

## Marks of an Excellent Shepherd: Edification

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:19

Code: B130318

It's important to have the right priorities, especially as a shepherd. Distractions put your flock in danger, and a shepherd who is around only part of the time can't properly care for or protect his sheep.

Pastors and church leaders have been charged with one duty—the spiritual training and protection of God's people. The lives under our care are to be our first priority. It's similar to a parental role (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12) in the lives the Lord has entrusted to us.

And it's easy to spot a shepherd who has lost sight of that priority. He's the one always out on the road, selling his latest book, speaking at the biggest conferences, and taking every opportunity to raise his profile and increase his influence. It often seems like his weekly pulpit ministry is a *distraction* from everything else he'd rather do.

An excellent shepherd won't exhibit that kind of attitude. His first priority is the edification of his people.

The spiritual well-being of the lives under his care was the apostle Paul's primary concern—he made that clear in 2 Corinthians. Rather than look out for his own reputation against the claims of the false apostles, Paul's self-defense was written for the benefit of the Corinthian believers. "All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved" (2 Corinthians 12:19).

Paul's goal in everything he did in relation to the Corinthian church, both in ministering to them and defending himself, was their edification. That was also the goal of the Lord Jesus Christ, who promised, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18).

The question naturally arises, since God was Paul's Judge (as we discussed last time), why should he bother to defend himself? He did so because if he were discredited the Corinthians would not listen to him; if they did not listen to him, they would not hear the truth of the Word of God that he taught. And if they did not hear the Word of God, they could not grow spiritually.

Paul suffered through the anguish and humiliation of his self-defense for the sake of the men and women *to whom he was defending himself*. His priority was not protecting his own reputation, but making sure God's people didn't inadvertently cut themselves off from His Word. He fought the lies of the false apostles to make sure the Corinthian believers had access to God's truth, and so that the truth would be active in their lives.

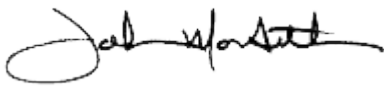
Remember, there were a limited number of teachers for the New Testament church, and the Lord was still revealing His truth through the inspired writings of the apostles. Severing the relationship

between Paul and the Corinthian church would have cut them off from the truth of Scripture and turned them over to the lies and corruption of the false apostles.

Paul needed to convince the Corinthians that he was the true spokesman of God, not so they could sit in judgment on his life, but so they could listen to his teaching. They weren't his judges; they were his spiritual responsibility, and he couldn't let them suffer the consequences of their own naiveté.

He could have reacted much differently; he could have angrily blasted the Corinthians for their disloyalty. But that would have been an abuse of his authority, which he previously said, "the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you" (2 Corinthians 10:8). In fact, he defended himself so vigorously so that when he next visited Corinth, he wouldn't need to be severe with them (2 Corinthians 13:10).

Pastors today can and should learn a lot from how Paul reacted under pressure and opposition. Rather than lash out defensively, he put the spiritual needs of the people under his care ahead of his own reputation and happiness. We ought to pay close attention to the heart of this excellent shepherd, and reflect in our own ministries his emphasis on faithfulness, selflessness, integrity, reverence, and edification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur", with a stylized, cursive script.

(Adapted from [2 Corinthians: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#).)

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