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A Misplaced Standard

10: 12-18

A misplaced standard DIG: How did the Corinthian church measure ministry? What were Paul's credentials? Why did the Corinthians have a hard time accepting them? How is Paul's exercise of authority different from his usurpers, the false apostles?

REFLECT: Do we evaluate how others are doing by comparing the fruit of their ministries to ours? Or do we actually have an audience of One? How skilled are you at spiritual discernment? How do you know when you're in God's will and when you're fighting against it?

We must not use the world's standards of measurement for ourselves or our ministries.



The misplaced standard (10:12): The Pharisee who proudly and arrogantly prayed: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector (Luke 18:11) illustrated the attitude of **the false apostles** (to see link click [Af](#) - **The Problem of the False Apostles**). In **their** zeal to elevate **themselves**, **they** would heartlessly tear down anyone who would get in **their** way. The proud, vain **false apostles** at **Corinth** sought to make **themselves** look good by slander and degrading **the apostle**.²²² But **Paul**, injecting a little humor, disparages **their** boasting with mock self-deprecation. **Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are (10:12a NLT).** Speaking tongue-in-cheek, **Paul** subtly raised the question whether **his rivals** were comparable to **him** at all. And the reality was that there was no comparison. None! **Paul**

couldn't make one if **he** tried. In all their boasting **they** presumed to be **Paul's** superior, but in **his** view, **they** were merely **false apostles**. **They** claimed to be in a different league than **Paul**; and **the apostle** readily agreed – they were in league with Satan. **They** may have won status in the eyes of some of **the Corinthians** with **their boastfulness**, but **they** had only won the judgment of **Ha'Shem** in the process.²²³

We get a real insight into the thinking of truly evil people in this portion of Scripture. Speaking of **the false prophets**, **Paul** wrote: **But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. Not wise (10:12b NLT)!** In other words, **they** felt no sense of guilt or shame about **their** destructive actions because **they** only compared **their** behavior with one another's. **They** dared not compare **themselves** with **Paul** and the other true believers of **Messiah**. The differences would have been too stark. But because **they** only compared **themselves** with **themselves**, **they** felt justified in **their** actions and reinforced in **their** teaching. **They** set standards for **their** own behavior and established **their** own code of conduct. And the standard that they chose was their own evil behavior.²²⁴

The true standard (10:13-18): False apostles, no matter what time in history, tend to be tyrants, who become enraged at those who would limit **their** ambitious designs. **They** continually seek to widen **their** sphere of influence and gain even greater prestige, fame, and wealth. To that end, **they** often overstate or even falsify **their** qualifications and gifts. **The false apostles** presented **the Corinthians** with a rather amazing resume. **They** claimed even greater power, knowledge, oratory skills and influence than **Paul**. And **they** used **their** phony credentials to gain influence in the church at **Corinth**.

But **Paul** refused to **boast about what lay outside the boundaries which God had given him**. **He** refused to trade lies and exaggerations with **the false apostles**; **his** assessment of **his** ministry was honest and accurate. In contrast to **them**, **he** was content to remain **within his assigned area** of ministry (10:13). **He planted the seed, and God made it grow (First Corinthians 3:6)**. Therefore, **Paul** appealed to the indisputable fact that **he** founded **the church at Corinth**. **His** rivals could not claim this. **His** only **boast** was in what **Yeshua Messiah** had accomplished in **his** life. **The false apostles** might point to **their** letters of recommendation and **their** rhetorical wizardry to corroborate **their** claims of divine authority. But **Paul** appealed to **the Corinthian church itself**, founded by **his** missionary preaching. **Like chaff driven by the wind (Psalm 1:4)**, **their** boasts were merely based on the evidence that **they** manufactured from **their** own fantasies about **themselves**.²²⁵



Messiah has given each of us special abilities - whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts (Romans 9:20-21 JB). Part of accepting these **gifts** is realizing our limitations. Nobody is good at everything; and no one is called to be everything. We all have defined roles. **Paul** understood that **his** call was not to accomplish everything or please everyone, but to focus only on the particular ministry that **God** had given **him** (**Galatians 2:7-8**). The word **boundaries above in 10:13** refers to the fact that **ADONAI** assigns each of us a field or sphere of ministry. This is determined by our **giftedness** given to us at the moment of salvation by **the Spirit of God**. If we try to overextend our ministry and reach beyond the giftedness that **God** has given us, we experience failure and stress. Just as a runner in a race is given a different lane to run in, we must **run with patience the particular race that God has set before you (Hebrews 12:1)**. Don't be envious of the runner in the lane next to you, just focus on finishing *your* race.²²⁶

What follows in **10:14-15a** basically repeats what **Paul** has said in **10:13** but takes it a step further by making it more specific, using a bit of sanctified sarcasm along the way. **We are not overextending our boasting as if we had not reached as far as you; for we came to you with the Good News of the Messiah. We do not boast about the area in which others labor (10:14-15a).** **Paul** had the **God-given** authority as **the apostle** to the Gentiles because he was called by **ADONAI** to carry out that ministry, unlike **the false apostles** whose only approval **they** received was **their** own. Having no legitimate accomplishments of **their** own, **they** were eager to take credit for those of others. But in reality, **they** had made no contribution to **the Corinthians'** spiritual growth, because **they** were not true servants of **God**. By preaching a false gospel and another **Yeshua (11:3-4)**, **they** were interfering with the work that **Paul** had accomplished. **They** were nothing more than parasites, sucking the spiritual life out of the church in contrast to **the true apostle**, who built it up.

Paul's plan and hope was that as the Corinthians' trust grew, his sphere of ministry

would be enlarged even more by them. His goal was, with their assistance, to proclaim the Good News in regions beyond Corinth. Our hope is not to boast about the work already done by someone else (10:15b-16). That was not possible at the time, however, because of the Corinthians' sin, immaturity, and rebellion. It would have to wait until they had completely rejected the false apostles and returned to sound doctrine and holy living. Paul was never one to rest on his laurels. His relentless spirit continually drove him to preach the Good News where it had never been proclaimed. In Acts 19:21 he expressed his desire to preach the Gospel in Rome, but he did not mean to stop there. He planned, with the Roman believers' aid, to reach Spain (Romans 15:24 and 28). When the Corinthians became strong enough in their faith, the apostle wanted them to launch him into the next mission field. But no matter where he went, Paul always wanted to stay in his lane. He humbly refused to follow the footsteps of other godly believers or to take credit for their labors.²²⁷

So, let anyone who wants to boast, boast about ADONAI (10:17). As this quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 implies, if a figure like Paul was going to boast about anything, its central focus was going to be the Lord and the work of the Lord. This is notably not the first time Jeremiah 24 had been quoted to the Corinthians (First Corinthians 1:31).²²⁸ Boasting in ADONAI is the true principle. And Paul followed it in all of his apostolic ministry. But it also applies to every one of us wherever the Lord has placed us, and whatever He gives us to do. Therefore, Paul brings his discussion to a focus and a resting point. It was the pattern that he followed.²²⁹

After Martin Luther's death (1483-1546), his friends found a scrap of paper in his pocket on which the great Reformer had written, which said, "We are all beggars. Humble men of God realize that they have nothing to boast about. If they preach the Gospel, it is because God's Word is a fire in their bones (Jeremiah 20:9) and they are compelled to preach (First Corinthians 9:16). They serve the Church only because Christ puts them into service (First Timothy 1:12), and any success they have is attributable solely to the grace of God at work in them (First Corinthians 15:10). They cry out with the psalmist: Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory (Psalm 115:1).

The false apostles were totally focused on the here and now, as they pursued fame, compliments, notoriety, prestige, wealth and power. But when they died their praise would die with them. True servants of Messiah, on the other hand, look toward their heavenly reward (Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:23; Colossians 3:24; Hebrews 11:26). They understand that worldly self-praise is meaningless, because it is not the one who praises himself who is worthy of approval. They are not trying to please everyone, whether the world

condemns **them** or praises **them** is of no particular significance in the long run. What matters is **whom the Lord praises (10:18)**; to whom **He** says: **Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of Your Master (Matthew 25:21).**²³⁰ That is the only evaluation that counts. In the last analysis, we have an audience of **One**.

If you're going to be **a servant**, you must settle your identity in **Yeshua**. Only secure people can **serve**. Insecure people are always worrying about how they appear to others. They fear exposure of their weaknesses and hide beneath layers of protective pride and pretensions. The more insecure you are, the more you will want people to serve you, and the more you will need their approval. But when you anchor your worth and identity to **Messiah**, you are freed from the expectations of others, and that allows you to really **serve** them best.²³¹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for the joy of serving **You**! Praise **You** that we can focus on doing our best in our **service** for **You**, without being bothered by criticism and put-downs from selfish on-lookers. It is a comfort that **You** wisely and carefully examine the love in our hearts (**First Corinthians 3:11-15**). When we **serve** humbly and kindly yet get put down, it does not discourage us for we remember that happened to **You** and **You** always do everything perfectly. **You** are our loving **Savior (Second Timothy 1:10)** and **the King of kings (Revelation 19:16)** yet **You** were unjustly criticized.*

*We choose to look away from earthly trials and problems and to focus on the eternal joy of pleasing **You (Romans 8:18)**. Though it's nice to hear praise for our work, it is so much better to know that when we follow **You** with all our heart, then we will receive an eternal reward – a reward far better than momentary earthly praise. We long to hear **Your** praise of our works done lovingly: **Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a little, so I'll put you in charge of much. Enter into your master's joy (Matthew 25:21 and 23)!** It is a joy to serve **You**, even in hard times. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*