Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Competent Minister, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:1-3
Code: 47-12

What a privilege it is to hear the Lord speak to us this morning as we look to His Word. Our text is 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and we're beginning a look at verses 1 through 6. This particular epistle and certainly the section that we're in right now speaks so much to my own heart, to the heart of any minister, that there's a sense in which your kind of outsiders listening as this word is directed at us, and yet it's not limited to that because you must maintain the standard, hold the standard, expect the standard that is laid out here to be lived by those who lead and serve among you.

as we look at verses 1 through 6 of 2 Corinthians chapter 3, the section is about the competent minister, the capable pastor. And at some point or another all churches face the task of selecting a man who is capable, who is competent to be their pastor. This church in God's perfect timing and providence will face that same hour when you have to select a leader.

What do churches look for in such a man? What are the manifestations, the characteristics and the marks of competency? What criteria do we use to make a valid judgment on a man's ability to lead the church?

We really need to ask a question that is posed in chapter 2 and verse 16, the question is at the end of the verse, "Who is adequate for these things?" The word adequate is the Greek word hikanos, it means competent, sufficient, capable, or able. Who has the competency to take on the monumental and eternally significant duty of being a human instrument through which the gospel is preached to the saving of souls and the damning of souls? Who is capable of being the vessel that bears the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ which is a saver of life unto life to some, the death unto death to others. Who is able to properly be used so that the knowledge of Christ is appropriately manifest in every place? Who has the capability to sincerely with divine power and clarity speak on behalf of Christ so that men are brought by their response to that preaching either to life eternal or to death eternal? Who has the ability to be such a divine instrument, who can function under the careful watchful eye of almighty God and not be disqualified? Indeed, who is competent for such a ministry?

Well there is a wonderful and perhaps even starting answer to the question in chapter 2 verse 16, the answer comes down in verse 6 of chapter 3. "God who also made us adequate servants." The Apostle Paul says we can offer ourselves as adequate servants or as competent ministers or capable pastors. It's the same root word as hikanosback in 2:16. And Paul is here saying that God has made him a competent minister. So we ask the question in chapter 2 and he answers here in chapter 3, he

is a competent minister. Why does he have to face that issue? Why is he even discussing that? Because his competency is under attack. His capability is being relentlessly assaulted by the false apostles who have successfully infiltrated the Corinthian church.

Painfully all through this entire letter, all thirteen chapters, Paul has to defend himself against their bold and unfounded lies against him. They are accusing him in an effort to discredit him. They want to usurp his place and teach damning demonic lies. And so the Apostle Paul writes this epistle to defend himself. And one of the issues is his competency. Is he capable of being such a monumental individual upon which eternal destiny hinges? Can he be the one who bears this aroma of life unto life and death unto death? Can he or anyone else? The false apostles are saying he does not have the ability, the capability, the competency, the sufficiency, he is not adequate to that.

Now, the beloved Apostle is somewhat on the horns of the dilemma as he defends himself. And the reason is because he is very sensitive to the fact that no matter what he says in self-defense, they're going to try to take it as some kind of act of pride and egotism and self-commendation and twist it around into another accusation against him. He does not want to give them any opportunity to think of him as proud and self-commending. He doesn't want them for a moment to be able to accuse him of a self-serving kind of defense which is meant to boost up his own prestige. He doesn't want to leave the wrong impression on the Corinthians and he doesn't want to give any room for accusation to the false apostles, yet it is crucial that he defend himself because he is the agency by which God brings the truth to them. And if they won't listen to him, they'll not hear the truth.

Since he is Christ's Apostle, it is crucial that he affirm his integrity and his authority for their sake and the sake of others as well, even beyond the Corinthian congregation. So it is a delicate line that he must balance in order not to provide more fuel for their fires against him.

In verses 1 to 6 then he talks about how it is that he has been made a competent minister. And in so doing he reveals five characteristics of ministerial confidence. Here is a profile for your next pastor. Here is the profile for any pastor to be selected by any congregation for a place of preaching.

First of all, a competent preacher for Jesus Christ has established a reputation for godliness, has established an impeccable reputation. That is to say he is not dependent on the testimonies of others. He is not dependent on the tributes of others. He is not dependent on secondhand affirmation, but rather the virtue of his life is well known. It is common knowledge that he is a holy and a godly man. He does not have to be accepted on secondhand testimony.

Notice verse 1, and Paul asks two questions that demand a "no" answer, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?"

Now keep in mind there's a delicacy with which Paul has to deal in this self-defense. He does not want to give any cause for the false apostles to accuse him of pride. Yet it is crucial that the Corinthians understand the truth. So he wants to affirm himself but he wants to do it in a gentle way, and thus he doesn't propound anything, he doesn't say anything overtly, he asks two questions. It's a relatively gentle or meek way to get into the issue.

On the one hand, you see, it is important to remind the Corinthians that he is the Apostle of Jesus Christ and he has all the rights and privileges thereof and as the Apostle of Christ he speaks divine truth and they must continue to acknowledge that what he says is truth and it must be obeyed. While on the other hand, he knows that such a defense of his office and work will offer those lying teachers another opportunity to hurt him. And so delicately he defends himself with humility, and he does it by these two questions.

Question number one, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?" Can it be that I'm going back to square one with you? Can it be that I've got to go all the way the back to the beginning and prove myself to you again? The "we" here is an editorial "we" a humbler way to speak than if in the first person. Now he referred so much to his apostleship in the first letter because he was really wielding the sword of authority. He lays it heavy on them in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, chapter 11, chapter 14, chapter 15 and it is alluded to elsewhere. And it may well have been that because he wielded a heavy hand of his apostolic authority there and even in chapter 2 identifies himself not as a huckster of the Word of God in verse 17, but as one from God speaking in Christ in the sight of God. He's a little sensitive at this point to the fact that maybe they're--they're thinking that he's heavy-handed, and maybe they've accused him already of being self-commending, self-exalting. He doesn't want that.

In chapter 5 and verse 12 he says we are not again commending ourselves to you. In chapter 10 verse 18, "Not he who commends himself is approved but whom the Lord commends." So he makes these disclaimers that he's really not commending himself, that's not what he's trying to do. He's simply trying to point to truth. His honest...his honest regard of himself does show up in 1 Corinthians 4:4 where he says, "Even when I know nothing against myself herein am I not justified?" And then verse 5 says, "I have to wait for God to give the verdict on my life."

So he's not just defending himself as some perfect man. He's not just commending himself for his own gain. But he's just asking a question that's going to force them to think and the question is this, "You mean to tell me you don't know enough about me after all this time so that I have to go back and start all over again to prove to you the kind of man I am?"

People are so fickle. It's amazing how they'll believe lies about somebody they know well enough not to really need to be deceived. You see, the false teachers were telling the Corinthians that there was a hidden part of Paul, a dark side, a sinful side, a wicked side, that he had a life of dirty thoughts, an

evil mind. And there was a secret side to him and they didn't know about it. They were doing everything they could to destroy his credibility. And all he says is, "You mean you don't know enough about me to know that isn't true?" The frustration of his heart comes through in this question. All the years, all the conversations, all the teaching, all the preaching, all the fellowship, all the prayers, all the love, all the tears, all of all of that doesn't mean anything? And now we're all the way back to the beginning? The word "command," by the way, sunistano(?) in the Greek means to introduce. You mean, I've got to go all the way back and we've got to start this deal all over with another introduction? Do I have to reintroduce myself?

No, the question is in a form that demands a "no" answer, you know better than that. You know me, you know my life, you know my character, you know my godliness. You know what I'm like from the inside out. We don't need to get acquainted all over again, do we? And what he is affirming here in this very gracious and humble way is his virtue. He is saying my virtue is legendary among you. It is well known to you. Yes I have a clear conscience, chapter 1 verse 12, my conscience is affirming to me my godliness and my holiness, but you also know my life, you know me. We don't have to go back to the beginning, do we? What I am is common knowledge to you.

Then comes a second disarming question demanding a no answer, "Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" Not only were the false teachers trying to convince the Corinthians that Paul had some hidden dark side, some wicked corrupt part of his life that they weren't aware of, but they also said this, he doesn't have proper letters of commendation. He doesn't have the appropriate documents. Now letters of commendation were a part of ancient times. You even see one in the Bible back in Nehemiah chapter 2 and verse 7, we see them in the New Testament, the book of Acts, for example, in Acts chapter 9, Paul went to the high priest to get some letters of commendation that he could take to Damascus so that they would accept him there as someone sent by the Jewish authorities to take prisoners from the Christians. And there were times in the early church when letters of commendation were written to introduce people to new groups who didn't know them. For example, Paul himself wrote a commendating...commending letter of Phoebe in Romans chapter 16 who was a deacon at the church at Cenchrea wanting her to be identified to the Roman Christians. Letters of commendation have been a part of life, they're still a part of life. Whenever you go to get a job or you go somewhere for an interview, or you want to be introduced to somebody who is important to you, you might take along a testimonial, a tribute, a letter of commendation that could gain you entrance. Certainly the Apostle Paul is not against those.

In chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians he even refers to such letters commending certain believers. You find it in verse 3, verse 10, verse 11. That's what's behind this. When these false teachers showed up in Corinth they had letters. I mean, the truth was they were teaching the lies but they had some pretty impressive documentation, they had some pretty impressive credentials. Paul didn't have any. When they arrived at Corinth, they sort of pulled out of their satchel their letters of reference. It is that to which Paul refers with that little phrase "as some," see it there in verse 1? Do we, do I need as some

letters of commendation to you or from you?

Undoubtedly these false teachers came in, these intruders and they got their entrance into the church because of these impressive documents. Probably they came from Jerusalem. And these false teachers may even have been associated with the Jerusalem church because there was in the Jerusalem church in the sect of Pharisees who were holding on to Mosaic law in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. You remember when they met there, it says in verse 5, "Certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed," that is they affirmed they believed in Christ, they identified with the church. "They stood up and they said it is necessary to circumcise them...that is all Gentiles...and direct them to observe the laws of Moses."

It says there in verse 1, they had letters of commendation to you, to the Corinthians. They knew where they were going and they had this thing set up. Notice the last little phrase, "Or from you." Now here's how they plied their trade. They didn't stay too long because their lives were corrupt, they were not genuinely regenerate. These false apostles, they were just that, false. And they couldn't stay too long or the character of their life would manifest itself, but they stayed long enough to confuse and tear up the church and long enough to get some more letters of commendation from the Corinthians, that's what "from you" means. They sought commending letters from those in the Corinthian church that they had deceived that they could add to the letters from Jerusalem, and as they kept moving it just gave them clout everywhere they went because they kept demonstrating their commendation from others. Their whole operation was dependent on that since their lives were corrupt and they couldn't be verified as authentic by their personal virtue.

Paul is saying, "Am I in that same boat? Do I need that? You don't know enough about me that I've got to start all over again, reintroduce myself to you and show up with a bunch of letters about secondhand testimony? You don't have enough firsthand testimony? Ludicrous, ridiculous." His virtue is godly, holy, sincere. Life was sufficient to commend him to them. Were they saying that all nearly two years of ministry in your midst day in and day out was worthless? It didn't amount to anything? Didn't tell you anything about me? Do I have to go back to the beginning? How foolish can you be? How deceived?

They were doubting what they knew was true concerning the great Apostle. Let me tell you something, when you look for a man to be your pastor, when you look for a man who can carry the fragrance of Christ, the aroma of the knowledge of Christ and spread it in every place as a savor of life unto life and death unto death, when you look for one who stands to preach the gospel of Christ who is the instrument and the agency of God to manifest the knowledge of Christ in every place, look for a man who doesn't need letters of recommendation. Look for a man who doesn't need somebody else to sell him. Find a man whose integrity and spirituality is firsthand common knowledge cause that's the kind of man who is a confident minister. He doesn't need to depend on written letters, everybody knows the character of his life. Find a man whose virtue is widely known, whose godliness

is a byword, almost synonymous with his own name. The confident minister doesn't depend on written letters. The competent minister has a reputation for holiness, an impeccable reputation. Isn't that what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said to Timothy his life should be blameless and above reproach? And it should be known as such.

When you call another pastor, don't be looking and trying to dig deeply into some group of people or search some wide frontier to find out if a man is godly. If he isn't synonymous with virtue, don't consider him.

Secondly, a confident minister not only has a reputation for godliness but has been used in a transforming ministry...a competent minister has been used in a transforming ministry. Paul's authenticity was not only evident from his own life but it was evident from the lives of the Corinthians.

Verse 2, you want a letter, he says, I'll give you a letter, "You are a letter written in our hearts, known and read by all men." These false apostles showed up, the Corinthians naturally said...Well who are you? Where you from?

We're from Jerusalem, we have letters. Into the satchel they go, out comes the letter. The letter is shown around. Literacy would be high in ancient times, not all could read it. Some could. They would be reading the testimony of others about these individuals written with ink on a piece of parchment, read by a few who would then spread the word. Paul says I have a better letter, you're the letter. The only testimonial I need outside the evident virtue of my own life is the fact that you're saved and sanctified, is the fact that God has stepped into the Corinthian city which is synonymous with debauchery and wickedness. "To Corinthianize" meant to go to bed with a prostitute in the Greek language. It was synonymous with wickedness.

And by using me as His instrument has carved out a church to His glory and His praise. You're my most eloquent letter. There isn't anything secondhand that could be written with ink on a piece of parchment that could compare with you. You're my most eloquent testimonial. And to bring some letter from somebody somewhere would be superfluous, would be absolutely useless since you are living proof of my instrumentality. And by the way, this letter wasn't stuffed in his satchel, it was everywhere to be seen. It wasn't limited only to those who could read, it was not limited to them at all. It could be read by anybody. In fact, he says in verse 1 it is known and read by all men, everybody who ever met one of those believers at Corinth could see and hear and understand the transformation. He didn't have a letter that was stuck in his luggage. He didn't have a letter that was folded up and pushed down into his pocket. In fact, he had a letter that was written in his heart. He said, "You're our letter," again that editorial plural pronoun, "written in our hearts."

I carry this letter with me but it isn't in my pocket and it's not in my luggage, it's in my heart. What does that mean? Well it's close, it's precious, it's beloved. He's saying I know you, I'm concerned

about you. I'm aware of you. I hold you in my heart, you're there all the time. That's where the letter is. What a tremendous affirmation of his affection for them which obviously they were questioning.

In 2 Corinthians 7:3 he says, "I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." Yes, he said, I have a letter, it's a living letter. It's you, it's not in my satchel, it's in my heart. And it's not something that can only be read by a few, and it's not just something on a page, it's living and it can be known and it can be read by everybody, not like a scroll stuffed in a bag.

Verse 3, "It is being manifested," literally, being continually made conspicuous. It's everywhere visible, constantly being manifest. You expect me to reach down in my bag and pull out some folded dusty piece of parchment to prove the point that God works through me? Wait a minute, you are a letter, you are a letter written in my heart that is continually being made conspicuous by everybody to everybody.

Further, it is a letter of Christ. Can you top that? Do the false apostles have a letter of recommendation signed "Jesus Christ"? I don't think so. This letter is Christ's letter. It's not from an earthly person, however respected and however esteemed. This is from the Lord Himself, the author of this letter is Jesus Christ and so my letter is this, it's you, it's everywhere manifest and it was written by Christ cause it's Christ alone who saves, Christ alone who sanctifies, only by His Word through a loyal faithful preacher such as I am.

And that's why he adds this little phrase, translated in the NAS "Cared for by us," it's diakoneo, literally means ministered by us, delivered by us, or even inscribed by us. Christ wrote the letter, Paul put it down and delivered it. What a tremendous thought.

What more letter do you want? That's all you need. Can you imagine anybody demanding out of the Apostle Paul after the tremendous work that God had done through him in the city of Corinth that if he was going to come and preach in their church they would need some letters of recommendation? How ridiculous.

There was a letter, a living letter in transformed lives, inscribed by the Apostle but authored by Christ. That's the only letter he needed. And he adds, "Written not with ink." Ink fades, ink is silent, ink is dead, it just sits there on a page fading. Words written in ink are silent. Anyone can write a letter with ink. Only Christ can write a letter, look at verse 3, with the Holy Spirit. He calls Him, "The Spirit of the living God." Paul says my letter isn't written with ink on a piece of parchment, it isn't silent, it isn't just a piece of dead parchment with ink on it, my letter is alive, it's alive in you by the Spirit of the Living God. My letter was written not with ink but with divine supernatural power by the Holy Spirit. And there is unarguable proof of my authenticity in that living letter.

Boy, it's just a tremendous testimony. It's very much like he said to the Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 5 of the first letter, "Our gospel didn't come to you in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit." And back in 1 Corinthians he said the same thing, basically, chapter 2 verses 4 and 5, "My message, my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." I came to you, I didn't preach with human wisdom, I didn't give you clever speech, I came in, I proclaimed the Word of God, the Spirit of God moved, you were transformed, you were saved, you were sanctified, all of that transformation is the work of the Spirit of God, it has produced a living letter that cannot be silenced. It can be known and read by all men. That's my letter, it's in my heart, it's penned by Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit. I'm the guy who wrote it down and delivered it, what more commendation is necessary?

And this thought leads him to another thought, another contrast. He says in verse 3, "Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts." Boy, this is a direct shot at these hucksters, these hawkers, these who are preaching a mixed gospel, who had taken Christianity and diluted it with Judaism, circumcision, Mosaic ceremony, who are trying to hold up the law. Notice the phrase "on tablets of stone." What was written on tablets of stone? Ten Commandments. Back in Exodus chapter 31 we remember well the account of God on Mount Sinai, it says in verse 18, "And when He had finished speaking with him on Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written by the finger of God. And in chapter 32 verses 15 and 16, it says those tablets of testimony were written on both sides, written on one side and the other, and the tablets were God's work and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. That was the Ten Commandments, the Law.

But what had happened in Corinth what was not God writing on stone but was God writing on human hearts. So different...so different. The Decalogue written by God was divine, but it couldn't be compared to writing the divine truth on the heart. The miracle of Sinai cannot match the miracle of salvation. To write something on stone is external, to write it on the heart is internal. And God in the case of Corinth wrote His law on the heart. Would you notice this? It's the same law. God hasn't changed His law, it's the same law. He just wrote it on the heart.

People say, "Well, if we're in the New Testament era and we're in the New Covenant dispensation, and we're under grace, are we still bound by the law?" Yes, yes, more than ever because now the New Covenant doesn't mean we don't have to keep the law, it means we can keep it. It's the same law. It's the same standard of morality. At Sinai the law was written by the finger of God on tables of stone, it was external, it was outside man, it confronted his inability to satisfy the just requirements of a holy God and it damned him, condemned him. But then when the law is written on the human heart, it transforms him. Same law. And, in fact, the prophet said there would come a time when God would write His law on the heart. Back in Jeremiah, one of the most wonderful promises in all of

God's Word, Jeremiah 31:33, "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it and I will be their God and they shall be My people." Chapter 32 verse 38, "They shall be My people, I will be their God, I'll give them one heart and one way." And then Ezekiel the prophet twice refers to that same New Covenant promise when the law will be written in the heart, I "Shall give them one heart...chapter 11 verse 19...shall put a new Spirit within them, I'll take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh in order that they may walk in My statutes, keep My ordinances and do them, then they will be My people and I shall be their God."

Chapter 36 and verses 26 and 27, "I will give you a new heart, I will put a new Spirit in you, I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I'll put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, you'll be clever to observe My ordinances."

All of that is about what God's going to do in you, in you, in you, in you, in you. At Sinai God wrote on stone. In salvation He writes in the heart. The prophets spoke of another law to be written internally, and yet it's not another law, it's the same law, the same law. Only now it's inside. The false apostles, you see, were hanging on the tablets of stone. They were advocating salvation by works, external rites like circumcision and ceremonies from the Old Testament. Not Paul. Just what he said to the Galatians applies here, having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect in the flesh? If you go back to law, you nullify grace, he says. God promised through the prophets that there would be a day when His truth would be written on the heart and that day came. And the transformed Corinthians were proof of that fulfillment and thus they were proof that Paul had preached the true message and therefore was an authentic Apostle.

So, you see, Paul's commendation was written in the lives of the Corinthians on their hearts by the Spirit of God, long before the false teachers ever showed up. And His was indelible, permanent, widely read and divinely authored letter.

Now a note, the message written on the heart does not nullify the message written in stone, it fulfills it. You understand that? In fact, the very same law written in the heart was written on the stone. Let me tell you what I mean. You could take all the righteousness expressed by the revelation of God, everything he ever said about righteousness and boil it down to Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments fall into two parts. The first half deal with a man's relationship to God. The second half, his relationship to his fellow man. That sums it all up.

The whole of the Law of God from beginning to end in His revealed Word can be reduced to those Ten Commandments and they have two sections. A man's attitude toward God and toward his fellow man, those are the only two categories in which you can sin and the Ten Commandments cover the bases of both of those.

Let me take it a step further. Those Ten Commandments with their two categories can be reduced to two statements. Statement number one, recorded in, for example, Mark 12:28, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength." That sums up the first five. And second one, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Paul says in Romans 13:8 to 10, that love becomes the fulfilling of the whole law.

So you can take all the law of God, all the moral law of God, all the commandments that He ever gave, boil them down in summary fashion to Ten Commandments, boil those ten into two commandments, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, means you'll never do anything to offend Him. Loving your neighbor as yourself, means you'll never do anything to offend them, and that's the sum of the whole law. And if you love like that toward God, toward man, you fulfill the whole law.

And that's what happens when you're saved. The Spirit of God comes in, writes that law on your heart. It's not something external anymore that you can't do, it's something internal that flows out of your new nature and you can do it. That's why Romans 8:4 says, "Now you can fulfill the law." It's the same law. There's no war between the law on stone and the law on the heart. There's no war, or battle between law and gospel, between Old Covenant and New Covenant. We're going to say more about this as we go through this text.

So, Paul is saying...Look, you've already had the law written on your hearts, why do you want to go back to something external? I don't need any letter of recommendation, you're my letter. You're the only letter I need and it's not stuffed in a suitcase, it's in my heart all the time. It's not something that only a few can read now and then, it's known and read by everybody who sees you and knows you and is continually being made conspicuous that you are a letter from Christ, simply delivered by me, a letter not written with ink but written with the Spirit of God and not punched into stone, but on the heart.

So, Paul affirms his competency on the basis of his personal reputation for godliness and his usefulness to God in the transforming of the Corinthians into people with God's truth inscribed on their hearts. When you look for a pastor, look for somebody who's left a trail of living letters. You don't want something written with ink. You want a man who has had a transforming effect on the lives of others, somebody who has left a trail of changed lives, somebody who has impacted souls for the kingdom. Who is competent to carry the censer and make the knowledge of Christ manifest in every place? Let the fragrance and the aroma go that is life unto life and death unto death, who is competent? One that God makes competent. How does God make them competent? First of all, in the virtue of their life and secondly, in the impact of their ministry. That's where you look.

You don't need secondhand information, you shouldn't have to have it. It should be enough that you know their character and that they have a living letter that will attest to the power of their ministry. There's three more but we'll have to wait for those.

Father, this is such a rich reminder, what a great text. We know what it is that You bless and when a man is made an able minister, he's going to be a man of godliness, he's going to be a man who has been used to transformed lives. We thank You that that's where Paul stood. He didn't depend on somebody else to make a pitch for him, somebody to sell him. He didn't need somebody to convince people secondhandedly. His life and his ministry left ample evidence of the kind of minister that he was. Lord, we could only pray that you would continue to raise up such men, such noble servants who need no written commendation, who don't need to go back to square one and explain themselves. Raise up men whose lives, whose virtue, whose impact is known. And, Lord, when the detractors come and the assaults, and the attacks, may the church not defect and be deceived, when the false accusations come against your noble servants, may people not believe the lies. It's so sad that Paul had to spend so much energy trying to defend himself for your sake against all of this. But it seems to be the lot of the most faithful servants to have to do that. We pray, Lord, that You'll cause Your church to know who the faithful men are and not believe the detractors. Raise up many competent ministers, preserve their reputation that they who are most faithful to Your truth may be most widely trusted and heard so that Your church may grow.

Thank You, Father, for the standard that You set, for the glory of Your kingdom. We pray in the name of our Savior. Amen.

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