

Outline

1. Introduction and Review

- Text focus: 2 Corinthians 5:12–14.
- Session theme: whether Paul was viewed as fanatical and how believers should respond to similar accusations.
- Opening application: when attacked for commitment to the gospel, doctrine, or edification, the believer's motive should be for God and for others, not self-promotion.

2. Paul's Response to the Charge of Being "Beside Himself"

- Explanation of 2 Corinthians 5:13: Paul is accused of being fanatical, deranged, or unbalanced in ministry.
- Paul's critics portray his zeal for salvation and the gospel as abnormal.
- Acts 26:24–25 is used as a parallel example of Paul being accused of madness before Festus.

3. The Meaning of "It is to God"

- First meaning: God will judge whether Paul's ministry is acceptable or excessive.
- Second meaning: If Paul appears fanatical, his zeal is sincerely directed toward God's service and glory.
- Paul's ministry priorities are identified as to the glory of God, the salvation of the lost, and the edification of the saints.

4. Application to Modern Criticism and Ministry

- Believers should not be moved by false accusations but should continue in grace and love toward critics.
- Criticism becomes an opportunity to display doctrine in action.
- The speaker applies Paul's example to criticism of the ministry's emphasis on sonship and edification.
- Believers must distinguish between false accusations and legitimate correction from God's word.

5. Learning to Respond to Attacks with Doctrine

- Like Paul, believers should examine whether criticism is true and make changes if needed.
- If criticism is false, believers must respond in a godly manner rather than in the flesh.
- Handling attacks is presented as vital to sonship edification and becoming more than conquerors.
- Examples are given for pastors, parents, grandparents, and workers as contexts where doctrine must be modeled.

6. Paul's Soberness "For Your Cause"

- The second half of 2 Corinthians 5:13 contrasts Paul's sober-minded humility with the self-promotion of false apostles.
- Paul refuses to use fleshly tactics to defend himself or gain a hearing.
- His measured response benefits the Corinthians and provides them with an example and an answer to critics.
- The Believer's presentation of truth is "to God," while the Believer's response to critics is for the saints.

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:12-14

Session 54: Was Paul a Fanatic? pt. 2

Introduction and Review

We are looking at 2 Corinthians 5:12-14, where Paul has been accused of taking his evangelistic efforts too far by some who are outside of the Corinthian assembly. The policy of evil means for this criticism to resonate with the Corinthians by causing them to back away from following Paul's example and with Paul to either slow him down or stop him altogether.

In verses 12-13, we have the objection, which we saw last session. In verses 14-15, we are given the doctrine to handle the policy of evil's attack so that we are unaffected by it.

I want to talk about the verse from our perspective. When we are attacked and maligned because of our unwavering commitment to the gospel, (and while the gospel is the strict context of this passage, I would also like to include such things as our commitment to the doctrine or to the edification of the saints), our response has to be that of Paul. And what was his response? That his actions are not motivated from self-promotion, but for the good of others, and if he is considered to be "crazy" or "fanatical," it is "to God."

2 Corinthians 5:13 **For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God:** or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause.

Paul's Response to the Charge of Being "Beside Himself"

There are two things in verse 13. The first is that **Paul is acting fanatical**, and the second is that **Paul is considered to be sober**.

Let's start with the fanatical accusation.

What does it mean that Paul is "beside himself?" It means that Paul is not thinking normally, but he is deranged, insane and as a result, his ministry is completely out of balance. We can imagine the kind of conversations that were

going on which might have sounded like this gossip group I am about to show you on the power point.

Gossip #1: “Paul is crazy. He isn’t supposed to go around talking about how people can be saved all the time, it isn’t normal, it’s unbalanced.

Gossip #2: You can’t go around telling people they are sinners; that is unacceptable in polite society.

Gossip #3: Religion has a place in the church, but Paul talks about being saved everywhere he goes. I heard quite a few people say he must have something wrong with him, and I think they are right.”

These are all clever contrivances by the policy of evil to position the church against Paul, and by so doing, demoralize Paul in his evangelistic efforts.

This isn’t the first time Paul has been accused of being fanatical in his approach to ministry. Think back to Acts 26 when Paul was standing before Festus. There is a whole long story starting back in Acts 21, but we will skip that for now. So, Paul is standing before Festus and King Agrippa to give an account of the charges against him.

Acts 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, **thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.** ²⁵ But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Of course there is more to the story, but we will leave it there as we have made our point that Paul, on several occasions has been accused of being mad. Paul’s answer to this is that if he does seem to be fanatical about the gospel, **“it is to God.”**

The Meaning of “It Is to God”

What is meant by this? Paul means two things: The first thing Paul means by “it is to God” is that **God will be the judge** of whether Paul has “gone off the deep end” in his approach to ministry.

Remember, just a few verses back Paul has already said that he wants his labor to be acceptable to God, for he knows he will stand before the judgment seat of

Christ (JSoC) to give an account, therefore Paul is very aware of what he is doing. So, the first sense of “it is to God” is to say, “it is up to God to decide whether I am beside myself or not.” If his labor is acceptable to God, Paul can live with being labeled as “crazy.”

Now stop and think about that and apply that to yourself. When you are being accused in some way that insinuates you are not a normal Christian, your defense is that “it is to God.” In other words, God will decide if you are not normal, not your critics.

But there is a second meaning when Paul says “it is to God.” Paul is saying, “I may appear crazy to some, but what they are seeing is only my **sincere service** to God.”

This one has to do with Paul’s motive. What Paul is doing is to God’s glory, not his. In other words, Paul is saying, “If I appear to be going off the deep end, know this: it is in sincere service to God.”

Three things are always at the top of Paul’s ministry and life: the glory of God, the salvation of the lost and the edification of the saints. If you are going into the ministry, this ought to be “the placard above the door” which you tap every time you walk through. The first one is a by-product of the last two.

Application to Modern Criticism and Ministry

We know a tiny bit of what Paul is talking about. There have been those who think this ministry is severely off balance, tilted too much toward sonship. Like Paul’s critics did with him, our critics also tell falsehoods about this ministry.

These criticisms are opportunities for us to put grace on display, no matter who is making the accusation. Usually when people resort to personal attacks, it means they don’t have a good argument to make their point, so they resort to putting a label on you, to discredit you. My obligation is to continue to love my critics and make sure that the doctrine is instructing my thoughts and behavior toward them. Satan would love to distract us all from living the doctrine, don’t give him the win by allowing yourself to be distracted.

If this ministry is taking sanctification too far, God will be the judge of that, I don't answer to my critics, I answer to God. Sometimes the saints will be our critics and when they are, we continue to love them as fellow members of the body of Christ.

But, by saying what Paul said in verse 13a, I am not just saying that God will be my judge, I am also saying something else: 2) I am saying that my continued emphasis on sonship and edification, my constant refrain on utilizing the doctrine to be conformed to the image of Christ, is "to God" in the sense that it is honestly done with Him (God) and His work in view; it is done in sincere service to Him.

My teaching and ministry are not to benefit me, to promote me, or to provide a legacy for me, it is for you, the saints – for your edification – and, at the same time, it is "to God" in that it is done on His behalf. It is what these very scriptures are written for: our edification, our comfort and consolation, and the strengthening of our inner man in the face of the attacks of the policy of evil.

So, we do exactly what Paul did: we examine and present our motive; our ministry is genuinely unto the Lord and in service to Him. We want our labor to be acceptable to Him for we know we will stand before the Lord Jesus at the JSoC and give an account.

We should not be moved by our critics ("God is my judge" which is exactly what my last name, "Daniel" says.) We are a part of the body of Christ and as such, we have a responsibility.

Paul is not being stubborn, he is being faithful in the face of criticism. And since we know how God expects us to handle these attacks, we can actually "take pleasure" in them because of the inner man transformation which can take place in us because of the attacks.

Now let's be honest. That is not to say that some criticisms cannot be legitimate. That is why I say that I am willing to be corrected by God's word, and more than willing, I *want* to be corrected by God's word, because I want to get it right for your sakes and for mine and for the glory of God. But unless and until I am corrected by the word, I will continue to stand fast, even if I must do it alone.

Learning to Respond to Attacks with Doctrine

I want to be like Paul, and so should you. Like Paul, we should be willing to hear what our critics are saying and do two things: 1) if the accusations are true, then we need to examine ourselves and make the necessary changes, and 2) we need to employ the doctrine to keep criticisms from ruining us; that is what the doctrine is there for. Like Paul, we must be willing to endure hardships and the attacks of the policy of evil. Why? Because unless, and until, we learn to deal with the attacks, we cannot become more than conquerors. Learning how to handle the attacks is vital to the process of our sonship edification!

Like Paul, we must learn how to deal with these attacks from the doctrine. I do not go looking for objections and criticisms, but I must learn how to honestly evaluate them in my own life, and if they are found to be true, then I have to change. If they are found to be false, then I need to know how to handle them in a godly manner.

Putting my head in the sand and pretending there aren't any criticisms, or shielding myself from them will not strengthen or edify me, and it will not encourage this church because if I, as the pastor, am not modeling the doctrine of how to deal with the policy of evil, where else are you supposed to see it working?

You that are parents with children at home, where else are your children supposed to see the doctrine working to produce a godly response to untrue criticisms? When we respond out of our flesh and rant and rave and attack back in kind, what are we teaching our children? Grandparents, the same is true for us.

When they stoned Paul at Lystra, how many times in 13 epistles did you hear Paul disparage those who were trying to kill him?

Like Paul, by my own response to those who object to this ministry, and by how we conduct this ministry, I need to give the members of our church an "occasion to glory on my behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them" which attack this ministry. That's right out of verse 12.

2 Corinthians 5:13 For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.*

Paul's Soberness "For Your Cause"

The second thing in the verse is Paul contrasting himself with the false apostles who are showy braggarts. Paul says, "whether we be sober" and by that he means if he does not promote himself (he that planteth is nothing), if he behaves with humility of mind, it is for the Corinthians, that they might receive the instruction he wants them to have.

Paul's evangelistic efforts are because of something that is working in Paul's mind, in his inner man. He knows what he is doing; he is not being irrational. Paul **evangelizes with purpose.**

Paul **responds to his critics in grace, not hid flesh.** Do you understand what is being said here? If Paul responds to his critics in his flesh, how will that profit the church? What will it teach the church? How will it glorify God? How will it advance his evangelistic efforts?

In other words, Paul is not going to take on the tactics of the false apostles in order to get a hearing. The power is of God, and Paul knows he can't manufacture it by any means of his flesh.

Part of this issue of "being sober" is Paul's **lack of self-promotion** like those false apostles who were always pumping themselves up to be something special.

Paul's response is for the **edification of the saints.**

But, there is also the issue of "sober" being the opposite of being "beside ourselves." What Paul is saying here is like this: "If you Corinthians don't think I'm crazy, but you think I'm sane and sober-minded, then I hope you will admit that to be the case, because that demeanor is for your benefit. If I am too fervent in my evangelistic efforts (and I don't think I am), it has been honestly done in service to God, but if we reserve ourselves and keep measure in our response to our critics, that is being done for you."

Paul is trusting that they (the saints in Corinth) will see him as zealous toward God and at the same time, of a sound mind toward them; that he seeks their welfare, he loves them and he hopes they will acknowledge that.

Let's go back to our gossip group for a moment. Suppose you are the fourth person in the group and you have heard the first three. This is the doctrine that ought to come into your mind – that we should have an answer to those who are serving as mouthpieces for the policy of evil. We do this with love, and we do it kindly, and we do it with the intention of persuading them of the truth. Yes, this can take the form of rebuke, but that needs to be said with the audience in mind (more severe for those who are mature and should know better and less severe with novices). What might you say to the gossip group?

Take a minute and think about this. Craft your answer carefully. Think about the four criteria I just gave you and link your response to the verses we are studying.

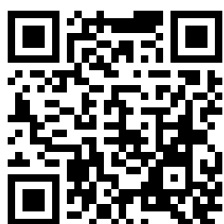
And that is the way I would like to be viewed by this church, if I am worthy of it. I am zealous on your behalf to God, and hope to be seen as sober and sound in my response to my critics.

If you are listening to this and these same or similar accusations come against you, whether you are in the ministry or not, I hope you will recall this doctrine and put it to work in your own life. It is certainly within the scope of the policy of evil to target a son or daughter who is serious about their sonship life, about their relationship with God, and about their understanding of the word; to unleash a series of complaints and objections.

Remember that your presenting of the truth is “to God” and your response to your critics is “to the saints.”

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The Most Important Decision

Doctrinal Summary: Paul's Remedy for Discouragement in Evangelistic Ministry

Paul is not discouraged by false accusations because his ministry is governed by doctrine rather than by the approval of men. If his zeal for the gospel is judged to be excessive, he leaves that judgment with God, knowing that his labor must be acceptable to Him and that he will give account at the judgment seat of Christ. His motive is not self-promotion, but sincere service to God, the salvation of the lost, and the edification of the saints.

Therefore, Paul answers accusation with sobriety, humility, and love. He refuses to defend himself by fleshly methods or imitate the self-exalting spirit of false teachers. His presentation of the truth is "to God," and his measured response is "for your cause," giving the saints an example of how doctrine works under pressure and equipping them to answer those who oppose faithful ministry.

Closing Exhortation: Let Doctrine Govern Your Response

When you are criticized, misunderstood, or accused of being too zealous for the gospel, do not let the accusation move you away from faithful ministry. Let God be your judge. If your labor is acceptable to Him, and if your motive is His glory, the salvation of the lost, and the edification of the saints, then you can keep serving without being ruled by the approval or disapproval of men.

At the same time, do not answer criticism in the flesh. Do not defend yourself by pride, retaliation, or self-promotion. Be sober for the cause of others. Let your response give the saints an example of doctrine working under pressure, and give them something sound to answer when faithful ministry is opposed.