

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

A Ministry of Integrity, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:11

Code: 47-34

Well, this morning it is our privilege again to open God's Word and to hear Him speak to us through the inspired pages of the Scripture to know that every word of God is pure, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It causes us to rejoice as we have this great privilege.

Let's turn in our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. And we're going to be looking at a section of Scripture that begins in verse 11 and runs down through verse 15. I've entitled the section, "A Ministry of Integrity."

Now the dictionary says that integrity is the quality of being undivided...the quality of being undivided. Or to put it another way, it is the quality of being true to one's ethical standards. Its synonyms are honesty, sincerity, incorruptibility. It refers to or describes a person who is without any hypocrisy, without any duplicity, someone who is completely in every aspect of life consistent with his or her stated convictions. Really, it is the opposite of a hypocrite. A person who lacks integrity, a person who says one thing and does another is called a hypocrite.

Now if there is any place in the world where integrity is absolutely crucial it is in the church, it is in the ministry, in the life of the pastor, the servant of God, the evangelist, the spiritual leader because he must maintain integrity in order to have credibility to set the example for all to follow. And yet there are many in spiritual leadership, and there always have been, who lack integrity. And frankly, a lack of integrity in the life of a minister is a very, very serious iniquity.

Jesus addressed it back in Matthew chapter 23 in what is really a blistering malediction against the scribes and the Pharisees. And what He basically does is reveal their hypocrisy. He describes them as leaders with no integrity. In fact, at the end of verse 3 in Matthew 23 He says of the scribes and Pharisees, "They say things and do not do them...They say things and do not do them." That is a lack of integrity. That is being divided, having one set of ethics by which you live and another by which you speak. In fact, their hypocrisy is abundantly manifest because in continuing this diatribe against them in verse 13 Jesus says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." In verse 14, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees...verse 15...hypocrites." He says the same thing again in verse 23, the same thing yet again in verse 27, the same thing yet again in verse 29 and finally in verse 33 He says, "You serpents, you brood of snakes, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?" Really an amazing rebuke of people in spiritual

leadership who lack integrity. And there you find God cursing people in spiritual leadership who do not have integrity, who do not live the truth that they proclaim.

Looking at another Scripture, turn in your Old Testament to 1 Kings chapter 9 and I want to get you clearly fixed on the significance of this matter of integrity, and this is a good illustration of it. Here we find not God condemning a hypocrite, but God promising blessing to a man of integrity, just the opposite. It is at the time when Solomon finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, the palace and all that he had desired to do. And then in verse 2 of 1 Kings 9 the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as He appeared to him at Gibeon, and the Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before Me, I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually but as for you...and here comes the promise...if you will walk before Me as your father David walked in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David saying you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel."

And so, God says if you will maintain a life of integrity, I will bless you. On the other hand, if you're in spiritual leadership and you do not and are a hypocrite, I will pronounce a curse on you. It is of grave consequence to be a hypocrite, it is of serious judgment promised to such.

Now Scripture tells us a little more about integrity by giving us a great model of integrity in the man Job. Turn in your Bible just prior to the book of Psalms to the book of Job and I want to show you a little bit about the godliest man on the earth at that time...the godliest man on the earth. In fact, in Job 1:1 it says, "There was in the land of Uz a man whose name was Job and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." He was a noble and godly man. And, of course, Satan came to God and Satan had this agenda, Satan wanted to show that he could destroy the faith of a man. And so God said you have My permission, you can attack Job and you will see the continuity and the strength of true saving faith. You can go after Job and you'll fail no matter what you do to him, and you know the story. Satan went after Job and brought devastation and destruction into his life. His animals were killed. His family was killed. Horrible things happened. And he lost everything.

Now you come down to chapter 2 verse 1, "There was a day again when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord." Satan has access to heaven. "And the Lord said to Satan, Where have you come from? Satan answered the Lord and said, From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." Why was he doing that? Satan roams about seeking whom he may...what?...devour. That's what he was doing. He's looking for people to destroy. "And the Lord said to Satan, `Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God

and turning away from evil." Very same thing that was said in verse 1 of chapter 1. Now listen to the next line. "And he still, even after all that you've done to him, holds fast his...what?...integrity. Although you incited me against him to ruin him without cause." Unbelievable horrors came into that man's life and he never let go of his integrity...never.

Down to verse 9, "Even his wife said to him, `Do you still hold fast your integrity? I can't believe it, curse God and die.'" Everybody was trying to attack his integrity, even his own wife. He would not budge.

Over in chapter 27 of Job we find the words of Job himself, "Then Job continued his discourse and said...verse 2...`As God lives who has taken away my right and the almighty who has embittered my soul, for as long as life is in me and the breath of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak unjustly, nor will my tongue mutter deceit, far be it from me that I should declare you right, till I die I will not put away my integrity from me."

He would not agree with his carping critics who wanted to have him do what his wife said, curse God. He would not listen to the bitterness in his own soul at the death of his family and a loss of all that he possessed. He would not cry out against God when had allowed him to be struck with boils all over his body and horrible pain. It says it all. "I will not put away my integrity from me till I die." A man of integrity. He lived what he believed.

Now Solomon, whom I mentioned earlier in connection with 1 Kings 9, certainly had a good example of integrity in his father David. David's life didn't start out that way but after all kinds of lessons by God's chastening, David eventually became a man of great integrity. And we read about the integrity of David in the Psalms. In fact, in Psalm 25 and verse 21, and again in Psalm 26 and verse 1, David affirms his integrity that he has walked in integrity, he says. And over in Psalm 41:12 he says, "As for me, Thou dost uphold me in my integrity." By the grace of God and by the strength of God he had maintained a life of integrity.

But the most important thing David says about his integrity is found in Psalm 78, a very, very important portion of Scripture. Psalm 78 is very long, it has 72 verses, so go to the very end of it. Psalm 78 and verse 70, he talks about the Lord and it says He also chose David His servant. The Lord chose David and took him from the sheepfolds. He was, of course, a shepherd. Took him from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs to shepherd Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance. So God chose David to shepherd, picked him up out of his shepherding and his time with the ewes and their suckling lambs and caring for the flock and He brought him over to shepherd Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance.

Then verse 72, the single greatest commentary on the life of any spiritual leader. This is a monumental statement. "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart and guided

them with his skillful hand." What a great statement on leadership. He shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart and guided them with his skillful hands. Skill and integrity. Shepherding God's people of all possible duties certainly requires integrity. To preach the truth demands that one live the truth. To call other people to follow the truth demands that one obey the truth. And that alone makes a ministry what it ought to be. That makes it God-honoring, Christ-exalting and Holy Spirit-empowered. Even God said in Psalm 101:6, even God said, "He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to Me." God expects to be ministered to by a man of integrity. The people of God expect to be ministered to by men of integrity. The church has every right to expect to be ministered to by men who live what they preach. Integrity in spiritual leaders, pastors, preachers, evangelists is the crucial thing. And a man without it is a hypocrite. He is a tomb painted white. And he is, in effect, living a standard that is beneath the standard of God while calling men to the divine standard. What hypocrisy.

So, for the man who serves the Lord a reputation of integrity, honesty, sincerity is absolutely crucial so that he can rightly represent the Lord and the truth. Therefore Paul says, "If anybody is going to be an elder he has to be blameless and absolutely above reproach." If he is not, the structure of his life no matter what it might look like is rotten at the foundation and the collapse will come at the least shaking.

Now, all of that to say this. Back to our text. If the false teachers who had come to the city of Corinth were going to get a hearing for their false gospel, if they were going to be able to tear that Corinthian church away from the truth and get it to listen to error, if they were going to get rich on the Corinthians. If they were going to gain their money, if they were going to gain sinful favors from them, if they were going to get power and prestige and prominence, if they were going to satisfy their egos, if they were going to propagate their lives effectively they had to do one thing and that was they had to destroy the integrity of Paul. They had to get the people to lose confidence in him because he was their teacher and they wanted to teach other than what he had taught them. They were bringing in error, they were bringing in teaching that was not true, that was contrary to what Paul taught. And in order to be heard they had to do away with Paul. And the way to do that, short of murder or even more effectively than murder, was to destroy his integrity.

So it began, a wholesale, full-blown, massive assault on the integrity of the Apostle Paul was orchestrated by these false teachers who had come to Corinth. Their leader is probably identified in chapter 12 as the messenger from Satan. Some demon-possessed guy who was leading the false teachers and they were so effective that they had convinced many of the people in the Corinthian congregation that Paul was not a man of honesty, sincerity, genuineness and integrity. And once they had destroyed Paul's integrity, they could then replace him as the teachers. Dethroning Paul was the issue and doing that by the destruction of his integrity was the most efficient means.

On the other hand, as soon as Paul's integrity was gone, so was his usefulness. As soon as his usefulness was gone, so was his fruitfulness. As soon as his fruitfulness was gone, so was his ability to serve his Lord. And so it was very, very important to Paul to maintain his integrity. Not for his sake, but for God's sake and the sake of the church and the sake of the witness of the church to the lost, for everybody but his sake. He himself says in this letter later on, "I am a nobody." We've already heard him say he is nothing but a clay pot. But at the same time that that is true and he is not seeking some self-glory, he desperately wants them to trust his integrity for the sake of the truth and the God of truth.

So it is essential to Paul that his people trust him as a man of integrity. A man who was in his conduct, who did in his actions what was absolutely consistent with what he said. If his people for a moment were convinced he was a hypocrite, everything is lost. They don't trust him. Then they don't believe him. And then they don't follow him.

Now that is exactly then what the Corinthian false teachers were trying to attack. And, you know, this is something that all of us in the ministry are very aware of. If somebody wants to tear down a ministry, the place to start tearing is at the integrity of the individual. Now what that says is, of course, first of all, I want to make sure that my life has integrity, right, if I'm going to minister. So I want to make sure that wherever I am, wherever I go, whatever I do my life is absolutely consistent so that there is no real breach of integrity. But at the same time, we're also who are in the ministry very aware that someone can assault your integrity without any grounds, without any substance, without any basis with false accusations, which is exactly what they were doing with Paul. And how do you hedge against that? All you can do is pray, all you can do is pray and ask God to protect you. And you hear the psalmist doing it over and over, don't you, praying that his enemies not destroy him, but that God destroy his enemies.

They came after Paul and they came after his integrity. First of all, they said he was...he was operating in the power of his flesh. They said he was...he was coming with fleshly wisdom and he has to deny that. Back in chapter 1 verse 12 he says, "We didn't come in fleshly wisdom, we came in the grace of God." And then they said that he had a secret agenda and that underneath what he said was a hidden agenda, he was after their money, he was after sexual favors, he was really after...after their accolades, he had a whole other agenda that was hidden. And so he responds in chapter 1 verse 13 by saying, "We write nothing else to you then what you read and understand." There's no hidden agenda. What I wrote is what I wrote and that's all there is, there's nothing more. There is no hidden agenda. There is no secret motivation here. What I wrote is what I meant and nothing else.

And then they said he can't keep his...he can't keep his word. He's double-tongued. He says one thing and then he says the opposite. You can't trust the man. He's a liar. He's an outright liar. And he has to answer that. But he says to them, "Look...down in verse 17...I was not vacillating when I intended to do this was I?" In other words, I wanted to come...remember he said, "I want to come to

you...I want to come to you on the way and stop by as I go to Macedonia, then when I come back I want to stop again. And I wanted to come, I really wanted to come. The fact that I didn't come, does that mean I'm vacillating and double-tongued? Does that mean...as verse 17 says...that I say yes, yes and no, no at the same time?" But, as verse 18, "As God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no." Then in verse 19 he says, "It's not yes and no but yes in Him." I'm not double-tongued, I'm not a liar. I speak the truth. Look, I wanted to come but I didn't come and I didn't come because...he says down in verse 1 of chapter 2...I just didn't want to come to you in sorrow again. There's so much trouble there, I didn't want to bring you more sorrow. I just didn't have the heart to bring you more pain. Back in verse 23 of chapter 1 he says, "To spare you I came no more to Corinth." I just didn't want to lord it over your faith. I didn't want to have to hammer on you again. It's not that I'm a liar.

Then they accused him of being corrupt. They said that...they said, "Ah, the man is...he's got a secret life of wickedness, vicious vice in his life. Not only that, he's a deceiver, he's a rank manipulator, he's a perverter of Scripture," they said. And he answers all of that in chapter 4 verse 2, He says, "We have renounced those things that are hidden because of shame." We don't have some hidden life of shame, we've renounced craftiness and deception. We do not adulterate the Word of God. And he has to defend himself against those assaults on his integrity.

Then they accused him of seeking personal glory, of wanting to build himself up and lift himself up and he says in verse 5 of chapter 4, "We don't preach ourselves." And then down in verse 7 he says, "We're just a clay pot, an earthen vessel and nothing more. And we're...you think this is for our glory? We're afflicted and we're perplexed and we're persecuted and we're struck down and we're always dying and death works in us." And all of this he says in verse 15 if for your sake. I'm not in it for my sake.

And then they said, you know, he doesn't even deserve to be listed among the apostles. He doesn't even deserve to be in the same breath mentioned with the apostles. He's so inferior, he's so much a fraud, he's so much a charlatan. And he had to answer that and he does in chapter 11 verse 5. He says, "I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles." He says, "I rank right there with the most eminent apostles." In chapter 12 verse 11 he says, "I am not inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody because the signs of an apostle were wrought in me."

So they were coming at him trying to attack everything. His...they attacked his ministry saying it was in fleshly power. They attacked his own personal life saying he had some secret hidden agenda. They attacked him as a liar. They said he was corrupt and he had a personal life of sin that was hidden under the surface. And he was a deceiver and a perverter of Scripture. They said he was seeking personal glory. And they said he didn't even deserve to be in the same breath spoken of with an apostle. And he has to defend himself all those assaults on his integrity. It's hard to do that because you don't want to defend yourself for your own sake because you are a nobody, you are a clay pot. You're the chief of sinners. You're less than anything. And he...and yet he has to defend

himself, not for his own sake but for the sake of his usefulness. You understand that? Because usefulness means fruitfulness and fruitfulness means glory to God. That's why he says in chapter 6 verse 11, "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide." Look, I haven't hidden anything. There's nothing hiding. And in chapter 7 verse 2, "Make room for us in your hearts, we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one."

And you can see this whole epistle, as I've said to you before, is a pleading for Paul to be accepted as a man of integrity. All through this epistle he has to humbly defend the assaults on his integrity, intended to destroy his credibility, dethrone him so the false teachers can replace him and teach their lying heresies.

False teachers still do that. They'll find anybody who teaches the truth and assault and attack and attack and attack and attack and try to destroy the credibility of those who teach the truth. You see, the great apostle knows that essential to his ministry is his integrity. And that has to be preserved at all costs. He wants a ministry of integrity.

Now all of that to bring us to our text which is about a ministry of integrity. And in these verses which are before us, verses 11 to 15, he gives the motives behind his defense of his integrity. He will defend his integrity and here is why he will defend his integrity in these verses. Let's see what he says.

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men that we are made manifest to God and I hope that we are manifest also in your consciences. We're not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves it is for God. If we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us having concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died. And He died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Now at first reading that seems like he's jumping from one thing to another. The sum of all of that are five reasons why he defends his integrity...five reasons why he defends his integrity. And they are absolutely crucial reasons.

The key phrase here, and this is where we have to start, is in verse 11. It's a verb, as often in interpreting Scripture we find the main verb yields the key to the interpretation, so it is here. And the main verb is this little phrase "we persuade men." That unlocks the door to the purpose of this passage. We persuade men. Again, we is editorial, Paul uses we instead of I, though he's referring to himself, because we is a more humble way to refer to himself. He does it all through this epistle.

When he says "persuade men," he uses the verb peitho. Peitho is an interesting verb. It does mean to persuade. But it is translated in Galatians 1:10 in a very helpful way, under somewhat similar usage. In Galatians 1:10 Paul says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God?" And there the verb peitho is translated "seeking favor...seeking favor." And that is a good translation for it here. We are seeking your favor.

What do you mean? We're seeking that you would look on us as a man of integrity. I want you to render a favorable judgment on me. It is important to me that you trust me, that you believe in my sincerity and my devotion to God and my honesty and my genuineness.

Now in Galatians he would not seek the favor of men by compromising the gospel, but here he will seek their favor by speaking the truth about himself. Now "we persuade men" some commentators have felt refers to gospel preaching. And it is true that the verb "persuade" is so used. For example, in Acts 18 and verse 4 it is used in that very way. What it says is, "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." And over in the last chapter of Acts, verse 23, it says that he was trying to persuade them concerning Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets from morning till evening. There persuading in the sense of bringing them to salvation, making them believe the gospel, persuading them about the truth of the gospel. Here it is not the gospel that is at issue. This epistle is not evangelistic. He is not concerned to persuade men at Corinth about the gospel, he is concerned to persuade them about his integrity. That is the issue. He wants them to know that he is genuine.

The following phrases make this very clear. Go back to verse 11. He says, "We persuade men but we are made known to God," or made manifest to God. The point he's making here is simply this, God knows me, I am manifest to Him, He knows me, He knows my heart, He knows my integrity. That's the point. What I'm concerned about is that you know it as God knows it. We are revealed to God. Our true spiritual condition God knows and He knows perfectly. It's very clear to Him, Paul says, and I would like it to be clear to you. God, he says, knows me. We're made manifest to God. God knows my sincerity, He knows my honesty, He knows my genuineness. He knows whether I have integrity or not.

And although Paul has been so relentlessly and brutally maligned, misunderstood, defamed and misjudged, God knows his heart. He's like Job, he hasn't abandoned his integrity. He's taken all the fury, all the heat, all the persecution, all the punishment, all the pain, all the physical pain. He's taken it all, all the whips, all the rods, everything, all the hatred, all the venom, all the plots to take his life and he's never abandoned his integrity. And God knows it, he says. Beyond the court of his own conscience is the court of heaven. But the court of heaven has a way of working itself into his conscience and his conscience isn't accusing him. As he says in chapter 1 verse 12, he says, "My confidence is this, my conscience is clear." The court of heaven knows my integrity, I'd like you to know it. That was so important to Paul that he have a clear conscience. He says in Acts 23:1,

"Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." He was like Job. He would not abandon his integrity. In Acts 24:16, "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience, both before God and before men." God knows me and I want men to know me and I maintain a blameless conscience.

His prayer then is this, verse 11, "And I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences." Mine is clear. God knows the truth. I want you to know it. I hope we are made manifest also in your consciences. Are you listening to your conscience or are you listening to the critics? You know me, he says. You know my life. Eighteen months I was. We walked, we talked, we ate, we slept together, we worked together with our hands. We traveled together. We talked. Long into the night I taught you, my heart was wide open, you saw everything about my life. I was never alone. There it was. My sincerity was manifest. You saw my godly life. You saw the impeccability of my moral character. You had a firsthand experience and that experience should be enough to inform your conscience. Conscience only responds to what you know, right? Remember that? And he says you know enough that your conscience would understand. We should be manifest to your conscience. You should be saying, "Wait a minute, don't you be criticizing Paul, I know that man and my conscience tells me that man is a man of God."

I'll tell you, nothing is as heart breaking for a man of integrity as to have those people who know him best listen to the critics and agree with them. That is heart breaking. In all the years of ministry that I've experienced, that is the most heart breaking thing I have ever experienced. When those whose conscience has been well informed by what they know to be true about you, not listening to that conscience but listening to the critics. Paul says I want you to listen to your conscience, not the critics. And you know and you know deep down what God knows, that I am a man who serves God with a single-minded heart. Theologian Hodge writes, "There may be many reports against a good man which we cannot specifically contradict, many charges we cannot specifically refute, and yet the self-evidencing light of goodness will produce the conviction of his integrity in the consciences even of wicked men and much more in the hearts of the good," end quote.

That's what Paul wants. He just wants them to reach down and take a good look at what they already know about him, that he is a man with integrity. In fact, verse 12 he says, "We're not even again commending ourselves to you." I don't even want to do that, what good is it going to be for me to now tell you that you should see me as a man of integrity? There's nothing else I can say. I'm not going to commend myself to you again. I mean, I can't give you any more information than you already have. What good is it if I write a few things down here? You must know, you must be persuaded that I am a man of integrity. Why? So much is at stake...so much is at stake. And it's not personal.

There are five very critical reasons for defending his integrity against the vicious liars who were attacking him. Let me give you one of them this morning...the rest next time.

Reason number one that he defends his integrity to the Corinthians is reverence for the Lord...reverence for the Lord. Back to verse 11. "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men." Now there's the reason why he persuades men, because of the fear of the Lord.

Fear? What do you mean by fear? Well, the same thing that it was meant in Proverbs 9:10 when it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The same thing that it says about the early church in Acts 9:31. It says they were enjoying peace, being built up and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't mean being afraid of God because you couldn't be afraid of God and have comfort at the same time. The word "fear" means worship, reverence. That's what it means, as in 2 Corinthians 7:1 where he says, "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In other words, being...being committed to the glory of God, adoring God, reverencing God, worshiping God, extolling God, exalting God, admiring God, respecting God, holding God in awe to the degree that you pursue holiness and you pursue service. That's what he says. The reason I want to persuade you about my integrity is because my heart references God. And I don't want to bring any dishonor to His name, first of all.

You know, that's what's most grievous. Sometimes people will say, "Well what is the most difficult aspect of criticism, false accusation, criticism?" It's not the personal part, that you can take, that's with a grain of salt, that's nothing, what is most disconcerting is that somebody might think that you misrepresent God. That is deeply disturbing. And that is what deeply disturbed Paul that someone would come along and say, "This guy misrepresents the Almighty God. This guy lies in what he says about God. This guy is not from God.

And so, he would be thought then to be living a life that is the very opposite of what he lived for, and that was to honor God. It is very disturbing that someone would think you are not honoring God and exalting God and lifting Him up and reverencing Him and holding Him in awe because that's what's in your heart. It's not that he's afraid of God. It is that he references God and he knows that God is worthy of his best. God is worthy of holiness. God is worthy of his service. God is worthy of all of his efforts. God is worthy of his fruitfulness. And he doesn't want anything to hinder that. Knowing...he says...that's from oida, has a settled knowledge, he knows God and he adores God and he is in awe of God and he reverences God and he wants to live his life for God and he wants to bring honor and glory to God's name. And anybody who destroys his integrity causes him to be unable to do that cause he's thought of as one who dishonors God. And as I said, once he's thought of as someone who dishonors God, then he's useless and unfruitful.

He knew God. Oh he knew God, he knew the nature of God. He even says, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever, amen," 1 Timothy 1:17. He knew his God. He knew the attributes of his God. He knew what his God was like. He knew He was worthy of glory, worthy of honor, worthy of praise and most worthy of service. And he didn't want

anything to hurt that service. God was so glorious He deserved his service.

He was the opposite of an Old Testament prophet. Remember Jonah? What a fascinating guy. It says in Jonah chapter 1, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, `Arise, go to Ninevah the great city, cry against it for their wickedness has come up before Me.'" Jonah is an evangelist. And his job is to go places and preach about the true God and call people to repentance. And so God comes to him and says Ninevah's in bad shape. It's a wicked, wretched, vile pagan city. I want you to go there and preach.

Now you'd think that an evangelist would say...Hey, that's great, boy, if God's calling me, then God's going to open the door, we're going to have a great time, I'm going. Not Jonah. He went the other direction. He got on a boat and went west instead of east to Tarshish, trying to run, it says, from the presence of the Lord. And he got out there, and, you know, he got in a big storm and he got thrown in and this big fish swallowed him and floated around with him for three days and three nights and then vomited him up on the shore. And finally he wiped himself off and said, "I think I better go to Ninevah."

And he goes to Ninevah and he preaches at Ninevah. And when he preaches at Ninevah, the whole town, the whole city repents. The whole place repents. That's an evangelist's dream. And look at his response, chapter 4, "It greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry." He was really mad. You know why? He was a racist. He hated Gentiles. And the idea that Gentiles would get in on the covenant just was more than he could stomach. He couldn't stand the fact that Gentiles would horn in on his Jehovah.

And then he prays to the Lord, and listen to this prayer. "Please, Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country?" What is that? I knew you'd do this, didn't I tell You You'd do this? I knew it. That's exactly why I didn't go, I knew You would save those Gentiles. I knew it. It really ticks me off. I knew it.

Boy, is this screwy thinking or is this screwy thinking? So he said, "In order to stop that I went to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and one who relents concerning calamity." Boy, that is great theology. He knew his God. He knew God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness and who relents concerning calamity. He knew his God well, but somehow it got convoluted and instead of knowing your God and being anxious to serve Him, he knew his God so well he wanted to run from Him. What a perverted perspective.

But that wasn't Paul. Paul said I know You're a God of grace, a God of compassion, I know You're a God who relents concerning calamity or judgment, I know You're a God of forgiveness. I don't want to run, I want to go and I want to preach. I want to preach the God who is the Savior of all men,

especially those who believe. I want to preach the God who is a Savior who is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. God our Savior who will have all men to be saved. I know what kind of God You are and I want to go. That was His attitude. He was different than Jonah. Paul wanted to go.

And it was so important to him because he was such a true worshiper that he'd be able to worship God with a life of service. And now this attack on his integrity was threatening his ability to serve God, threatening his ability to teach and preach and be believable. I mean, his whole life I think is summed up, the goal of his whole life in Romans 12 where he says, "Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual act of worship." He gave everything to God as a spiritual act of worship. His fear of God, his awe of God, his reverence of God caused him to lift up his whole life and offer it to God. And for somebody to debilitate him from doing that, for somebody to steal his ministry, to steal his opportunity, to rob him of his service because his integrity was destroyed was not acceptable to him. He defended his integrity because of his reverence for the Lord. He wanted to serve Him as effectively as he could. He wanted nothing to undermine that service. And he knew some day he'd stand before the judgment seat, that's why "therefore" is there in verse 10, and he would stand before that judgment seat and he would be rewarded for that service that he rendered to his Lord.

If his reputation was ruined, so was his usefulness. If his usefulness was ruined, so was his opportunity. If his opportunity was ruined so was his fruitfulness. If his fruitfulness was ruined, he had no reason to live. He only wanted to honor God with a life of service. So, you see, he's defending himself, but not for his sake. For God's sake cause God is worthy of worship.

Well, four more reasons to come. Let's bow in prayer.

Time has gone so rapidly this morning, our Father, and yet we've been so deeply into the heart of Paul it seems like we've been sitting across a table and talking eye to eye with him. And You've been in the conversation, too. And we've sensed Your presence and Your truth. We thank You for a true worshiper like Paul, different than Jonah who knew exactly what You were like and because of that didn't want to serve You. Here was a man who knew exactly what You were like and because of that he did. And that was his spiritual act of worship and he didn't want anybody to hinder his worship, he didn't want anybody in the way of his praise. He didn't want anybody hindering his adoration, his exaltation, his respect, his awe for You. Now there's a reason to keep your integrity. And we grieve, Lord, about those people who have been in spiritual leadership and have sinned and have lost their integrity and when their integrity was lost, Your honor was lost and they have dishonored You and they have not adorned the doctrine of God, but they've smudged it and smeared it with their iniquity.

O Father, may we be like David who shepherded in the integrity of his heart and the skill of his hands. We want to be skillful but with the skill must come the integrity. Give us leaders of integrity who are

faithful. Make us Christians with integrity, for we too have a world of influence among believers and unbelievers. We too bring glory to Your name when we live lives of integrity, when we live what we say we believe. Keep us consistent, Lord, that You might be honored, that we might be offering up our lives as spiritual acts of worship to You. And, Father, we're so grateful that Your Holy Spirit can accomplish this in us which in our flesh we could never do, so we plead with You to be gracious and grant us the Spirit who alone can uphold our integrity, for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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