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## Accredited Ministry

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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(An Abbreviated Message)

*"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God... Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. 2:3-5; 4:1).*

*"For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead." (2 Cor. 1:8-9).*

*"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not... always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?" (2 Cor. 4:1,10-11; 3:1).*

Paul is speaking concerning the ministry being accredited, and links this accrediting with his sufferings. Before writing 2 Corinthians he went through a very deep experience in Asia: "...weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power... we despaired even of life". God "who raiseth the dead" became his only way out, and from that deep experience this second letter sprang.

Ministry is that of the Church. Apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers were given as gifts for perfecting the saints unto the work of ministering; the ministry, therefore, belongs to all.

Truly *accredited* ministry is through suffering. Accredited ministry represents a tremendous victory, set in a background of great conflict.

A determined effort is made through the age to discredit spiritual ministry, and to do so through the one engaged in that ministry.

In the case of the Lord, there was a persistent effort to discredit Him, and thereby discredit His ministry. It drew forth the words: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country" (Luke 4:24).

In the case of Paul, the Judaisers sought to discredit him, and thereby discredit his ministry. At Corinth a great battle raged over his position as an Apostle, and 2 Corinthians is much taken up with the establishment of his own position, and therefore his authority in ministry.

One who counts for the Lord, is a joint of supply, who can be of value in any way to the Lord's people, and stand in His testimony, will know the enemy's effort to render those spiritual values nil by discrediting. The enemy will give a strong sense of unworthiness, unfitness, uselessness to the Lord, or he will cause something to be associated with the vessel for the discrediting of the ministry; he may even patronize in order to compromise, as when the demons cried: "These men are servants of the Most High God, which proclaim unto you the way of salvation". Sometimes he will cause to associate with a pure thing people who are unsaved, to bring discredit.

The Lord's answer to that is to keep the vessel of ministry in weakness, dependence upon Himself; so that all is kept spiritual, and all is of the Lord alone.

The essence of the second letter to the Corinthians is that here there was a wholesale discrediting of the Apostle and his ministry. He will not be accredited by asserting his rights. God will take him into death itself, where there is no way out, and then as from the dead bring him back, and pour through him a new stream of life for the Lord's people. In the realm of spiritual intelligences, where all is known and understood, there is a clear recognition that the effort to discredit has broken down, that this ministry is of God, and cannot be overthrown.

Such ministry may be personal or through those who constitute the assembly, or of a home.

Resurrection becomes the hallmark of that which is accredited of God.

Metal is passed through the crucible and refined then the stamp is put upon it to show its calibre.

So God brings through the fires of Satanic antagonism, allows the thing to reach a point where He alone is its life, and then brings it up out of the conflict, and puts the stamp of resurrection life on it, so that it has in it the power of an indestructible life - that only comes through death.

All ministry that is to be accredited will be bound up with suffering; a decision we have to make is as to the object of our ministry. A good many things can be taken into consideration, but there comes a point where all other things have to be ranged on one side, and one thing on the other side - the real spiritual value, without alloy: that which is wholly of God and not at all of man. In the measure in which that is true there will be suffering. To stand utterly for what is spiritual is a costly thing.

There must be a willingness to be dealt with by the Lord, in such a way as to keep the ministry living and pure. All ministry which issues from such suffering is going to count. It may not be welcomed or desired by the mass, but where there is need and a call for that which we have gained through suffering there will be response.

Two tragedies today amongst the Lord's people:

(1). So many have no knowledge of the truth in any adequate way, and are therefore spiritually immature.

(2). So many have a great deal of truth, and are dead. The Lord needs a vessel to meet these conditions - a vessel that has gone through the fire, and is living in the power of resurrection.

Such a vessel is going to be a suffering vessel, which has come to the place where God Himself meets the situation.

This may explain much; it may be a challenge; it may be a call.

"Seeing we have this ministry... we obtained mercy" - we have received grace to help - and so "we faint not". But the treasure is in vessels of fragile clay, the vessel is being broken day by day. To stand in the power of God, the revelation of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, represents cost. Are we prepared for that? That is the way of the accredited ministry.

God has accredited the ministry of His Son, yet there was a universal combination to set Him at naught.

God has accredited the ministry of His servant Paul, but he was taken through depths of suffering.

So for us; ministry accredited of God is linked with suffering, but the suffering produces that which is wholly of God and cannot be destroyed.