

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

Honor and Dishonor--The Paradox of Ministry, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:3-7

Code: 47-41

We are in the great privilege of studying 2 Corinthians in our Sunday morning services here at Grace Church and we have been so blessed and so instructed and motivated in this study. To those of you who have not been with us and are visiting, in some ways I apologize because you are going to hear a message that is really the middle of a three-part series and I can only hope that you'll grasp a little of the first and the third part as we endeavor to pick up enough pieces so that you can grasp the great truth of this text.

The passage before us in our study is 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 1 through 10. To every Christian and especially preachers, God has given the ministry of reconciliation. That ministry of reconciliation is proclaiming to alienated sinners that they can be reconciled to God through the work of Jesus Christ. That ministry of reconciliation, preaching to alienated sinners the gospel, is built upon the word of reconciliation. And because we are those who proclaim that word, we are ambassadors for Christ. In fact, we are begging men and women to be reconciled to God.

Now all of that was discussed at the end of chapter 5. From verses 18 and following, Paul defined for us the ministry of reconciliation, the word of reconciliation and then identified us as ambassadors for Christ, begging people to be reconciled to God. That's what we're here in this world to do. You and me together, we are to call sinners to be reconciled to God. We are to proclaim the good news that that is possible, that Christ has made that available to those who believe.

In this particular section, chapter 6, the apostle Paul reminds us that the ministry of reconciliation and the proclamation of the word of reconciliation by the ambassadors of Jesus Christ leads to extreme reactions. And as we noted last week, we should not be surprised when the preacher, for example, is the most hated and the most loved man in the community. His is a life of dishonor and honor. It just depends. It is the nature of Christian witness, both for the preacher and for the Christian, that those who hear the gospel, repent, and believe the gospel will love the messenger. While those who hear the gospel, cherish their sin, reject the message will also resent the messenger.

In fact, the expected response to a faithful ministry is not going to be popularity. It is not going to be to have all men speak well of you, but rather to follow the path of our Lord Jesus who was at once the most beloved and the most hated.

I thought about the fact that it would be wonderful if we were treated the way the people of Israel treated King David in 2 Samuel chapter 18. You remember that David was ordering his troops into battle and delineating which troops would be commanded by which commander and sending them out to battle. And he said in that section of Scripture, "I'm going to go with the troops and I'm going to be in the battle as well." And the people in verse 3 of that chapter immediately replied by saying, "Don't go, don't go, because you are worth ten thousand of us."

It is wonderful when people do recognize the value of God's appointed leader, when they recognize the worth of one who represents the rule of God in their life. But such is not the lot of those who preach the gospel. It is rather the lot of the preacher and the Christian witness who confronts alienated sinners with warnings of divine judgment and who confronts sinning believers with warnings of divine chastening to be both loved and hated. In fact, the ones who preach the gospel should expect to be treated like the Lord Jesus Himself who was both despised and rejected of men, and at the same time adored.

Paul speaks in this chapter of the way he himself was treated. Let me read the verses to you, starting in verse 1. "And working together with Him we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain, for He says, At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation. Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true, as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold we live, as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things."

Such is the paradox of ministry. And the more noble the minister, the more paradoxical the ministry. Like Paul, any ambassador of Christ, me or you, proclaiming alienation and reconciliation is going to have this same kind of response to one degree or another. Oh not necessarily to the extent that the Apostle Paul did, but to some degree.

As Paul writes in this section about the paradox of ministry, he settles in on four perspectives that allow him to endure this. First is the perspective of privilege, second of passion, third of protection and then fourthly of paradox. And an effective ambassador for Christ proclaiming the word of reconciliation in the context of the ministry of reconciliation to which we have been called is going to need these four perspective...four perspectives.

Let's go back to number one, the perspective of privilege. Verse 1, "And working together with Him" And in that simple introductory statement Paul gives us the high point of our perspective. There is the dignity of ministry. There is the honor of ministry. There is the glory of ministry. We are working together with God. "With Him," by the way, is added in italics and correctly so because it is the very essence of what has been said in verses 18 to 20 in the prior chapter. It is God who reconciled us, verse 18, it is God who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 19, it is God in Christ reconciling the world. And it is God who committed to us the word of reconciliation. And then in verse 20, it is God who is entreating through us. Indeed, we are coworkers with God. That is the dignity of ministry. What condescension, what incarnation that the Almighty God of glory, the eternal One should dwell within us, should stoop to work with unworthy sinners such as we are. That is the nobility of the ministry God has given to us.

So much for the privilege. Secondly, we review the passion. You remember that we said to you that Paul ministered in privilege and with passion. The privilege of working together with God in the drama of redemption, in the salvation of eternal souls, produced in his heart a persistent zeal. And so he says in verse 1, "We also," that is to say, as does God, we along with God, "also are always urging you, pleading, begging, calling, exhorting." It's the very same word translated back in verse 20, entreating. And we are urging you not to receive the grace of God in vain for nothing. There's a passion in ministry. There's a relentlessness in ministry. There is a constancy in ministry with regard to people responding to the message of God's grace being proclaimed. And we suggested to you last time that Paul has in mind that the Corinthians not cause his ministry to be useless, either because they reject the grace of God in salvation, or the grace of God in sanctification. It is grace which operates in both, by the way. It is grace which saves, it is grace which sanctifies. Paul has preached the grace of salvation, he has preached the grace of sanctification. Legalists have come into the church and they have confounded the simplicity and the purity of grace. They have talked about a salvation by works and a sanctification by works. And not a lot unlike the Galatians, these people who begun in the Spirit are imagining themselves to be perfected in the flesh.

And Paul is concerned that he will have preached the grace of God for nothing. And so there is a passion and an urgency as he cries out to them. And he says in verse 2, "For He says," and he's quoting God speaking in Isaiah 49:8, this is a direct quote, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." And what is that to say? It is to say that there is a season, there is a time when salvation occurs. There is a time when God listens. There is a time when He helps. And that is to say there is a time when He does not. Paul responds to the quote from Isaiah 49 by saying, "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And what he is saying to the Corinthians and to all of us is this is no time for weakness, this is no time for vacillation, this is no time for a feeble Christianity, this is no time to be deceived by false teachers either about salvation or sanctification because this is a saving time. This is an acceptable time. This is a day of salvation. This is not a time to waste. This is a time to accept the gospel that saves. This is a time to accept the truth that sanctifies so that you can preach the gospel that saves. And so he is

passionately concerned that the Corinthians not be hindered in coming to salvation and not be hindered in coming to sanctification in order that they may be useful for a crisis time to preach the truth in a time when God hears and helps the repentant sinner.

Paul then is a pleader. He is a beggar. He is an exhorter. As a faithful ambassador, so should we be in the grand ministry of reconciliation. So he is motivated by privilege, as we saw last time. And also as we saw, by passion because it is the time of grace in which God responds to penitent sinners.

That brings us to number three. There is another perspective that an ambassador for Christ must have and it is the perspective of protection...protection. If there are those who reject the grace of God, and there are, Paul wants to be certain that it is not because he has put a stumbling block in their path. That's his concern. He doesn't want to be guilty of what God indicted the Jews for in Romans 2:24 when He says to them, what is the most tragic indictment of all indictments against Israel, verse 24 of Romans 2, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." It's not enough that the god of this world has blinded their minds, it's not enough that they love iniquity. It's not enough that the natural man cannot understand the things of God. It's not enough that they are blind and deaf and dumb to truth on their own, and that that is exacerbated by Satan, but you by the blasphemy of your own hypocrisy have caused them to blaspheme God. What an unbelievably frightening indictment to say you are the cause of their blasphemy against God because you name His name and you're a hypocrite.

Paul wants no such indictment on his life. And so he says in verse 3, "Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God." There is a tremendous sense of protection in his life. The faithful ambassador of Christ does nothing that would discredit the vital ministry of reconciliation. He is protective of the integrity of his mission, the integrity of the gospel, the integrity of the God he represents.

We all know as we share the gospel, as we witness to people that they are looking for excuses to justify their rejection, are they not? They are looking for excuses to justify their sin. And the most common excuse and the favorite one that they like to find is that Christians are just a bunch of...what?...hypocrites. And so we must see that our lives provide absolutely no excuse for them to resist the truth, that our lives provide no justification for their rejection on the common criticism that Christians are fakes and phonies. To put it simply, proclamation of the gospel cannot be in conflict with personal virtue.

Paul knew that. He knew that just gave excuse for unbelief. When the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus that marvelous little epistle of only three chapters, he was instructing Titus how to evangelize Crete. It is an epistle on evangelism. And this is how he tells him to evangelize Crete. "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine so that older men will be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith and love and perseverance. Preach sound doctrine so that older women likewise are to be

reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good. Preach sound doctrine so that young women will love their husbands, love their children, be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, subject to their own husbands. Preach sound doctrine so young men will be sensible and examples of good deeds, pure in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach."

In other words, the whole issue in evangelism is the virtue of the church. And he says in verse 5, "So that the Word of God may not be dishonored." And in verse 8 of chapter 2, "That the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." And in verse 10, "So that we adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." All of that because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men. And the grace of God which comes with a saving purpose builds that saving purpose on the integrity of the church. Protecting one's purity, protecting one's virtue is crucial and that is exactly what Paul says. On the negative side, we give no cause for offense. On the positive side, we commend ourselves as servants of God.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body into submission." I have to bring my otherwise sinful flesh into submission to the truth of God and the Spirit of God so that in preaching to others I myself don't become disqualified.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 1, after all the accusations that have been thrown against Paul, that he was in it for the money, that he was in it for the women, that he lied, that he was a deceiver, that he had a secret life of hidden sin, and that he was a manipulator of truth and he had no credentials from Jerusalem, and he had no business calling himself a true apostle. All of the terrible malignant things that had been spread abroad in the Corinthian assembly about him, he responds in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 by...verse 12...by saying, "My conscience is clear, and I have served the Lord in purity and godly sincerity, in holiness," he says. I know my heart and my conscience is not accusing me.

He protected his purity, he protected his virtue. And he made this the theme of 2 Corinthians. Believe me, his enemies looked for every possible way they could to destroy his credibility. They dogged his steps. Everywhere he went as he traveled, they probably came behind him and interviewed the people that had met him. If they could just find some sin, some dirt somewhere to destroy the man because he was so strategic. I mean, it was if in one sense God had put all His eggs in one basket, Paul...thirteen epistles.

And can you imagine if somewhere along the line they had found some moral scandal? How differently we would read his exhortations. How differently we would think about the model of Christian virtue. And you can believe that all of the forces of hell and humanity together were doing everything they could to find some sin and iniquity to lead Paul into some compromising situation which would devastate his integrity. But he guarded his life.

Every preacher, every Christian witness must look at his duty of telling people the gospel as the most important and the most honored and the most urgent and the most holy responsibility of life. And it isn't just what we say, it's what we live.

Look back at verse 3, "Giving no cause for offense in anything." And again I remind you, there are so many people who want to justify their rejection because of the glaring iniquities in the lives of people who identify with Christ. They wanted to find an Achilles heel in Paul, they just couldn't find it so they lied. They manufactured lies. People still do that. But Paul didn't need to change anything. What I am doing, he says in chapter 11 verse 12, I'll continue to do. Nothing changes.

There was nothing in his life and ministry that he needed to stop. It wasn't that he was perfect, it was that he dealt with his imperfection. It wasn't that he was sinless, it was that he dealt with his sin. And, beloved, it is so sad and tragic to review the lives of those who by sin and scandal have disgraced Christ and His gospel and given fuel to the fires of the unbelievers who want to justify their rejection. The world loves it. The world revels in it. The press eats it up. They want to spread it all over the place. And sometimes they want to exaggerate it and sometimes they want to make it up. And when I see that I always have mixed emotion because when I see some scandalous exposure of someone in the ministry, I know that the gospel is discredited and the name of Jesus Christ is brought to shame. I understand that. But on the other hand, I'm happy in my heart because public exposure is still better than concealment. And at least the corruption that's eating at the heart of the church is exposed for what it is.

Paul wanted no such thing in his life. He was protective of the glory and the integrity of the truth. He was protective of the honor of his Lord. He was protective of the credibility of his message. He says it there in verse 3, "In order that the ministry not be discredited." That's why he wrote this whole epistle, thirteen chapters of this, not to save his ego, his reputation or his income, but to save his opportunity to preach truth and not be thought of as a liar and a fake. He defends himself here for the sake of the proclamation of the truth, so he won't be supplanted by false teachers who will lead people to hell. He is determined that no real blame will stand against him, no blemish, no disgrace. He wants to wield an untarnished sword and he wants people to be able to look at his life as close as they can possibly look with as much scrutiny as they can possibly muster, and find nothing that would destroy his ministry.

The ministry of reconciliation then calls for the most devout and the most faithful. And certainly at a time when moral weakness and doctrinal ignorance are at an all-time high, this level of integrity is called for and this standard is not to be lowered. Paul knew exactly what was at stake, the believability of the saving and sanctifying truth. How are you going to convince someone that Jesus Christ saves and transforms life when they look at you and you don't demonstrate such a transformation? So he guarded his life. And verse 3 is the negative side, what he didn't do, and

verse 4 is the positive side, what he did do, "In everything commending ourselves as servants of God."

The greatest gift that any pastor, including myself, can give you, the greatest gift I can give the church or this community is not a good sermon, not even an occasional powerful sermon, and maybe an occasional life-changing one, the greatest gift I can give you is not simply the understanding of what the Bible teaches or sound theology, the greatest gift that I can give to you is personal virtue. That's the greatest gift because that makes everything else believable.

It's wonderful when a person is esteemed for their theology, their interpretation of Scripture, but what they must be esteemed for is their character. A minister's life is the only letter of commendation that matters. And Paul here says, "In everything commending ourselves as servants of God." On the negative side he said, "I'm careful what I don't do," on the positive side, "I'm careful what I do in endeavoring to commend myself as a true servant of God."

How do you know a true servant of God? How do you know one? How is one commended to you? How is one identified? By a degree from a seminary? By education? By having the right theology? By popularity? By personality? By giftedness? By success? By building a religious empire? By fame? By material prosperity?

No, no Paul says that faithful servants of God are commended...listen to this...by their ability to endure. See it there in verse 4. "But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance."

In much endurance. That's the only one in the list that has an adjective added. So it stands out as a singular point which is then defined by what comes after it.

In everything...afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonment, tumult, labors, sleeplessness, hunger, purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, the word of truth, the power of God, the weapons of righteousness. In all of those things, in everything, he says, "Commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance."

You see, the faithful servant of God is commended, listen, first of all, by his ability to survive the hostility of the enemies of the truth and remain faithful. I'll say that again, the servant of God is commended by his ability to survive the hostility of the enemies of the truth and remain faithful. That's the negative side. He endures the hostilities.

The positive side, the servant of God is commended by never wavering from purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, etc., etc., etc. All the positives that begin there in verse 6.

Verses 4 and 5 talk about the negatives and 6 about the positives. But the commendation is the same, the man endures through all of them. It doesn't matter what the attack is. It doesn't matter what the difficulty is, he endures. That's how you commend yourself.

Now these words starting in verse 4 and running down to verse 7 are emotionally charged. They tell us that in the ministry of reconciliation it is not, as the name it and claim it people say, we who make demands on God, but rather it is God who makes tremendous demands on us. He demands that we endure all kinds of hostility. He demands that we endure in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, love, the word of truth, the power of God and the weapons of righteousness. He demands an unfaltering step, an unwavering line.

Ambassadors of Jesus Christ then are those who are so loyal to Christ that they seek not greater comfort but greater endurance. They seek not greater prosperity but greater purity. As Roy Clements has said, "Great men and women of God do not make it their ambition to look like overfed stock brokers, they make it their ambition to look like Jesus." And Paul is here defining ministry that is willing to make sacrifice, to endure hostility, to be unpopular, to live as the gospel demands, not as the culture suggests. What commands the loyal ambassador is not popularity, it is endurance. And the word "endurance" here, hupomoneis that remarkable untranslatable word in the Greek that means to triumph under difficulty. To endure with a triumphant attitude under hardship. That's what commends him.

And look at the things that he lists that define that endurance. He was in much endurance in afflictions, that's the word thlipsis, it means anything that expresses pressure, the exerts pressure, physical, emotional, spiritual pressure. Those crushing experiences. Those vicissitudes that weigh us down and burden the heart, those crushing disappointments, those pains of life. It's the same word Paul used in Acts 20 when he said he was going to Jerusalem bound in his spirit.

And then he says "hardships." What is that? It's a general word for difficulties. It could refer to all of his persecutions, the struggles of life in a fallen environment. It has to do with difficulties that have no relief. Difficulties that have no exit.

And then he adds the word "distresses," a very interesting word. It literally means "to confine in a very narrow place where someone can't turn around." Those confining things, those frustrating narrow places, suffocating, unrelenting difficulty with no escape and no way to get comfortable.

Paul had that kind of pressure, hardship and distress. Things just burdening his heart, binding his spirit, crushing him. Difficulties without any relief, confining things where he couldn't even find a way out, he couldn't even find a way to turn around and get comfortable. The unrelenting concern of all those things that were on his heart.

And then he moves to some external things in the second list of three, and it's a series of three groupings. He says then in verse 5, "In beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults."

"Beatings" mean mutilating whippings. He describes them in chapter 11. "Imprisonments," obvious and he experienced more of those even than beatings. Commonly was he in prison. And then he adds "tumults," which have to do with riots, civil disorders and mob violence. And you can find that in Acts 13, 14, 19, 21. He faced rabble mobs in Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus already when he wrote this and there was more to come.

You see, the badge of his faithfulness was not his wealth. It was not the fact that he had succeeded so much in the ministry. He was very, very popular and very wealthy and that proved God's blessing on his life. No, the badge of his faithfulness was not wealth, it wasn't even health. His outer man was wearing, he speaks of himself as Paul the aged and he's not that old. His body was fast failing. It wasn't earthly success. It wasn't prosperity. The measure and badge of his commending faithfulness was the fact that he endured suffering and never flinched and never changed his message and never held back and never grew weary.

Now he adds to the internal and external matters that he endured some self-inflicted trials. Notice them there at the end of verse 5, "In labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger." And that really wasn't pushed upon him, that was by choice. The word "labors" is kopos, it means to work to the point of sheer exhaustion. It is the toil that takes everything you have and you've got nothing left, and that's how he worked. Sometimes with his hands to provide a living for himself and everybody that traveled with him. Sometimes in the preaching of the gospel. But he toiled and labored to the point of anguish by choice.

And then he mentions "sleeplessness." He didn't have to work day and night. He didn't have to minister day and night as he says he did. He didn't have to stay up all night in prayer and intercession on behalf of the church. He didn't have to spend the darkness of the night sleeplessly trying to work out a ministry strategy and prepare what he might say. He didn't have to endure the insomnia of overwork, the aching muscles without the relief of any kind of medication in that day. Those aches that allow you to stay awake all night and find no rest. That was by choice.

He didn't have to go without food. It's just that he put himself in circumstances and conditions where it wasn't readily available, but for the sake of the ministry he was willing to do it. And the whole point of this is he commended himself by his endurance through all this hostility and all this difficulty. That's the measure of a man's commendation. It is not his popularity in the world, and frankly it's not even his popularity in the church because you find Paul at this particular point in his life extremely unpopular with the world. They want to kill him, both the Jews and the Romans, and extremely unpopular with the church, they want to get rid of him, too.

But here was a man who proved his character by his endurance. Here was a man who would say, "I know what may happen to me at Jerusalem but it doesn't move me because I don't count my life dear to myself, I just want to finish the ministry the Lord has given me." Here is a man who could say, "Because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, everything else in my life is rubbish." Here was a man who could say, "I know how to have and how not to have, how to be abased and how to abound, and all of it, I just commit myself to the Lord and my trust is in Him who strengthens me." Here was a man who could say, "The sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be ours." Here is a man who back in chapter 4 of this same letter said, verse 17, "A momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory, and we're not looking at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen." Here is a man who can come to the end of his life with nothing but a prison cell to show for it and about to lay his head on a block and have it chopped off and say, "I have run the race, I have fought the fight, I've kept the faith."

And so, on the negative side he had endured all these hostilities. He had faced the enemy. He had fought the battle. He had faced the lions and they hadn't torn him to ribbons. He endured in the worst possible conditions. And that's the commendable character of the man manifest.

But there's a positive side, and again you have three groups of three...a positive side comes in verse 6. There's another side to this enduring. It's not just the enduring of the hostilities, it's also the enduring in those things which graciously define for us the righteousness that God has granted us...purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, Holy Spirit, genuine love, word of truth, power of God, and then the weapons of righteousness. There's the positive side. And there are three groups of three there as well.

Take the first three, in purity, in knowledge, and in patience. Paul says I've never wavered in purity. I've endured in a pure way...purity of life, purity of thought, purity of motive. By the way, the word hagnotes actually means freedom from all fleshly stains. It's a comprehensive word and it's at the top of the positive list because it really is so very, very important. The man lived a pure life. There was no reproach, no blame, no shame. He endured in purity to the end.

And then secondly he says "in knowledge." His understanding of divine things, his commitment to sound doctrine, his grasp of God's redeeming love and purpose, his understanding of sinful man, his understanding of religious error, his understanding of false systems, false teachers, his grasp of the strategies of Satan, his understanding of the means of effective ministry of preaching, teaching and discipling and evangelism, he understood and he never wavered from a proper understanding. He never wandered off into some error. He never was deceived. He never was led astray. He wasn't blown about by every wind of doctrine. He didn't jump on the bandwagon of every new trend and nuance that came down the pike and identified itself as from God. He was sound in his doctrine and he never vacillated and he never wavered from that. He endured with a clear understanding of the

truth that never was altered.

In fact, when they said about him that his presence was unimpressive and his speech was downright contemptible, he responded in chapter 11 by saying, "Even if I am unskilled in speech, I am not so in knowledge. In fact, in every way we've made this evident to you in all things." Sound in his knowledge of the truth on every front.

And thirdly, in speaking about the positive things he endured in purity, he endured in knowledge and he endured in patience, that's makrothumia. That means...that means tolerance with people. And people do test your patience. He had to deal with the ignorant and the stupid and the sinful and the hard and the weak. And he had to deal with the unruly. And he had to deal with the overscrupulous and the judgmental and the critical and the narrow minded and the hostile and the deadly. He had to deal with the corrupting, the mutinous, the elite. He had to deal with the poor, the educated, the uneducated, the moral and the immoral. He had to deal with the faint hearted and the bull headed. And in all of it he was patient...patient because he knew in the end he had to bring them the truth. And they never exasperated him to the degree where he set the truth aside and walked off. He endured those people who caused him personal pain, who inflicted wounds on his own body. He endured those people who caused him grief, who made him cry, who broke his heart. He endured.

And then the next group of three, second group of three. "In kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love." "Kindness" is goodness is action. The word means he did good to people. No matter what they did to him, he did good to them. Galatians 6:10, he said, "We're to do good to everybody, especially the household of faith." And he did that. It's a kind of goodness that comes from someone who has no end to their compassion, someone who has no end to their sympathy.

And then he endured not only in his kindness, but in the "Holy Spirit." And this is the heart of everything, folks. It's kind of thrown in the middle of the list but it's really the heart of it all. the reason all the rest was true was because he endured in the Spirit. What does that mean? That means that he walked in the Spirit, that he enjoyed the fullness of the Spirit, the filling of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the comfort of the Spirit, the joy of the Spirit, the freedom of the Spirit. He didn't grieve the Spirit, he didn't quench the Spirit, he didn't frustrate the Spirit. It means that he manifest the fruit of the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. And that's why he did not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, as Galatians 5:16 says. He let the word of Christ dwell in him richly. Consequently the Spirit of God was in control of him and it was in the Spirit that he worked and served and prayed and preached and lived.

And then he ends verse 6 by saying "in genuine love." And since Romans 5:5 says, "The Holy Spirit has shed abroad God's love in our hearts," that genuine love was a product of the ministry of the Spirit. When you walk in the Spirit you experience the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and so forth. And a genuine love it was, agape love, that's the love of sacrifice, that's the love of the will, it's not the love of attraction, it's not the love of emotion, it's not the love of sensual

affections. It is simply the love of the will. It is the love that wills to sacrifice, apart from any attraction. It was a sincere and devout and devoted love for all his friends and all his enemies and all his church people whether they loved him or whether they had turned on him. He loved them. He loved the way we are taught to love. When Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 5 to love your enemies, He was teaching us the kind of love that Paul had. And it was no sham and it was no pretense, it was not facade, it was no front, it was no plastic smile, it was no mask. He loved them enough to give his life. And he said again and again that it was his joy to offer his life for the purposes of the gospel. And that's how he really felt from the heart.

Well this dramatic list of commending realities in which he unwaveringly endured is then concluded with a final three. That final three in verse 7 are so important, I'm going to say more about them next week, "In the word of truth, in the power of God and by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left."

You know what? The man never sunk to human means. He never sunk to earthly means. He operated within the confines of the word of truth, revealed Scripture. He operated only in the power of God and only with the weapons of righteousness. He did not operate in the weapons of the flesh. He did not operate in human strength and he did not operate beyond the pages of the Word of God. He brought the Word of God in the power of God and fought with the weapons of righteousness. He endured that way. His whole life was that way, never beyond the Scripture, never in his human strength and never with fleshly weapons did he battle the kingdom of darkness.

Now this is his commendation. It isn't the empire builder who is necessarily commended. It is the man who endures to the very end, both the negative hostilities that come his way as the human and the supernatural enemies of the gospel fight against him, and it is the man who endures on the positive side in the divine graces and virtues that God requires of a faithful ambassador. He endured in both and thus protected his ministry, thus protected his reputation and thus commended himself to God and to men.

You would think with such a noble life and such a life of commendation that there would be a great applause for this man. That somebody in the crowd might say, "Boy, let's make sure we keep this guy alive, don't kill this guy. He's worth more than ten thousand of us." Not so. And that takes us to the fourth perspective, I'll say more about it next week, but for you that won't be here, let me say a few words briefly.

Paradox...in spite of all of that, look at verse 8, in spite of the nobility and the commendable character of this marvelous man, he lived his life by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true, as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold we live, as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

You see, that is the mark of his ministry. When you want to see a ministry that has character, look for the paradox...look for the paradox. Because an ambassador who is faithful to the word of reconciliation in a ministry of reconciliation, believe me, is going to have opposite extreme responses. Even with all the noble devotion to the other perspectives, even though his heart was overwhelmed with his privilege, even though he was a man of passion, even though he was a man who totally protected the integrity and purity of his own life before God by the power of the Spirit, still he lived out a paradox of love and hate. Contrasts that show how it is in a hostile world. We become to those who hear and believe the message beloved and to those who refuse and reject the message, enemies. And it's not something to try to change. To some we are a savior of life to life, and to some we are a savior of death to death, but in either case we rise as a fragrance to God.

You mean to tell me God is pleased when we are a savior of death to death? Yes, because God is pleased with our faithfulness. This is the very chaos and dichotomy of the ministry. This is the life of one who is a force for truth, a confronter. This is the life of one who divides the true from the false, the right from the wrong, the sinner from the saint. This is the life of the one who incarnates the Word. This is how it is and this is how we should expect it to be.

As we approach every day of our lives we don't have to live to the degree that Paul did in fearing the hostility of our society. Maybe if we did we would be less likely to compromise. Maybe it is more difficult in the subtleties of our culture to endure. But remember this, one way or another the gospel has human enemies and superhuman enemies. Satan and his whole entourage who fight unendingly against the truth one way or another. And we have to endure that without compromise.

On the other hand, God has given us the graces to keep us powerful and effective for those who will hear and believe and we want to endure faithful to those graces. This is our calling as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and nothing less will please Him.

We look at the privilege and are overwhelmed. We trust the privilege generates passion in our hearts because this is a time of salvation, we do everything we can to protect our lives and we wait for the paradoxical response. And we know in the end that God is pleased, even in the paradox. Popularity is not our goal. They killed Jesus and He said, "The servant is not above his Lord," right? The disciple is not above his teacher. To be most loved, what a marvelous joy. You know what that's like when you lead someone to Christ. To be most hated, we have to take that, too. It's the nature of what we do and who we are.

Father, we thank You as we close this morning that You have called us to be ambassadors for Christ in whatever little part of the world You've put us. And, Lord, we want to be protective. We would just bear unbelievable shame if it had to be said of us "Because of you the name of God was blasphemed. Because of you the gospel was discredited, the ministry dishonored. Because of you

sinner found justification for their rejection. Because of you the criticism of Christian hypocrisy was validated." Lord, what shame we would bring on You and what uselessness for our own lives. And so we want to approach our life with a sense of privilege and passion and a sense of protection and accept the extreme opposites that come, knowing this is how it is and this is how it was for Christ and our noble and beloved friend, Paul. And so shall it be for us. May we mark out our own character by endurance to the very end. Faithful in pursuing the pure things. Faithful in enduring the difficulties of life.

Raise us up, Lord, to be useful to You as the gospel advances and exalts Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.

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