”. This is the only guarantee. If we speak what God gives us to speak, and teach only what His word declares, then we can only be triumphant and pure. That is how I can state categorically before all who hear me that what I say is true and without fault. If I only speak God’s word, this statement is bound to be correct. But, if I speak with my own mind, I can be found wanting and I am liable to be faulty.

This text again shows critics of Paul that he is far from being a megalomaniac. He ascribes all glory and honour to God, not to himself. He says others must follow him, *so long as he follows Christ*. He says all must obey his words, *because they come firstly from God*.

I (and others who preach the truth) claim exactly the same for my own ministry, because the same truth applies. I speak of God, not of myself, and so what I say must be true. Therefore, those who hear must obey – not me, but God.

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