

2 Cor 6:3-10 Marks of Commendable Christian Ministry

One of the things that really gets my wife excited is a good deal. She can hardly contain herself when she is able to purchase something she wanted for a low price. She is willing to endure great inconvenience if the result will be getting a good deal. If she can get the item for free, it's even better. And the best, most exciting thing is when she makes a few cents on a purchase.

I suppose that it's human nature for people to want the most for the least possible expense. Sometimes we are able to do that. But usually, there is a cost to pay for the things we want. And often, the most treasured things are highest in cost. Along with the joy of having something valuable is the cost you have to pay to have and enjoy that thing. E.g., a house, a spouse, children, a car. Almost everything worth having or doing has a cost associated with it.

In this passage, Paul tells us that if you want to enjoy all the *blessings* of serving God, you have to also be ready to experience all the *hardships* that may be involved. Service for God is *filled with benefits* but also *fraught with difficulties*. Those who serve God have to be willing to take the bad with the good. Jesus assured us that, if we want to follow him, it's going to cost us our lives—"deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." The cost of following Christ can be very high, but of course the blessings are also considerable.

The main idea in today's passage is that those who serve God must persevere under pressure. It's easy to serve God when everyone is complementary and positive. But those who serve God often experience opposition, criticism, and hostility. Most people who serve God experience both blessings and the hardships. So we have to be able to endure and continue on serving God no matter what it costs us.

.3-4 Paul uses the word "ministry" and "ministers" here, but he's just talking about serving God. In fact, the word for ministry is *διακονία*—it just means "service." The word refers to just about any kind of work or service for the Lord.

Paul's ministry was different from ours. None of us is an apostle; none of us has the responsibilities that Paul did. However, each of us should be engaged in serving God and serving God's people; we should be ministers. We should not be bystanders, not mere spectators sitting on the sidelines. We should be directly engaged in serving God in some way.

If we are engaged in Christian ministry, how should we do it?

This passage tells us how to serve God and others in the context of the church. The main point is that we should expect both blessings and hardships in ministry. We enjoy the blessings and we don't allow the hardships to stop us.

Notice the language of vs. 4: "in all things we *commend* ourselves as ministers of God." Let's notice some marks of commendable Christian ministry.

I. .3a Commendable ministers serve without creating difficulties for others.

I.e., don't be difficult.

- A. The word "offense" (προσκοπή) means "an obstacle or difficulty which may be encountered; a cause of stumbling; i.e., any kind of 'obstacle, trouble, difficulty.'¹

It could be translated, "We are trying to put no obstacle whatsoever in anyone's way."²

- B. And the grammar here seems to emphasize *not* causing difficulty. The text literally says "not in anything in nothing giving difficulty." Double negatives are fine in Greek; they emphasize not doing something. The sense is, "cause no offense at all, in any way." What we are to avoid doing here is causing problems, creating obstacles, or being offensive to others as we engage in Christian ministry. To put it bluntly and simply, don't be difficult.

Romans 14:13 ... *resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.*

- C. There are many aspects of ministry that are difficult; we can't avoid problems in ministry. But the point here is that we don't want to create that difficulty for others. We don't want to be difficult or make obstacles or trouble for anyone else. We don't want to be the cause or source of difficulty.

1 Cor 8:13 *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 243.

² Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 468.

The main concern here is that we don't hinder the work of God, we don't create obstacles or offenses for others by what we do.

Medical doctors used to take the Hippocratic Oath: "Do no harm." As we engage in ministry, one of our main goals should be to do no harm, don't be difficult, don't be offensive.

App: Sadly, many people do exactly what Paul is telling us *not* to do—they make trouble for others through their ministry. I.e., as they participate in ministry, they offend others, cause others to stumble, or make life difficult for others.

The last thing we should want to have is the reputation for being difficult or troublesome. Would anyone describe you as a difficult person? What kind of reputation do you have in that regard? "He/she is easily offended. He/she is hard to work with, hard to please. He/she is very demanding. Be careful what you say around that person. She has a very thin skin." I hope no one says such things about you or me. I hope none of us has a reputation for being difficult to work with or who causes problems.

Trans: The first mark of commendable ministry is that you are not difficult. Avoid creating offenses and obstacles for others as you seek to serve God. Remove any reason that may provide a cause for someone to take offense.³

- II. .3b Commendable ministers serve blamelessly. Avoid faulty ministry.
- A. Here's the reason not to be difficult. Why should we intentionally avoid being offensive and difficult? So that the ministry is not "blamed."
 - B. The offense/stumbling block/difficulty (.3a) leads to a fault, something worthy of blame (.3b).
 - C. The word "blamed" (μωμᾶομαι) means "to find fault with;" it refers to that which is open to criticism; that which is faulty or liable to reproach or censure; that which is open to ridicule or mockery. We want to avoid ministry that could be "blamed/discredited/faulted." We should do nothing that would discredit our witness or turn others away from the gospel.⁴

³ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 213.

⁴ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 306.

1. He seems to be speaking specifically about a moral failure that would cause others to reject or ridicule the Gospel.

Quote: Nothing is more ridiculous than striving to maintain your reputation before others, while you invite reproach upon yourself by a shameful and base life.⁵

Frankly, it's impossible to maintain a good reputation for very long while at the same time living a degenerate lifestyle. Those living that way are eventually exposed for their hypocrisy.

2. The root word for "blamed" is "blemish, blot." We should intentionally avoid any kind of behavior that would be a blemish or blot on our service for God and for God's people. We should live and serve in a way that any accusations against us would be totally unfounded. Any charge would amount to a lie because our service for God cannot be legitimately discredited.
3. What would be blameworthy behavior? What would cause a fault or a blemish?
 - a) Anything in direct contradiction of the clear commands of Scripture. Particularly, any kind of moral failure or compromise;
 - b) Anything that hinders people from accepting the Gospel, e.g., hypocritical behavior;
 - c) Anything that stains the reputation of the church.

Blameworthy conduct hinders the Gospel and damages the reputation of the church. We must strenuously avoid the kind of faults or blemishes that would hinder Christian ministry.

- D. Note the emphasis on "our ministry" not being blameworthy.
 1. He's not so much concerned here about personal reputation, although that is also important.
 2. We should be much more concerned about the testimony of the work of God than we are about our own personal reputation. The last thing we should want to do in ministry is to bring disrepute or discredit on the name of Christ or on his church.

⁵ John Calvin, quoted Hughes, *NICNT*, 221.

2Sam 12:14 *Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, ...*

1 Cor 9:12 ... *[we] endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.*

- E. In some ways, we almost cannot avoid criticism and blame altogether. It's almost inevitable that someone will complain about something you do. If you serve God, someone will complain about how you do it. So, in some ways, we can't avoid criticism even if you are intentionally trying to avoid it.

In the next few verses, Paul mentions that he's received a lot of criticism and hostility. But there's nothing we can do about that. If we serve God, we will face opposition and conflict. It's inevitable.

- F. Further, we know that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the unsaved (1 Cor 1:18) and there is a natural offense of the cross (Gal 5:11). We can't avoid the kind of scorn and ridicule that people have for Jesus and his followers. We should expect opposition. So we are not trying to avoid that kind of offense.

- G. However, we must avoid blameworthy behavior as much as possible. Paul is warning us against offenses/faults that come from our own bad behavior. We don't want to serve in a way that is easily criticized for moral failure or doctrinal error. We don't want to participate in a way that is faulty or wrong. We should strive to eliminate blots and blemishes from our service for God. We don't want to bring disrepute upon the ministry by our behavior or attitudes.

Quote: Nothing is more likely to cause the name of God to be blasphemed and mocked by unbelievers than the example of a minister whose conduct of himself is evidently a contradiction of the transforming power of God in Christ which he advocates in his preaching.⁶

App: You are probably aware that there is a lot of faulty, blameworthy ministry done in churches around the world. It's very easy to spot and point out fault and blame in many churches.

⁶ Hughes, *NICNT*, 222.

Illus.: Just over the last couple of years, one of the biggest mega-churches in the world, the Hillsong churches, have experienced huge upset as several of their ministers have been implicated in immoral conduct. The pastor of the church in NYC (Carl Lentz) was exposed as an adulterer. The founders of the church in Australia had to step down because of significant inappropriate conduct. That kind of thing drags the name of Christ and the testimony of the church through the mud. They are guilty of exactly what Paul is talking about here—they engaged in blameworthy behavior, and that caused discredit to the name of Christ.

- H. Our main concern should be that nothing that we do hinders anyone from accepting the Gospel message. That is, we should live the kind of lifestyle that no one can accuse us of violating Christian morality or biblical standards. No one should be able to look at us and say, “If that’s what it means to be a Christian, I want nothing to do with it.”
- I. None of us is morally perfect, but we should strive to be blameless—i.e., not liable to accusation. This is a biblical goal.

1Co 1:8 ... *that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1Th 5:23 *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1Ti 3:2 *A bishop then must be blameless, ...*

We will never achieve moral perfection this side of heaven, but we can live in such a way that avoids allegations and accusations of immoral or inappropriate conduct. We strive to avoid conduct that discredits the Gospel and the church of Christ.

Quote: Ministers of Christ’s gospel must exert themselves to be blameless in their conduct so that no one who observes them can take offense. If they proclaim the Word of God but fail to follow its teaching, they deny the truth, destroy the church, and insult their Lord and Master.⁷

⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 212.

When we engage in Christian service, we have to do it in a way that is not blameworthy—not open to accusations of impropriety or immorality.

App: Sadly, blamelessness is a rare virtue, even among those serving God.

Illus.: In a Texas mega-church, a well-known pastor recently had to step aside because of inappropriate communication with a woman not his wife. These messages were not immoral per se, but they were deemed to be coarse, foolish, and inappropriate. And that was from a formerly respected leader in evangelicalism. He embarrassed himself and his church. The church, to their credit, made his step aside from ministry temporarily.

I remember my shock and dismay the first time I heard a pastor tell an off-color joke. Many pastors these days use coarse/vulgar language. I find that very offensive and scandalous.

Examples of blameworthy ministry are not hard to find; they are, sadly, quite common. I hear about them regularly.

How do we avoid blameworthy behavior? We try to do things in a proper, fitting, and orderly way.

1Co 14:40 *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

1 Cor 10:31 *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

1 Corinthians 9:27 *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

We must be intentional when it comes to avoiding offenses and blameworthy behavior. We may not be sinless, but we must avoid the kind of behavior that discredits ourselves, the Lord, or the church. We don't want the ministry to be blamed because of our bad conduct. We don't want to give anyone a reason to ridicule or reject the Gospel because of us—because of our faults and failures.

One last detail here: notice the words “anything” (vs. 3) and “all things” (vs. 4). We should be seeking to give no offense in any area of life, and we should be striving for commendable ministry in all ways. Remember the context here is Christian ministry. What this demands of us is careful control of the way we engage in ministry. We want to avoid being difficult and we want to be commendable in how we do all things.

Nobody is perfect. We all stumble in many ways. But our objective/goal should be that we avoid blameworthy ministry. We should intentionally avoid causing offenses or being difficult. We must avoid the kind of conduct that would hinder the Gospel or tarnish the reputation of the church. We should do everything possible to maintain the purity, integrity, and good testimony of Christian ministry.

So don't be difficult—don't cause problems for others.

And don't engage in blameworthy conduct; avoid anything that would discredit the name of Christ, hinder the Gospel, or weaken the church.