

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

Honor and Dishonor--The Paradox of Ministry, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:8-10

Code: 47-42

This morning we are able to return to 2 Corinthians chapter 6 to finish a three-part look at the opening ten verses of this important chapter. And I've entitled this section, "Honor and Dishonor, The Paradox of Ministry."

One phrase in this text of 2 Corinthians chapter 6, one phrase really does sum up the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. As he preached from his conversion to his execution, one little phrase says it all. It's found in verse 4 and that phrase is, "in much endurance." Nothing was more true of the Apostle Paul from the start to the finish of his life than that he endured.

Let me tell you a little about that word because it's a word that really doesn't give you the full meaning when translated by one English word. The word in Greek, hupomone, is one of the most magnificent of New Testament spiritual virtues and no single English word really gets its arms around the significance of this term. It is used but somewhat infrequently in classical Greek to refer to the bearing under the difficulty of hard labor. It's used of bearing difficulties that come upon a person against their will. It's used of surviving the sting of Greek or the shock of battle or even the coming of death. It is even used in some secular Greek sources to refer to spiritual staying power that belongs to people who are willing to die for a cause.

But it really gets its rich meaning from its usage in the New Testament. It is used thirty times in the New Testament in the noun form, fifteen times in the verb form. And in that New Testament usage we begin to pick up the richness of the meaning of this word. And we understand why it designates a very noble virtue. And let me give you one way to approach the meaning of this word that might be helpful.

It is commonly used in the New Testament with the word "trouble," as, for example, in Romans 5:3. It is commonly used with the word "faith," as in James 1:3; with the word "hope" as in 1 Thessalonians 1:3; and with the word "joy" as in Colossians 1:11. It then is an enduring that involves trouble, at the same time calls for faith, and allows for hope and even produces joy. But most often this term, hupomone, endurance, is used with the idea of future glory. It is used in that combination in Romans 2, Hebrews 10, Hebrews 12, James 1, James 5.

So it is not the endurance then of someone who wearily sits with a bowed head struggling to hold on until the trouble is over. It is rather the spirit which accepts the worst of all circumstance, not with a

grin-and-bear-it mentality, but with faith and hope and joy and the anticipation of coming glory. It really is triumphant patience under trouble. Triumphant endurance where though the difficulty is profound, faith, hope, joy and the anticipation of future glory are in tact and cause the individual to be able to rise above the circumstance to accept gladly and patiently the difficulty. Triumphant patience.

Chrysostom, the early church father, said, "Hypomoneis a fortress that is never taken and a harbor that knows no storm." And nothing is more characteristic of the Apostle Paul than endurance. He endured under the most pressing difficulties that came upon him from those who hated his ministry. And he endured under the most pressing obligation that came from God in heaven and that held him to the greatest and highest standard. He endured it all. Though, as he says in chapter 4, "He was afflicted...in verse 8...in every way he was not crushed; though he was perplexed, he was not despairing; though persecuted, not forsaken; though struck down, not destroyed and though he was always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus," as verse 11 says, "he was being delivered over constantly to death for Jesus' sake." Still in spite of that, "The life of Jesus was being manifested in our flesh and though death was working in him, life was working in those to whom he ministered"

His faith never wavered. His hope never diminished. His joy never abated. And the sufferings of this world were certainly not worthy to be compared with the glory which was to come.

This kind of endurance did not belong only to Paul, it is characteristic of spiritual heroes long before Paul. Hebrews 11 gives us a little insight into them. You remember how the chapter ends, after reciting some of the more familiar heroes to us we come to verse 32 and the writer writes about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. And he describes these with these words, "Who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women...he says...received back their dead by resurrection and others were tortured, not accepting their release in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes also chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword, they went about in sheepskins, goatskins, being destitute, afflicted and ill treated of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." And these are the heroes whose faith never wavered, whose hope ever died. Even though they were hoping for something they couldn't see, something far better that was saved for us who are on this side of the cross. They then become the models of faith that Hebrews 12 says we are to follow. They are the great cloud of witnesses, testifying to the validity of faith in the most dire circumstance and calling us to live the life of faith and run with endurance...the race.

The character of this virtue then is to be triumphant through all kinds of circumstances. Troubles and persecutions, on the one hand, and tremendous lofty expectations by God on the other, never crumbling. Such was Paul. And so we say again that nothing sums up his life and ministry better

than to say he lived and served in much endurance.

He never gave in and he never caved in. He was faithful to the very end, from conversion to execution. It's a marvelous testimony to the loyalty that he had to the truth and to the Lord of the truth.

And all who are called to be ambassadors, as we saw back in chapter 5 verse 20, are called to the same standard. As ambassadors of Christ we have been given the ministry of reconciliation which is discharged through the proclamation of the word of reconciliation. And we will need to possess this virtue of endurance to do that faithfully.

Satan wants to tear us down. That's why in Ephesians chapter 6 we are reminded that we are to take the armor of God and we are to stand firm. And when the battle comes and the smoke clears and the war has subsided, having done all we are to stand. In other words, we are to endure. The Apostle Paul as he writes this epistle, we remember, was defending himself against lies being propagated by false teachers who wanted to destroy his reputation, who wanted to cause the people to lose confidence in him and thus in his teaching. And then they could step in and teach their lies. And so the whole letter is Paul's humble but strong defense of his integrity.

One of the things they had said about him was that the reason he suffers so much in his life is because there's a secret life of shame and sin under the surface for which God is continually punishing him. Here he responds by saying, "The sufferings that I undergo are simply a part of the paradox of ministry." To accuse Paul of being sinful and deceitful, one who deserves to be punished for his sin and deception and that God was doing this was to miss the whole point of his life. He replies that his sufferings are not the result of sin but of faithfulness. And they are not from God but they are from wicked men and demons.

And certainly it is the experience of anyone who proclaims Christ, be he preacher or layman, anyone who is faithful to the gospel of reconciliation to expect that what Jesus said will come to pass and that is the servant is not above his master, and if they treated Me with disdain and hate, that's how they'll treat you. And so we said in our opening message that the one who preaches the gospel is the most loved and the most hated person in the community. Most loved by those who hear and believe. Most hated by those who reject. It is a ministry of honor and dishonor. That's the paradox of ministry.

But Paul endured through it all and we can as well, I think, when we have these perspectives that are illustrated here in Paul's words. He had four perspectives on ministry that are revealed here and I think they are the perspectives that help us hold our ground under tremendous pressure from the ungodly world against the truth and from God Himself for us to be faithful to the truth. Four perspectives and I'll review briefly, and then we'll come to the one that is of interest to us today.

First was the perspective of privilege. He approached his ministry and understood that no matter how difficult or how trying it was, the privileged...the privilege of that ministry far outweighed any difficulty, the honor of just doing it. And that is indicated to us in the first phrase of verse 1, "And working together with Him." And the "with Him" is aptly put in there because back in verse 20 in the ministry of reconciliation, as ambassadors of Christ, it is God who is pleading through us. So we are God's coworkers. And that's the privilege of ministry, to be a coworker with the eternal God. That is the dignity, that is the honor of ministry. Paul was always in awe of that reality, particularly when he looked at his own life and saw what he was and how utterly unworthy of such a high calling. It is God who is at work in us. It is God who is at work through us. Here is the great honor. Here is the exalted privilege in the ministry of reconciliation, to be God's personal coworker as the drama of redemption unfolds. That privilege takes us beyond the trivial suffering of this life.

Secondly, he viewed his ministry with passion. Another thing that led to his endurance was the zeal that he had. You just could never really stop his passion. And he says there in verse 1, "We also, along with God, urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." He is not content with what has happened in Corinth. He is not content with false teachers coming in and confusing the people and beginning a rebellion, leading them into error. He is not content with that, whether the error regards salvation or sanctification because he will not accept the fact that he has gone there, expended his life and poured out the truth of the grace of God and now it is going to come to nothing because of their defection. He's too passionate for that. And so he with passion pleads that the Corinthians not turn away from the truth of God's grace to the legalistic approach that is being pressed upon them by the false apostles. He has given his soul and the truth to them. God has also come along and urged them through the Spirit and he cannot stand still and see them turn from the truth. He is passionate regarding the truth of grace. That's what he's talking about.

And I believe here, as we noted in our last study, that it is the grace of God both in salvation and sanctification that was being assaulted. The false teachers wanted to add works to salvation and they wanted to add the flesh to sanctification. We see it in the letter of Paul to the Galatians where he says, "Having begun in the Spirit do you think you're now going to be perfected in the flesh?" Always the enemy attacks grace and tries to put the issue of salvation and spirituality back on the individual which short circuits God's work. He didn't want them to fall from grace, as he said to the Galatians. He didn't want them to be disobedient to the truth that saves and the truth that sanctifies.

Obviously there were people in the Corinthian church who had heard the gospel and not yet believed and now were being led astray by this legalistic approach to salvation. And there were believers who had come to know the Lord and were now being led off the truth path of sanctification into a false path.

The urgency in his heart is expressed in verse 2. Here is why he is so passionate. "For He says," and he quotes Isaiah 49:8, quoting Isaiah, "At the acceptable time I listened to you and on the day of salvation I helped you." What is he saying? He is saying the prophet said that there is a time when God listens and there is a day when He helps. And what that means is there may be a time when He doesn't listen and a day when He doesn't help.

But then He says, "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation." It is now a time when God does listen and God does help sinners. This is a day of salvation. This is not a time to waste. That's his point. This is no time for unsanctified saints. This is no time for unsaved church members to be occupying churches because those conditions will not lend to effective evangelism in a very time when God will listen in a day when He will save. Satan wants to make sure the church is populated by unsaved church members and unsanctified believers. And he was working hard to make that occur in the church at Corinth and Paul is not going to stand for that because he knows the crisis hour, he knows the urgency of this time which we often call the age of grace when the gates of grace have swung open and sinners are invited to come. This is not a time for unsaved and unsanctified church members.

Thirdly, and we're still reviewing, Paul viewed his ministry not only from the viewpoint of privilege and passion but from the viewpoint of protection. He was very, very concerned that he never discredit the gospel, that he never discredit his ministry and that he never bring shame on his Lord. If there were those who rejected the grace of God, it must not be because of Paul putting some stumbling block, causing some offense, or bringing reproach on the gospel and shame on the name of Jesus Christ. He did not want to be like the Jews of whom it is said in Romans 2:24 that their life even though they claimed to know the true God had blasphemed God's name.

And so, he says in verses 3 and 4, "Giving no cause for offense in anything as we work together with Him, in order that the ministry be not discredited but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance." Giving no cause for offense in anything.

The faithful ambassador will have nothing to do with discrediting his Lord and discrediting His gospel. The faithful ambassador of Christ will give no occasion for anyone to be justified in their rejection because they are convinced that Christians are just hypocrites. Paul devoted himself to Jesus Christ, walked in the power of the Spirit in order that he cause no offense in anything so that the ministry was not discredited on the positive side in everything he commended himself as a servant of God in much endurance.

You see, that again defines his life. He endured in everything, without offense and faithful. And they threw everything at him from a human viewpoint and from a supernatural viewpoint, they who are a part of the kingdom of darkness threw everything at him. It's a sad thing when you look at ministry today and you see preachers and parishioners alike who have brought terrible reproach on the name

of Jesus Christ, terrible reproach on the gospel, shame to God because they have not endured. They have fallen into some iniquity, to some unfaithfulness and they have put a stumbling block in the way of sinners. It seems so common today. But Paul faithfully endured.

In fact, he says, "In everything commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance." He endured in everything. And then he begins to list the everythings. First there's a negative side to the everythings...in afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness and hunger. And then there's a positive side...in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, 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." He endured the pressure from a persecuting and hostile world and he endured the pressure from a holy God. And he was faithful to both. And we've gone through those and we won't go through them again except I want to take you down to verse 7.

As this section on his protection closes you have here three things that I said last week I wanted to emphasize because I didn't have time. He says, He has endured the negative things that the kingdom of darkness have cast against him, in verses 4 and 5. He had endured the positive pressure that a holy God has put on him in verses 6 and 7. And the sum of that is in verse 7, and these are remarkable phrases that would demand, I think, a sermon series at some point. He has endured in the word of truth in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left.

Now what is he talking about? What does he mean "in the word of truth"? We don't have to look too long to find out because he defines it. Colossians 1:5, he says, "Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard," here's the same phrase, "in the word of truth, the gospel." The word of truth is the gospel, the good news that God is reconciling sinners through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as he described it in verse 21 of chapter 5. It's the gospel.

James uses the same phrase in James 1:18. "In the exercise of his will he brought us forth by the word of truth." In other words, we were born again by the word of truth, the gospel. He says I have been faithful to preach the gospel. I've never wavered. He was faithful to the gospel. Here we are two thousand years from the events of the gospel having been lived out in the Savior's life, here we are after two thousand years of theology and dialogue and study and scholarship and here we are two thousand years later and what is it that we are still trying to sort out and understand against the backdrop of all the assaults? The gospel. On the one hand, we're not sure whether Jesus needs to be Lord. On the other hand, we're not sure what you have to believe to be a Christian. And maybe we could just throw our arms around everybody who calls Christ their Savior without regard to what it is they believe.

How could we be confused about the gospel after all of these centuries have gone by? Answer, because it is at that point where the enemy assaults most viciously cause that's the point of salvation. Paul never wavered on the gospel. He was faithful to it, faithful to the revealed gospel.

Secondly he says, "In the power of God." He preached the gospel and as Romans 1:16 says, he did it not ashamed because it is the power of God unto salvation. That's a tremendous truth. He understood the power of the gospel. In fact, earlier in his writings to the Corinthians in the first letter, first scriptural letter, chapter 1 verse 18, he says, "The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." He understood the power of the gospel. He didn't hesitate on the gospel. He didn't mitigate the gospel. He didn't redefine the gospel. He didn't make it shallow and simplistic. He didn't avoid the difficulties of the gospel. He didn't stay away from the terms that may seem too profound for the average human mind. He preached the gospel clearly because he knew it was the power of God and the worldly wise thought it was beneath them and foolish, but those who were being saved experienced as the power of God.

He says in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, "I didn't come with superiority of speech or wisdom," he says, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came in weakness. I came in fear. I came in much trembling. My message, my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." He knew where the power was. The power was in the truth as it had been revealed to him in the gospel.

Here was a man who endured all kinds of assaults, all kinds of attacks, all kinds of confusion about theology and never wavered and preached the word of truth which is the gospel and preached it in the power of God and saw it reveal the power of God. He never deterred from a clear preaching of the saving gospel, no hesitations and no subtleties. There's no other way. And if you believe it is the power of God unto salvation, you don't hesitate to preach it.

Finally, all the way to the end of his life he endured triumphantly by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left. What is he saying here? He's saying I'm armed in both hands to fight on all sides and my weapons, he says, are the weapons of righteousness.

Now what are they? Very important question. What are they? What are these weapons that we're supposed to use. We hear a lot today about spiritual warfare, but what are the weapons?

Well to answer the question we have to go a little later in the book to chapter 10 because it's in chapter 10 that he defines these weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left. Look with me at chapter 10 and we'll examine verse 3 through 5.

In verse 3 he says, "For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh." Now don't get confused here when he says, "Though we walk in the flesh," he's not making a commentary on sin in his own life, he's simply saying we're human. At this point the word flesh has to do with being human.

He's saying though we live life like every man, subject to the weaknesses of being human, though we are earthly and we have great limitations, we are just human, we do not war according to the flesh. We have to live as human beings but we don't fight spiritual battles that way. We do not war according to the flesh. We do not battle against evil and error, we do not battle the powers of darkness, we do not battle those who seek to distort and overthrow the truth with human ideas, human wisdom, human ingenuity. We don't do that. They make no advance on the kingdom of darkness, they gain no ground. That's why, he said, I don't come with cleverness of human speech. I don't come with human wisdom.

Verse 4 follows it up. "Because the weapons of our warfare are not human, but mighty before God," or divinely powerful, "for the destruction of forces." Why would we use human ingenuity, human cleverness, why would we use things like that when we have weapons that are divinely powerful?

So he says we don't fight for the truth, we don't fight for the gospel, we don't fight for men's souls with human ingenuity, we don't use psychology, philosophy, politics, the attractions of secular entertainment and well oiled organization, we're not interested in that. That gains no ground on the strongholds of Satan. That tears down no fortresses. The secularized, worldly wise church is really ceasing to fight with any effect to the degree that they use those fleshly weapons. If we want to tear down strongholds and destroy fortresses, we have to use divinely powerful weaponry.

Now look at the phrase at the end of verse 4, "The destruction of fortresses." Immediately in verse 5 he goes on to explain what that means. "We are destroying...here are the fortresses...speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God."

Now I want you to notice this very carefully because this is where our spiritual warfare takes place. It's not a matter of chasing demons around. It's not a matter of working politically. It's not a matter of somehow psychologizing people. The issue of spiritual warfare comes right down to this, the destruction of fortresses with divinely powerful weapons. The fortresses are defined in verse 5 as speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.

What are we talking about? We're talking about ideas, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about things of human philosophy and wisdom with which, of course, the Greeks, including those in Corinth, were enamored. We're talking about reasonings, logismos, reasonings and rationalizations of self-content and intellectual pride that justify the sinner in his sin. Sinners have fortified themselves in their ideologies. They have invented intellectual systems that do not understand human depravity, spiritual ignorance and divine grace and give no place to the cross which to them is foolishness.

Christian warfare then is aimed at pulling down human reason, pulling down human speculation, human wisdom, human rationalization, proud intellectualism. These are the towers of pride. And as

Philip Hughes said, "Towers of pride become tombs." They are towers of human wisdom, towers of human philosophy, towers of sinful defiance that set themselves against the truth. Our universities are filled with them. Our country is filled with them. Our world is filled with them, whether they be sophisticated, intellectually defined, elite kind of ideologies that are very, very hard to comprehend and can only be mastered by the smartest philosophers, or whether they are the simple musings of the man on the street who knows very little except that he wants to build a fortress against the invasion of God in his life by creating ideas of his own. They are the fortresses that we storm. It's an ideological battle. That is why, beloved, I have to tell you spiritual warfare is doctrinal, spiritual warfare is theological. It all has to do with content. It has to do with truth. It has to do with rightly dividing the Word of truth, it has to do with confronting false ideas with what is true. There's never a premium on ignorance, never a premium on the tolerance of various viewpoints. There is a compulsion to study to show yourself approved that you might rightly divide, to be diligent to be approved that you might rightly divide the Word.

Why? Because we've got to storm the towers of human ideas, human philosophies. And what is our goal, according to verse 5? To take all those thoughts captive and bring them to Christ and make them bow the knee before the true sovereign, the source of truth. We're to take all those thoughts of men and demolish them and lead them to Christ. We are assaulting ideologies. That's why we have to confront. You can't embrace the culture, we're here to confront it. It is a fortress set up against God. And it has to be assaulted and it has to be destroyed and its ideologies devastated and everything taken captive to Christ.

That is to say we bring sinners the truth. We expose their error, their fortress, their castle crumbles and they humbly bow the knee to the truth of Christ and become obedient to Him. That's what we are about.

So what is our weapon? What are the weapons of righteousness? Truth...truth, the truth of the Word of God, or the truths, if you want to stay in the plural. It's the truth of God's revelation, no artificial atmosphere, no gimmicks. What we're talking about here is confronting a fortress of ideologies with the truth. That's ministry. And Paul had done it from the beginning to the end faithfully.

Yes, here is a man whose life can be summed up in the words "in much endurance." He endured the negative hostility from the world around him. He endured the positive pressure from holy God who expected the highest level of obedience. And to the very end he endured it all. And you know something? You might expect that a man who had that lofty sense of privilege, who had that tremendous commitment to passion and who was so carefully protective of his own virtue, you might think that man would be some kind of a hero, that he would find a peaceful path in life because of the nobility of his soul and his spiritual commitment, you might think that God would just give him a bed of ease, but he understood a fourth aspect of ministry and you have to understand it and that is paradox. Because of the level of his spiritual commitment, because he was so powerful with the

weapons of righteousness to devastate the strongholds of sinners, because he was so passionate and unrelenting in the assault, they both loved him who believed and despised him who did not. And it is the paradox of ministry that he talks about in verses 8 to 10.

Here's how it comes, "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."

That's the paradox of ministry. Even with all the noble devotion to the other perspectives, the outcome is going to be opposite extremes. And the more faithful you are and the more godly you are and the more virtuous and the more zealous and the more passionate and the greater your sense of privilege and the more you confront the strongholds of human ideas, whether individually or collectively, the more you are going to be the loved and the hated. The people who receive and believe the truth are going to embrace you and adore you as they did the Apostle Paul when they fell with tears all over his neck and kissed him because he was leaving town. On the other hand, while some are on your neck kissing you, there's a plot over here to kill you. And that is how it is in the extremities of ministry.

He describes the paradoxical character of ministry, the series of contrasts starting in verse 8. He says, "By glory and dishonor." Praised and despised, treated as a man of honor and respect and treated as an arch-criminal, exalted and maligned, criticized and flattered, vilified and cherished. It all goes with the job. It all goes with the witness. Light and dark, sun and shadow filled his life. No bland life of routine. The swing was from pole to pole...such is the legacy of spiritually faithful men and women. They're someone's hero and somebody else's antihero. They're someone's friend, and somebody else's enemy. They encourage and they infuriate. They receive glory from some and are given nothing but dishonor from others.

And then he adds, "By evil report and good report." You cannot expect all men to speak well of you if you're faithful to God. Some people gave a good report of the Apostle Paul and some gave an evil report. Some said the truth about his life and ministry, and some lied in order to slander and destroy him. Some will gloriously and happily celebrate the impact of his life on them as he brought the truth to them, and God used him to change their life, others will assault his character and slander him with the hope that they can destroy his effectiveness. This is the very chaos of dichotomy that was going on right in the Corinthians church. There were those in the church who loved and adored Paul and there were those who vilified him.

And Satan, believe me, wants to set that in motion to destroy anyone who preaches the truth and any congregation who has been founded in the truth. But this is the life of one who is a force for truth, someone who makes an impact, a confronter, a divider of sinners from saints, one who really

incarnates the truth and proclaims it faithfully. It is his legacy to have this polarized kind of response where he is the most beloved and the most despised.

Then he says, "Regarded as deceivers and yet true." They said that of Jesus in John 7:12, some of them said He was a good man and others said He's leading people astray, He's a deceiver. Paul was accused of being an imposter and a false apostle. And obviously Satan wants to destroy the reputation of anyone who has become a force for the truth. Even today it's still going on in the name of scholarship in seminaries and places across our country. Paul is being treated as one who deceived.

Being called a liar by those who hate the truth. And being called true by those who love it. Verse 9 tells us a little more about how he viewed the dichotomy of ministry. He says, "As unknown yet well-known." That's interesting. At first in his life he was well-known in the elite of the Jewish community. He was brilliant, he had great ambitions as a Pharisee, all kinds of credentials as zealous, highly trained, blameless Jew known for his leading the assault of persecution on the Christians. He was widely respected and honored in the community of those Pharisees and those Jews who hated Christianity and basically was unknown to the Christians until he began the persecution. But then he became a Christian and it all reversed. The ones who knew him well wanted nothing to do with him, the ones who didn't know him at all wanted everything to do with him. And he who was known and unknown became unknown and known. He was unknown now to the world that he used to be a part of, and he was now well-known to believers. He was ignored by many who never heard of him, yet for others he was the most important person that ever lived because he brought them the truth.

For some he was an obscure nobody. For others he was everything. And that's how it is...that's how it is. There is a world out there that doesn't know who the faithful are, but we know. And they're unknown and yet they're known.

Then he says in verse 9, "As dying, yet behold we live." What does he mean by this? Always on the brink of death. Back in chapter 1 he talked about that in this epistle. Just constantly burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life, we had the sentence of death within ourselves. I mean, it was just a daily thing. He talks about it in chapter 4 again. Every day facing death, every day facing death, always on the brink, always on the brink, his enemies dogging his steps to destroy him and his ministry. And just when they thought they had him, he got away. They stoned him and left him for dead and he rose from the ashes, went back into the city and preached again to the same people. Just when they thought they could get him, he escaped.

They thought they were going to get him in Jerusalem and tie him up and deal with him. That didn't work, he wound up in Caesarea, finally wound up in Rome, everywhere he went he had a tremendous impact for the gospel. He always had the power because the Spirit of God was working through him to break the bands of his enemies and burst forth in a more powerful life. And you know

what always happened to him, is they escalated their persecution and increased the trouble to try to wipe him out. All they did was make him stronger because that's what trouble does, doesn't it? And they just made him more formidable. But death was his constant stalker, but death was unsuccessful until the moment when God determined that it was time for him to go to glory. So on the one hand he was dying daily and yet he was absolutely alive with a vibrant, vivacious, aggressive life right on the brink of death. And again that celebrates the fact that his life was lived among those who loved him and his death was imminent by those who hated him and the truth was the divider.

And then further expanding that same idea, he says in verse 9, "As punished yet not put to death." And here I think he's talking about what he listed in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, all those times he was beaten with whips, 39 times by the Jews, the times he was stoned, the times that he was beaten with rods, and all the imprisonments, all the stocks that he was in, all of the terrible way he was treated in his being put in jails and jails were inconceivable in those ancient times. But even though all of that was true, even though he was punished relentlessly, and in it all they certainly would have wished to take his life, he was never put to death. Even when he came to his first offense he said, "No one stood by me but the Lord was there and the Lord delivered me out of the mouth of the lion." He was really invincible as long as God wanted him alive.

And so they did everything they could to punish him but they could never kill him because that was in the hands of God. And the punishment, all it did was make him stronger because the testing of your faith produces a perfect work.

Well finally, in the last three in the three groups of three that make up this point, verse 10 we read, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things." Here again is paradox in ministry. He was sorrowful. When? All the time. You say, "How do you know that?" Because he said in Romans, "I have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart." It was always there. There was no way he could look at life trivially. He had a deep sorrow, he had a deep pain. He had a broken heart over the unconverted sinners, particularly among Israel. He had a broken heart over disobedient believers, over false teachers, and over corruption and sin in his churches. It just tore him up. It just distressed him. As he says in this very letter, "It depressed him." Yes, he had constant sorrow and yet he was always rejoicing.

Why? Because he had a deep unfailing joy that dwelt way down in the untouched part of his soul because of God's grace and God's power and God's goodness in his life. He rejoiced always. Periodically as he writes his letters he bursts into praise and that's why we have doxologies scattered throughout his epistle. He was not impervious, he was not immune to sorrow. He knew what it was to be discouraged and disappointed. He knew what it was to feel the pain of life far more than we would ever imagine. And yet he never lost his joy. And he said, "Rejoice always, and again I say rejoice." Joy was never touched. That's how it is. It's this paradox of unending joy and unending sorrow.

And then he adds, "As poor yet making many rich." He had very little of this world's possessions. In fact, when he writes to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 he's telling them that he's been willing to work with his hands so nobody has to take up his support. But he says this, "Working night and day so as not to have to cause you to support me." Night and day, in other words, he didn't have any reservoir, he didn't have any bank account, he didn't have any savings bag. He had to work day and night just to sustain his support and the support of those who were with him. He knew what it was to be hungry. He knew what it was to go without sleep. He knew what it was to suffer the difficulties of hard labor just to make ends meet. He had very little of the wealth or possessions of this world. There was a time when he had that and occasionally there would be churches that would send him more than he would need so that he could say to the Philippians, "I know what it's like to be in abundance, to be in prosperity, I also know what it's like to have absolutely nothing. And in either state I am...what?...content."

He had none of this world's goods but he sure made everybody around him who believed what he said rich. He had nothing to give like, you remember, Peter and John, "Silver and gold have I none, yet such as I have give I unto thee." That's what we have to offer. We may not have the world's material goods, but we have what the true riches are.

He was an amazing man. Working all his years to support himself, really had nothing, and yet made people eternally rich. And he closes this section by saying, "As having nothing yet personally possessing all things." Don't feel bad about my poverty, don't feel as if I've been poor just to make you rich, I've possessed everything, absolutely everything.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1...I'm sorry, chapter 3 verse 21, Paul says, "All things belong to you whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all things belong to you and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God." That's riches. He calls them the "unspeakable riches" in Ephesians. Paul had all the lasting treasure, all the gifts God's grace could bestow.

Now, you see, he understood the paradox of ministry. People talk about burn out, they talk about people who get weary in well doing. That is not related to work, as I've told you, that's not related to effort, that's related to unrealized expectation. And if you don't have any expectations you're not going to suffer from that. Paul expected the best and...what?...the worst. So when the best came, he accepted it gladly and when the worst came, he accepted it gladly. One who understands paradox in ministry, one who understands the pendulum swings to two extremes is ahead of the game, really, because you're not going to be put off, you're not going to be knocked down, you're not going to be discouraged when you see it happen. It happened to Jesus, it happened to Paul, it happens to any faithful witness.

You have to expect it. You have to expect that response to your life and ministry will be a wildly oscillating experience. And through all that oscillation from glory to dishonor you maintain endurance, contentment, integrity. You learn to accept the lows and highs. You learn to rejoice when someone comes to Christ. You learn to accept it when someone becomes hostile. The paradox is expected. It happened to Jesus, it happened to Paul, it's happened to all those who faithfully preach the ministry of reconciliation to alienated sinners. It happens to all those who take the weapons of righteousness in the right and left hand, namely the truth, and storm the ideological fortresses of life.

So here was a man who endured through all of this because he had a sense of privilege, passion, protection and paradox. Understanding those things is really crucial if you're going to be an effective ambassador for Jesus Christ. And that's what God has called you and me to be. Let's bow in prayer.

So much more to say, Father, our time is gone, we just commend this to you. We thank You for the truth of this text, the power of it, the example of the beloved Apostle Paul. May we be those who have been made aware through this series of the tremendous privilege to be coworkers with You and to see You entreating sinners to be reconciled through us as we present the truth. May we be committed to the word of truth, the power of God and the weapons of righteousness. May we be passionate, understanding that this is the day of salvation, this is the acceptable time. And may we not get side tracked and render the grace of God in salvation or sanctification useless. And, Lord, may we...may we see the ministry through the perspective of protection so that we guard our lives lest we become a reproach to Your name and put a stumbling block in the way of sinners. And help us to expect the extremes, love and hate, glory and dishonor, that's the nature of it. And, Father, may we be faithful to be the ambassadors You want us to be. Would You do this, Father, we ask You, lead across our path those You desire for us to reach and help us effectively by the use of the truth of Scripture to storm the strongholds of their minds and tear down the speculations and the proud intellectualism that exalts itself above the knowledge of God. And may we be used to bring to the worldly wise the foolishness of the gospel that they might be brought captive the obedience of Jesus Christ. These things we ask in His name. Amen.

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