

“And There Are Many Adversaries”

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There are many adversaries in Christian ministry. Although we might assume we understand the ideas being presented in this short thought, perhaps too much assumption is taking place and thus a host of misunderstanding exists. Let us begin by defining a couple of key thoughts.

First, “What is Christian ministry?” Christianity ministry is one that reflects kingdom values and advances its agenda. The kingdom of God has a real set of values, thoughts, ideas, and expressions that show it for what it is. It is different from the kingdom of this world, the devil, and fallen flesh. It is this agenda, this value that is to be presented and advanced in a fallen world.

Second, “What is the kingdom?” We speak of a “kingdom” as if everyone understands what is meant, but unfortunately, such is not the case. In our Lord’s Prayer, He prayed, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Although there is a real kingdom of God on earth right now, there awaits us a fuller and final manifestation of this same kingdom down the road. **In this kingdom, Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. In this kingdom, the work of God is without resistance.** There will no longer be any adversaries or obstacles to the work of God. The church is a real part and expression of this kingdom.

Yet currently kingdom work is met with persistent opposition. Every local church has within it those who would oppose the work from moving forward. There are local communities and entire nations that are in opposition to the kingdom’s presence. They hate the king, thus they hate the kingdom and those who would advance the values and agenda of the king.

In our text (1 Cor. 16:9) Paul uses the word “adversaries.” It means “repugnant” or “to be in direct opposition.” Every ministry begins with promise and hope. All ministries initially are a wide open door and are filled with real power to accomplish kingdom work. Yet, all ministry has standing in its path those who are in direct opposition to what is ready to unfold. This adversarial element is found from within and from without all fellowships. Let us initially consider our internal adversaries.

Internal adversaries:

Notice Paul’s language to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30.

²⁸ “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and **from among your own selves men will arise**, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

This same warning is given by our Lord to the disciples in Matthew 7:15. Peter likewise warns of those from within who stand in the way of kingdom work (2 Pet. 2:1).

“Beware of the false prophets, **who come to you in sheep's clothing**, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15).

“But **false prophets also arose among the people**, just as there will also be **false teachers among you**, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Pet. 2:1).

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Paul reiterates this thought in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

¹³ “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, **disguising themselves as apostles of Christ**. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

If such things were present in the days of the apostles, why should we not expect anything less? The elders are placed in their position as shepherds to protect the flock of God.

“holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both **to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict**” (Titus 1:9).

¹ “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort**, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Yet there is more. Not only are there internal adversaries, but there are adversaries outside the church.

External adversaries:

Paul speaks of such adversaries when he references Alexander, the coppersmith, in 2 Timothy 4:14, 15.

¹⁴ “Alexander the coppersmith **did me much harm**; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching” (2 Tim. 4:14, 15).

Even a casual reading of the gospels reveals the constant and persistent opposition to ministry our Lord faced with the religious establishment. We also know that the devil stands in direct opposition to all kingdom work. Paul and Peter reference this in two of their letters.

“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and **I was rescued out of the lion's mouth**” (2 Tim. 4:17).

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. **Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**” (1 Pet. 5:8).

It is this “adversity” that provoked Paul to say, “who is adequate for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). Although the adversaries to kingdom work are numerous, formidable, and persistent, they are no match for the priceless and powerful nature of our Triune God. It is His work, and we are His workers. We need to awaken to the real dangers swirling all around us. We must truly repent of our lusting after lesser things in place of the greater glory of God. O what real joy is ours when we drink from His well and feast from His table. May each and every day find us fighting the fight of faith to find Him always and forever enough for each and every moment.