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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 slandering 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*