

1 Corinthians

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Preacher: Howard, Kenneth (1921-1992)

- [0 : 00] We turn this afternoon to the words found in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians in the second chapter and at the third verse.
- The first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 3. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.
- The apostle Paul in the beginning of this epistle is comparing himself with his message, his message with himself.
- And in doing so he draws a remarkable double parallel. First of all he says there is a certain folly or lack of worldly wisdom about his message, that is about the gospel.
- Chapter 1, verse 21. He says, After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, he pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, save them who believe.
- [1 : 29] So he says of himself in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, I, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.
- For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. For I determined not to know anything about his message, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. A certain folly or lack of worldly wisdom about the Christian message itself.
- Then his second parallel is this, that there is a certain weakness or lack of worldly power about the gospel.
- Chapter 1, verse 27. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.
- And base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen. Okay, and things which are not. To bring to nought things that are, that no flesh could glory in his presence.
- [2 : 45] And having said that, that apparent weakness, that apparent lack of worldly power concerning the gospel, he now says concerning himself in our text, that I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much of fear.
- Now, my friends, if you think it rather strange that I should choose such words for such an occasion, I can only point to the apparently greater strangeness.
- That an apostle of the Lord should use them on any occasion. But let us not stay with the strangeness.
- Let us look at these things and see what is involved. First of all, let me introduce a question. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.
- Whence comes this weakness? And this fear? And this much trembling? It's a fact in the apostle's experience?
- [4 : 10] Whence comes it? What accounts for it? What accounts for what I shall call, for the sake of brevity, ministerial trepidation?
- What accounts for? And I'll answer the question, first of all, negatively and then positively. First of all, this ministerial trepidation does not arise from any lack of certainty as to the veracity or the truth of the message.

If that were the case, Paul would not have been a Christian apostle at all. Any man who doubts the truth of the faith once for all delivered to the saints has no place in a Christian pulpit unless in the Christian ministry.

But the facts of the case are that the apostle Paul preached the gospel with all boldness, with a fearless honesty, and with an intense personal persuasion of its veracity and truthfulness.

And time and experience will testify if they have not already done so. I trust that the occupant of this pulpit will do the same.

[5 : 44] Whence comes this ministerial trepidation? Not from any lack of certainty as to the truth of the message. And yet, both Paul and I can say, I'm with you in weakness, don't be in fear, don't be in much trouble.

Again, answering this question negatively, where does this ministerial trepidation come from? Neither does it come from any lack of conviction as to one's own call to the work of the minister.

One may be convinced the truth of the gospel without being called to the gospel minister. And if Paul were in any doubt on that matter, it would have appeared in his ministry as it does appear in the ministry of any man whose motive falls in any way or case below that of the irresistible constraint of the Spirit of God.

Paul is a man who can say, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.

Spurgeon used to say to young men who were inquiring or feeling their way toward the ministry, stay out of it if you can find the least possible reason for doing so.

[7 : 45] He was perfectly, he was absolutely right. Well, your pastor never had any other serious inclination to any other calling.

And in his better moments, though he's walked a chequered pathway, he has never wished to change his status as a minister of the gospel.

And yet Paul and I with him not only can but have to say with you in weakness and in fear and in much trouble.

So I say again, this ministerial trepidation does not arise from any doubt about one's call to the ministry.

Neither, again to answer this question with yet another negative, neither does this disposition arise from the lack of willingness to face persecution or trouble for the gospel's sake.

[9 : 13] The apostle Paul never invited persecution but neither did he flinch it when he came his way. He was willing to suffer and he suffered.

As to trouble, in terms of personal inconvenience and deprivation, he says, I was troubled on every side.

will the Christian minister in our land today faces little, if any, outright persecution for the gospel's sake.

Though he faces plenty of trouble. his very association, his very identification in a public and official way with the Christian message in a secular, materialistic, atheistic age is something that brings with it a certain derision and a condescending sneer on the part of the man of the world.

Fancy spending your life and your time and your gifts in a course so outdated, so irrelevant, so gone and in the past, so superseded.

[10 : 42] In one way or another, that's how it is put. Well, in that one is human, it hurts.

But in that one is convinced of the truth of the message and of the call of God, it matters nothing. And there's nothing particularly virtuous in being willing to endure that kind of condescending sneer.

Now, it isn't this that makes the Christian minister weak and fearful. Yet there is something that makes him say, as Paul says, with you in weakness and in fear and in much trouble.

what is it? Well, to answer the question now positively, I would put it like this and say, what makes a Christian minister have this sense of weakness and fear and much trembling is an absorbing sense of responsibility.

every man, any man worthy is calling, has a new sense of responsibility in his particular vocation, whatever that may be.

[12 : 22] but because Christianity is unique and there isn't anything else in the world with which it can be compared and because preaching is a different means of communication which is not used in any other way, in any other place or for any other purpose and because involved in that communication is God and eternity of the issues and life and death because this is the case then the gospel minister has a peculiar responsibility that has no parallel in any other sphere of life and it is from this that there arises this weakness here for much trembling how?

How does it arise? Well, in the first place it comes from the burden of the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord is a glorious thing.

The word of the Lord is a grand thing. The word of the Lord is a two-inch sword and yet it's a heavy sword in the hands of those who in the ministerial capacity have to wield it.

The very content of the word of the Lord makes it so. God, man, sin, salvation, life, death, righteousness, eternity, judgment comes.

There's only content of the message. I say, makes it a burdensome thing. It isn't that the burden is unwillingly carried.

[14 : 42] It isn't that the burden is not sought. It isn't that the burden doesn't yield also joy and pleasure and happiness. and yet those things that together comprise and constitute the gospel message go to make up a burden that gives the minister the sense of weakness and fear and much to have to go into the presence of the Lord, the almighty God.

To have to seek of him the word for the hour for the people, to have to wrestle with that word and study it and pray over it and bring it forth and then deliver it not in one's own name but in God's name.

That is something that can only make a minister in front of him. He feels the burden of it as the prophets did, as the apostles did.

He has heavenly treasure, glorious, wonderful and he's glad to have it and he's glad to hold it forth. Yes, but he has it in an earthen vessel. the vessel of his own hands and heart and words.

Inevitably, he feels a certain weakness, though the message itself is the power of God unto salvation.

[16 : 33] the burden of the word of the Lord induces this unique sense of responsibility and so this feeling of ministerial trepidation.

God but also this disposition in the Christian minister arises from the potential danger ever present of misrepresenting or of distorting the message committed to.

If our blessed Lord could say my doctrine is not mine but his that sent me and if the apostle Paul can say I delivered unto you that which I received of the Lord then I say how obvious it is that the Christian minister does not originate his message does not create the message he delivers and therefore is in the position where he must be always on his guard that he delivers only that which he has received of the Lord and that he doesn't mangle it or mutilate it or misrepresent the message given to him by the Lord he is a messenger and no more though he has discerned the truth of the message though he has felt the power of the message in his own soul he is still a messenger and no more and so I say the great danger is the danger of misrepresentation or distortion of the whole counsel of God all my friends you must know that pressures are applied to ministers of the word of all manner of quarters from his enemies from his friends one wants him to soft pedal this doctrine a little another wants him to soft pedal another doctor another says leave out this another says bring in that he's thanked when he preaches in this vein he's ignored when he preaches in another it's all the whole counsel of God and then of course there's the devil himself that brings pressure on the minister but a minister never climbs up pulpit steps but the devil climbs up after him and so in these various ways it is possible that the balance and the proportion of the whole counsel of God is disturbed and distorted it's a possibility it's a potential that all was there but there's no such thing as ministerial infallibility things are not true because ministers say things are true because they come from the mouth of God through his word and the minister must test all that he says by the word of God and the people must receive whatever they do receive from the minister testing it by the same word so you see a minister trembles lest he betrays his trust as a steward of the mysteries of God and this weakness and fear and much trembling arise from that sense of responsibility but further this disposition of ministerial

trepidation arises from the fact of his known and felt accountability to God as a pastor for the spiritual well-being of the flock under his charge if a minister is going to be a true minister then he must have pastoral concern for the spiritual health of his people he may not have all the gifts and I certainly have but he must blend within his heart and within his mind on the one hand a passion for God with on the other hand a passion for the souls of men and if those two things are blended as they should be and as they must be if he is a new testament minister then he will inevitably think of himself as answerable to

God for the spiritual health of his flock he can't give them life except as a messenger of life but under the good hand of God he can be used to bring them to life and he can bring and he can be used to strengthen and stimulate them in life he is not a hireling shepherd who delivers a message and then he's off and he has no further responsibility his responsibility is there before he begins his responsibility is there in the delivery of the message his responsibility continues but a minister has this pastoral responsibility for the health of his people so that is why we read as

[23 : 34] Paul himself says in Hebrews 13 and verse 17 obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls as they that must give account that they may do it with joy and not with grief hence the weakness and fear and much tremble hence the ministerial trepidation he cannot save a soul and yet he's God's instrument very often in the salvation of a soul whether or not in the spiritual nurture of the flock he is answerable for his own soul but there is a sense and a measure in which he is also answerable for the souls of his flock and my friends the realisation of that is enough to make any true minister tremble here it is here are the main factors then I say that give rise to this sacred disposition of ministerial trepidation it isn't because he isn't sure of his message it isn't because he isn't sure whether he's a minister or not it isn't because he has any doubts about the validity and the relevance of the message he delivers that has nothing whatever to do with it he has none of those things but his trepidation arises from a sense of deep responsibility concerning the message and its content well having answered that question let me in the second place draw some practical conclusions first of all if this disposition of ministerial trepidation marked an apostle of the

Lord how much more ought it to characterize the ordinary Christian minister weakness yeah much gender but Paul had seen the Lord Paul had the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit in uttering scripture Paul had been caught up to the third heaven and seen wonderful things and yet Paul contemplating the responsibility of his ministry at Corinth says I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much temper and when

I remember that I have none of these apostolic prerogatives then all I can say is I am with you in weakness and in fear and in much temper clearly there's no room whatever in the Christian ministry for the bubbly bouncy preacher who in William Cooper's famous phrase the very fact that it is his shows that the thing is by no means new or novel there's no room in the Christian ministry for the bubbly bouncy preacher who skips lightly up the pulpit steps and delivers himself before him preaks it all as something well within his personal competence that kind of man is not likely to be with anybody in any felt sense of weakness or fear or treasure or a second conclusion that I would deduce from this matter is that this disposition on the part of a minister is evidently a factor in a spiritually fruitful ministry today's approach of course is to say just the reverse today's approach to matters is to say rather that any man who acts in this way will get nothing done the argument of today is that if a minister is going to be a success he must be confident he must be self assured he must be self possessed he must lose a certain optimism he must lose a certain confidence only so will he succeed but if he feels if he feels any personal weakness or fear or trembling still more if he lets it be known that he feels then he's foredoomed to failure so pontificates modern psychology and alas that psychology pontificates itself all too often in the jargon of modern evangelicalism read some of the books that are written on preaching from those quarters and you begin to wonder whether they ever began with the word of god at all or whether they didn't start in a psychiatrist consulting if that view is right then the apostle

Paul's ministry must have been a monstrous failure because he was none of those things who planted the church at Corinth and in a dozen or so other places who cared for that church who nurtured that church at Corinth through all its foolish controversies who did the spirit of God choose to propagate the gospel among the Gentiles more than any other man in his day but the apostle Paul he did exactly the opposite to what the psychologist would say and recommend the spiritually fruitful ministry of this man was I have no doubt whatever in my own mind due in measure to his mistrust of himself to his faithfulness of God to his reliance upon the

Holy Spirit alone to apply the redemption provided in Christ the worst thing it seems to me my friends that could befall any Christian church is to have an omniscient pastor a man who knows it all and a man who can do it all a man who can take it all in his stride for the pastor who comes in weakness and fear and much trembling for him there is I trust and I believe some prospect of spiritual fruit another practical conclusion that I deduce from this message is that this disposition this ministerial trepidation on the part of a pastor ought to commend him as nothing else can to the care and the prayer of his people would you feel the same need to pray for a minister who gave the impression that he knew it all and had it all that he was always abreast of everything and never at a loss for a word or to know what to do would you feel the same need to uphold him at the throne of grace who gave the impression that he lacked nothing possessed all the gifts why here's the apostle

[33 : 07] Paul himself and again and again he pleaded with the churches to pray for him as he did to the church at Ephesus when he said praying for all saints and for me you see he was over them in the Lord but he was not over them in the sense of being some isolated remote demigod who was beyond the need of their fellowship and beyond the need of their love and their prayers he had a soul as they had he had a salvation that they had though he was over them in the Lord he was with them in the bonds of the gospel and men as they were men he suffered the infirmities of the body and the weaknesses to which the flesh is heir of course pastor and people alike in trouble may turn to God and yet it's part of God's ordination but his people in trouble may turn to their pastor as well if they wish but when a pastor's in trouble where does he turn the fact that his office of necessity is in a sense remote puts him into this state of weakness and fear and much friendly and that fact I say is enough to commend him to the prayers of his people and then another practical matter that I would deduce from this thing this disposition is that this disposition of humbleness and much dependence on God while it is applicable in a minister and suitable to a minister applies in principle to every member of a church and a fellow every member of this church and fellow why so well because we're all in constant danger of misrepresenting the gospel by the inconsistencies of our lives so there's good cause for us all to feel our weakness and fear and tremble lest we misrepresent the gospel we're all in the position of the possibility of denying the Lord in our daily life war when those saved we don't act as though we're saved when though his we pass as others the possibility

I say is always there so there is always the need for this sense of trepidation in each and every one of us now my friends God has done great things for us where have we're glad and I am persuaded that he'll do more but not if we are self reliant not if we are proud of our orthodoxy not if we are self pleased with our stands on matters which are nothing more than our common and simple distinguishing the great word to us surely in harmony with our text is that of the apostle Peter when he says humble yourselves under the almighty hand of God and he will exalt you in due season casting all your care upon him for he careth for you and so I say casting ourselves faster than people alike upon the

Lord and with all our weakness and all our fear and all our trembling we shall discover the greatness of our daughters in God our glorious heavenly father in Christ our blessed and only savior and in the Holy Spirit our eternal and only and sovereign governor and so I approach the great opportunities of this ministry with the apostle's question in my mind who is sufficient for these things and I'm content to answer it with the apostle's answer our sufficient is of

God for in him our weakness is made strength our fear is hallowed but our much trembling finds us upon the rock the rock unmoved immovable the rock Christ Jesus the Lord help us there to stand there to work and there to serve his name and his glory amen and and and and and and and and

Thank you.

[40 : 43] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Amen.

[44 : 25] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.