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

Christian Loyalty, Part 3
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:5-6
Code: 47-74

We come now to our time in the Word of God with great anticipation. I invite you to the second Corinthian letter and the eleventh chapter. The Apostle Paul in this great letter let's us in to his heart more so than in any other of his letters and we have been relishing the experience now for many, many months. I will never be the same as I was before I studied 2 Corinthians by any means, nor will I ever understand ministry in more rich, profound, heart-searching and personal terms than I have come to understand it from knowing the heart of Paul as it's revealed in this tremendous letter.

As we come to chapter 11 in 2 Corinthians, what concerns him here is spiritual loyalty. And we've been talking about that now for two Lord's days and this is the third message on spiritual loyalty. It is the theme of the opening six verses of chapter 11. Solomon recognized and articulated the premium on loyalty when he wrote the axiomatic proverb, "Many a man proclaims his loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?" Proverbs 20 and verse 6. To put it in the vernacular, everybody claiming loyalty isn't demonstrating it. It's easy to say you're loyal and something else to prove it. God Himself said, Hosea 6:6, "I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice."

I suppose we could understand the highest level of loyalty in the terms of "Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," being totally devoted to God, uncompromising, unflinching, unflagging loyalty no matter what the price. This is a virtue of greatest honor. And as we have noted previously, the Apostle Paul faced tremendous disloyalty throughout his life. Churches to whom he had given so much of himself and even more importantly to whom he had given the gospel of Jesus Christ, churches where he had preached and evangelized and where he had founded the church and ordained the elders have slipped into periods of serious disloyalty even before the pages of the New Testament are closed. We read the seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation and the first century is not even over yet and five of the seven manifest serious deep endemic disloyalty that threatens their future existence.

By the time Paul came to the end of his life after such notable career as a preacher and teacher of the truth of God, at times early in his career even a worker of miracles, it's almost unbelievable to read the level of disloyalty that occurred at the end of his life. It should have been that as people got to know him better and as the evidences of his power and the expression of the Spirit of God through him began to multiply as he founded church after church after church and as he wrote letter after letter after letter and as the pattern of his godly example became more familiar to everybody in the known Christian world, you would have assumed that by the end of his life there would be a

tremendous crescendo of loyalty to the man because of all that had gone on before in such unflinching and unwavering devotion to Christ. But the sad fact is that when he went to pen the last letter he ever wrote when he was a prisoner awaiting his imminent execution, that epistle being 2 Timothy, he says to Timothy in chapter 1 of that epistle and verse 15, "You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me." Disloyalty on such a widespread level that he says all that are in Asia turned away from me. He names Phygelus and Hermogenes as two illustrations.

It's almost unthinkable. It's almost inconceivable that there would be such manifest disloyalty to Paul and consequently to what he taught. At the end of that epistle, the last chapter he ever wrote, chapter 4, he says in verse 9 almost with a melancholy tone, "Make every effort to come to me soon for Demas for having loved this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." One can only imagine the deep hurt and pain that Paul felt at the desertion of Demas. Nothing new really. Verse 16 of the same chapter, "At my first defense no one supported me but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me."

I suppose anybody in ministry has to be ready to face disloyalty. I don't think Paul really felt it so profoundly because it just involved him, but because he understood the implications. Disloyalty to the Apostle Paul was tantamount to disloyalty to the one whose ambassador he was. Disloyalty to the Apostle Paul, being ashamed of Paul was being ashamed of Christ for Paul was really lost in Christ, Paul who said, "But for me to live is Christ," Paul who said, "I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me." Paul was almost indistinguishable from Christ. His words were not his words, they were Christ's words. His demands were Christ's demands. His character was Christ's character coming through. It was he who said, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ." And a rejection of Paul, disloyalty to Paul was a tacit disloyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ and that's what was so heart-wrenching about it for him. It wasn't that he needed to accumulate fans, it was that that was betraying an evident defection from Christ. Sad.

As we come to 2 Corinthians we have to say that such a defection had begun in the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church had manifested signs of disloyalty, serious deep disloyalty. And this disloyalty so greatly concerned Paul that he wrote this epistle called 2 Corinthians. And he wrote the epistle to confront the disloyalty in this manner, to confront the disloyalty by affirming and defining clearly and comprehensively the integrity of his own ministry because what had happened, as you know, is the false teachers came, and false teachers always want to teach false doctrine. But where you have a dominant teacher like Paul as the reigning influence in Corinth, they're going to have a hard time teaching their false doctrine. So they came into Corinth with a smear campaign, they came in with an all-out attack and did everything they could to destroy the reputation of Paul. They lied about him in every way imaginable. And sadly, the people listened to their lies, began to lose confidence in Paul, began to gain confidence in the false teachers, gave the false teachers the pulpit and they began to teach the false doctrine. It's in that environment that Paul is concerned, more than concerned, he's frightened of what can happen.

When he hears about that he sends Titus with a letter. Now that letter is not in the New Testament, it's called by Bible students "The Severe Letter." It's referred to in the second chapter here of 2 Corinthians, the letter he wrote with anguish and tears and that letter called them back to loyalty, loyalty to him and loyalty to the message that he taught and the Christ he represented. And they had a fairly decent response to that but there were still smoldering embers of mutiny and smoldering embers of betrayal in that church. And even after the good report from Titus that they wanted to reaffirm Paul, he knew the false apostles were still there and many of the people they had won over were still there and it just went underground.

In order to deal with it in a final way, he writes this letter and he does what he hates to do, what he hates to do is defend himself. In fact, he hates it more than anything else, I think, anything other than sin. And he'd almost...he'd almost rather do anything than have to defend himself because he's such a humble man. He calls himself a clay pot in 2 Corinthians. He calls himself in 1 Corinthians scum, dregs, off-scouring. He refers to himself in most sort of obnoxious terms, the garbage bucket, the trash bin. That's what an earthen vessel was used for. He's a nothing, he calls himself a nobody. He says in 1 Corinthians that he is the least of all the Apostles and he's absolutely a nothing. For a man who views himself like that to be put in a position to have to defend himself is an excruciating thing, but he doesn't have much choice because he must reaffirm his credibility in their eyes because he is the channel of divine revelation and if they turn from him they turn from the truth and they turn from Christ.

He's dealing with a potential group of traitors, betrayers. I wonder if there's anything more despicable in the world than a traitor. Throughout military history, political history, the history of men and nations, traitors bear labels that never go away. Traitors are despicable. The all-time and ultimate and supreme traitor is none other than Judas Iscariot whose name spoken almost turns your mouth downward...an unthinkable betrayal. Traitors are despised for their disloyalty and stigmatized permanently by it. But nothing is more tragic, nothing is more serious and nothing is more despicable in the eyes of God than spiritual disloyalty...disloyalty to Him. It's one thing to be a traitor to your nation, something else to be a traitor to your God, your Christ. Paul was concerned that there was developing in Corinth a mutiny that was going to be full-blown betrayal in his beloved church, so he wrote this epistle to reaffirm his apostleship, his integrity, who he was to remind them that he was the spokesman for God. He was the Apostle of Jesus Christ and if they turn from him they turn from truth.

He starts out this discussion of disloyalty in the first six verses with verse 1, let's look at it. "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are bearing with me." He says you've come this far, just bear with me a little longer, please, and please bear with me in a little foolishness. This is foolishness to him. It's a necessary foolishness. He knows really only a fool would commend himself.He says in verse 18, "Not he who commends himself is approved but whom the Lord

commends," and here he is having to commend himself and he hates that. In verse 17 he said, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." Here he is having to boast about himself and back in chapter 10 and verse 12 he says, "We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves." I hate getting into a comparison with others.

The false teachers had obviously come in and done that, compared themselves with Paul and they pushed Paul down and pushed themselves up. And Paul says I just resent that, that is folly, that is foolishness, that is repulsive, that is repugnant to me. I don't like to do that. But your folly has forced my folly. Your foolishness has forced me to foolishly have to defend myself because the Christian faith is at stake. And if you as a church are seduced away from the truth, then your witness is gone, your power is gone. His beloved people were being deceived and they were being seduced by unscrupulous false teachers.

And the letter is not written so that Paul can gain back his fans. Over in chapter 12 verse 19 he says, "All this time you've been thinking we're defending ourselves to you," you've been thinking I'm doing this for me, "actually it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ." In other words, I'm doing this before God and in full view of Christ and it's not selfish and they can witness that. And it's all for your up-building, beloved. If you don't have the right teacher, you're not going to be edified. This is for you.

So verse 1 opens us to Paul's thinking here...Hang in there as I continue this foolish self-defense a little longer. And then verses 2 to 6 he addresses their disloyalty specifically. It's taken him a long time to get to the specifics of their disloyalty. In many ways this is kind of the heart of the book because here he confronts specifically what concerns him.

First I remind you that there are four features of this disloyalty, four elements of this disloyalty, four categories of this disloyalty, each introduced by the English word "for," f-o-r. which is the Greek word gar. The first one in verse 2, "For I am jealous for you...literally in the Greek...with the jealousy of God." First he was concerned about their disloyalty to God. They were disloyal to God who is a jealous God and allows no other Gods. They were being disloyal to the God who was their creator and their redeemer, and we've looked into that, we won't go over it again.

Secondly, another "for" in verse 2, "For I betrothed you to one husband that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin but I'm afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Secondly he was concerned about their disloyalty to Jesus Christ. And remember, he used that beautiful imagery of a Jewish marriage which had two major components which were divided into the betrothal as we would call the engagement, and the nuptial, or we would call it the wedding. At the betrothal it took on much more force than what we have commonly in our culture as an engagement. At a betrothal it was an actual binding contract only to be broken by death or by divorce. And so the actual contract, the contractual

obligation between the man and the woman was constituted in the betrothal or the engagement.

Then there was about a year period until the wedding. During that year period, you remember, we pointed out the bridegroom went away to get everything ready to take his bride. He went away to secure a living, to build his home. If it was added on the father's house or built on the father's estate or wherever it was he had to prepare the place for her. Just like Jesus in John 14 said, "I go away to prepare a place for you," as a bridegroom would do. I've already made the connection, we've already made the betrothal, I'm going to go away and get your place ready...and that's what the bridegroom would do. And he would do all the preparations and ready everything for her. The father's responsibility was then to protect the virgin who had been given to her pledged husband, his job for that year between the betrothal and the nuptial was to protect her and to keep her pure. That is a father's duty and Paul sees himself as a father. He says I've betrothed you to Christ, I engaged you to Christ when I brought you the gospel and the contract was made and you were bound to Jesus Christ and some day He's going to come and take you to the home He's now preparing. But until that happens my task is to care for you and keep you so that I may present to Him a pure virgin. Now that's a pastor's heart there, that's a shepherd's heart...I have to protect this pure virgin church from being seduced.

And he says in verse 3, "I am afraid...I'm afraid, I've turned my back very briefly and already you're being seduced, I'm afraid it's just going to be like the serpent deceived Eve, the serpent comes in the Garden, he masquerades as the one with the true wisdom, the pure wisdom, the true knowledge of God, as we saw last week. It isn't that he told her to sin, he told her to rebel against God, she thought he was giving her the truth, that he was giving her the right information, that he was calling her to the highest standard of being like God. That's what she thought. She thought he was going to elevate her to a level the likes of which she had never yet known and that she was going to honor God by doing this. That's how false teachers are. They have the secret information, the inside scoop, the higher knowledge. And Paul says, "The same thing is happening to you, they're coming in telling you they've got the true knowledge, the transcendent knowledge. They'll elevate you higher than you've ever been and they'll lift you to the great heights and you're being seduced away from simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

Let me tell you, folks, Paul is saying there's no higher knowledge, there's no esoteric insights, there's no ecstatic experiences, there's no big mysteries up in space somewhere, the Christian life is devotion to Jesus Christ. That's what it is. And so he says...I'm concerned about your disloyalty to God, I'm concerned about your disloyalty to Christ. You've already shown a susceptibility to seduction.

Thirdly in verse 4, he's concerned about their disloyalty to the gospel. Verse 4, "If one comes...and one did, you can translate it 'since'...Since one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached..." Obviously they didn't come in and deny Jesus, they just perverted who He was.

They just twisted around His identity. "Oh yes, we believe in Jesus, of course we believe in Jesus..." and they talked about Jesus but it wasn't the Jesus Paul preached. And they came under the power of a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit they had received, but a demon spirit because all false teaching about Christ or anything else is from demons, doctrines of demons and seducing spirits. So they came preaching another Jesus under the power of a different spirit and with a different gospel...the gospel of mixtures of works and bringing in Greek philosophy and elements of antinomianism, all mixed up. They came in with a different Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel. And at the end of verse 4 he says, "You bear this beautifully." Is that not amazing?

You gave them the pulpit. You just took them in. Just unimaginable. Disloyalty to the gospel. This is serious stuff.

Finally, and our last point for this morning, he was concerned about their disloyalty to the truth. That was all just reviewing what we said, but it's necessary to get you into the flow. The fourth "for" comes at the beginning of verse 5, "For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles but even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I'm not so in knowledge, in fact in every way we've made this evident to you in all things."

These two verses are really important because they deal with disloyalty to the truth. He starts out with the word "for," garagain, indicating a key to the fourth element in this discussion of disloyalty. And he's saying, you know, "You can be so easily moved by the false apostles. You can be so easily seduced by the false teachers. You just bear them beautifully. I mean, you just...you just roll over and in they come. You just throw open your arms and you bring them right in and you welcome them." Now he says if you can do that for those who bring another Jesus and another spirit and another gospel, I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

This is what I call a minimalistic statement. He says, "I consider myself not in the least inferior." I mean, he is so hesitant to say anything self-promoting that he says the bare minimum. He's saying...he's not saying they're equal to me, but he's saying I'm at least equal to them. Again you see his humility in this. "I don't like these kinds of comparisons," remember what we saw in chapter 10 verse 12, "I don't like to boast. If I'm going to boast I'm going to boast about the Lord. I know that it's not he commends himself but whom the Lord commends who is approved. I don't like this. But I'm telling you, I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles."

Now some people think he means here the Twelve when he says the most eminent apostles, he's talking about the Twelve and he's saying...I'm not the least of the Twelve, I'm not anything inferior to the Twelve true Apostles. And that was true, he was equal to them although in 1 Corinthians 15 he says he was the least of the Apostles and didn't even deserve to be called an Apostle because he was a blasphemer before. So when he has an opportunity in 1 Corinthians 15 to compare himself with the true Apostles, he says I'm the least of all of them, I'm not even worthy to be one, I'm an

apostle born out of the normal time, I don't even belong to be mentioned in the same breath because I was a blasphemer. It is true though that he was equal to the Apostles, even though so humbly in his own spirit, so humbly devoted to Christ and so sensing his own unworthiness he wouldn't acknowledge it, it was true, he was equal to the Apostles, and certainly in some ways more useful than the others since it was he who was used by the Holy Spirit to write thirteen epistles and some of the Apostles wrote nothing.

But I don't think he's talking about the Apostles here. In fact, if you want to know what the Greek said, it says, "I consider myself not in the least inferior to the extra-super Apostles." That's what he says in the Greek and that is dripping sarcasm. Paul can be sarcastic. First Corinthians...now you are rich, now you are kings, aren't you something...I wish you were...he says. He can be sarcastic. And here he is. He's not talking about the Twelve Apostles, he wouldn't compare himself to them in the way he does in verse 6..."Even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge." Why would he compare himself with whoever he's talking about and saying...I've got the knowledge...if he was talking about the Apostles. He wouldn't compare himself to the true Apostles as being characterized by knowledge as if the Twelve weren't. But when he compares his knowledge with whoever these super-extra-super apostles are, he is saying they don't have it and I do. And that's evidence that he's talking here about the false apostles. They're the issue. He is talking about the false apostles, and I can show you that as you look at this whole section of Scripture. He calls them the extra-super apostles. That's probably what they called themselves, truthfully.

Down in verse 13 they were identified as false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, disguising themselves, verse 14, as an angel of light, disguising themselves, verse 15, as servants of righteousness. They came...Oh, we are the servants of righteousness, we are the angels of light, we are...we are the apostles, we are the true workers of God, we are the apostles of Christ. In fact, Paul is this lowly lying guy who is just a fraud and a fake and we're the extra super apostles. Paul says...You accept them and you won't accept me and I am at least their equal. That's the minimum statement. And in fact, he's a lot more and he gets to that. But I think it's so interesting how he compares himself.

Finally in chapter 11 verse 21, he actually...he goes so far as to compare himself. And I think this is so wonderful. He says, "To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison." Isn't that interesting? To my shame we are...I have to admit, we've been weak by comparison. You know what he said? I haven't said enough...I... And this is what I was saying to you, remember a couple of weeks ago, how hard it is for the servant of the Lord to get put in the position where he has to blow his own horn. But sometimes you get to the place where if you don't you can't survive in the place of responsible ministry. And you don't like to do that but there are times when you have to and Paul says, "I confess, to my shame I just haven't gotten into the fray and held my own...so here I go."

Verse 22, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Let's get the comparison rolling here. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane." In other words, he hates to even suggest that, that's like a statement of a madman, but that's what they're claiming. "I more so." You want my credentials? Now what do you think he's going to say? I graduated from the school of So-and-so and So-and-so? And I have papers from the So-and-so institution and ??? No.

Here we go. "I'm more of a servant of Christ than they are because I had more labors, more imprisonments, I've been beaten more times and in danger of death more often."

Wow, that's interesting, isn't it? "In fact, five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I spent in the deep. I've been on frequent journeys and everybody's after me, even the rivers are after me. The robbers, the countrymen, the Gentiles, I'm in danger in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea, among false brethren. I've been in labor and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, without food, cold, exposure. Those are my credentials."

Let me tell you something about false prophets. They're not in it to suffer. We understand that, don't we? They're in it for the...what?...the money. They're in it for the filthy lucre. Paul says..."You want to know how...how to measure me? Measure me like this, I am a servant of Christ far more than they are because I've been abused and beaten and hammered and killed." Wow. Those are his credentials. You can tell the true servant of Jesus Christ by the abuse he suffers from the ungodly, right? The Jews were after him. The apostate Jews were after him. The Gentiles were after him. Everybody was after him. The whole kingdom of darkness was amassed against the man. And all those things were evidences of legitimate apostleship. Jesus put it this way, "Don't expect to have it any different than I got it, right?" Remember in Matthew 10 where He said, "The servant is not above his lord. The way they've treated Me is the way they're going to treat you. In this world you shall have...what?...tribulation." They're going to throw you out of the synagogues, etc., etc., etc. Jesus said they're going to treat you the exact same way they treated Me.

Those are his credentials. That proves that he's an apostle. He doesn't leave it there. He even talks about how the Lord delivered him at the end of the twelfth...eleventh chapter. He talks about how the Lord delivered him out of the city of Damascus when he was seized, an incredible thing. And that again is a badge of God's faithfulness to him, delivering him from that potential death. And then he comes in to chapter 12 and says, "I've got to tell you, I've been to heaven, folks. I've been to heaven and back. I was caught up to paradise and I heard things which a man is not permitted to speak." You want...you want...you want to do a comparison? Here's a comparison, I've suffered more than they have. God has demonstrated His power in my life more than theirs and I have been to heaven and back. But, he says, I'd rather talk about my weakness in verse 5. He didn't want to talk about heaven. I'd rather talk about my weakness, please. I just want to speak about my weakness. "I just

want to tell you I have this thorn in the flesh and I keep asking the Lord to take it away and He just doesn't. So let me boast, verse 9, in my weakness and I'm content with weakness, insult, distress, persecution, difficulties for Christ's sake for when I'm weak then I'm strong. But I'll tell you this...verse 12...the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance with signs and wonders and miracles."

What else do I need to say? You saw my suffering. You know I was delivered by God miraculously. You know I've been to heaven and back. And you know that I have done the signs and wonders and miracles associated with the true Apostle. What is the problem? Verse 11 sums it up. "I have become foolish, you yourselves compelled me." I don't like to do all this. I don't like to talk this way, this is foolishness, but you make me do this. "I should have been commended by you." You shouldn't make me do this. You should have been commending me instead of me having to commend myself. "For in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles." There he is sarcastic again, the extra super-guys. "Even though...here he goes right back to it...I'm a nobody." He felt so comfortable referring to himself in the most base terms. It was such a foreign thing for him to have to elevate himself.

This is a remarkable man...a remarkable man. Earlier in this epistle his humility manifests itself in chapter 4. In verse 7 he says, "We have the treasure of the gospel in this clay pot that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." And then he starts to define the clay pot. He says, "The clay pot is afflicted, not crushed; perplexed, not despairing; persecuted, not forsaken; struck down, not destroyed."

Now what kind of vessel are you, Paul? Well, let me give you my credentials. I am afflicted. I am perplexed. I am persecuted and I am struck down. Furthermore, I'm always dying.

Boy, you don't sound like much of a success. Chapter 6, let me define myself, he says. Verse 4, 6:4, this is great, "I would like to commend myself as a servant of God." Okay, give us your credentials. Here they come. "Endurance, affliction, hardship, distress, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, hunger. Purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, the Word of truth, the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, evil report, good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true, unknown yet well-known, dying yet we live, punished yet put to death, sorrowful yet rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing yet possessing everything." What a statement. Credentials. He was much more comfortable talking about his weakness, his suffering, his nothingness.

Let's go back to our text. What he's saying in a simple statement of verse 5 is...Come on, I'm certainly not inferior in the least to these extra-super apostles, and you know it...you know it. And beyond anything else, beyond suffering, beyond trips to heaven, beyond whatever, verse 6, "You know this, even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in...what?...in knowledge." This is s great

statement.

One of their attacks on Paul was that he was really a poor speaker. Go back to chapter 10 verse 10. "They say...these false apostles...they say his letters are weighty and strong." Well, nobody could deny that. They couldn't deny the power of his letters, his inspired sanctified reasoning and his theology. They couldn't deny that his letters had clarity, rationality and spirituality. "But his personal presence is unimpressive." The man lacks aura. He doesn't have persona. His demeanor is not attractive. The guy has no charm. He has no personal magnetism. Where is the oppressive demeanor? Where is that dominating presence? Where is that aura when you come into the room and everybody is drawn to you? Where is his kingliness? Where is that controlling personality? Where is that invincibility? Where is that self-confidence? He hasn't got it.

Secondly, his speech is contemptible. In other words, as a speaker he's just terrible. And the combination of being homely and unable to communicate was pretty serious in their minds. The guy wasn't attractive physically and he couldn't speak. Where is the impressive oratory? Where is the compelling rhetoric? Where is the knowledge of Greek philosophy? They were so used to that in their culture, they worshiped eloquence. I mean, they used to go down, you know, you read these stories about the Greek philosophers, they used to go down to the river and fill their mouth with marbles and learn how to articulate with all these little round stones in their mouths, teaching themselves how to articulate. I remember going to a seminary class at another seminary one time and this class was offered a semester long on the proper usage of the microphone. There are always those who are enamored by the polish of the speaker. This was no polished speaker.

In fact, go back to our text, he says, "Okay, I acknowledge I am unskilled in speech." And the word "unskilled," are you ready for this? It's the Greek word idiotes, it's the word for idiot in English. It has a contemptuous edge. I know, I'm an idiot as an orator...is what he's saying...I know that...rude and crude and they said amateurish, untrained, common, unrefined and ordinary...that's what the word means, idiotes. He was no orator. He was clear. He was profound. But he didn't have any of the oratorical finery. It was...to him it wasn't the technique, it was the truth that was captivating, right? Only truth and clarity concerned Paul, and the simpler the better. I want you to know that I've learned a lot from him. My goal in preaching is to be as simple as I can possibly be, and to me it's not a big challenge cause I'm pretty close to there when I get started. But if I...if I think I'm saying something or going to say something in a difficult way, I work very hard to simplify it. There's no virtue in you being struck by my erudition...that means thinking I'm smart. I mean, I like to expand your vocabulary a little as we go, but... The issue is the truth. I believe the truth empowered by the Spirit of God does its work, I don't think the oratory of the man plays a role if it's human embellishment, human eloquence.

Paul knows that he is unskilled in speech. He doesn't want to be. He isn't interested in sticking pebbles in his mouth and learning how to do something. He's not interested in theatrics. He's not interested in manipulation of crowds. You see, Paul knows that the human eloquence draws men to

the preacher not to the cross. Faithful preaching results not in men admiring the preacher, but men admiring the Christ of the preacher and wondering how the preacher makes a living doing that. Paul never wanted to establish a reputation for himself as an actor or an orator. He did want to establish a relationship between the people and Christ.

Go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, comparative passage as we kind of wrap this up. First Corinthians 1:17 Paul says, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." He simply means here that they were always fighting in Corinth about who belonged to who and pride was an issue and I'm of Paul and I'm of Cephas and I'm of Christ. And, you know, there was going to be a contest about...Oh, I was baptized by Paul, who baptized you? You know. So he says I don't want to get into that, that's, you know, I have baptized and I will baptize but not everybody will be baptized by Paul...that's not the issue. But I will preach to everyone the gospel. And verse 17, "Not in cleverness of speech." I avoid that, I don't want to be convoluted, I don't want to be cute. I don't want to be clever. I'm not trying to be culturally relevant. I just want to speak the power of God, the cross of Christ. And if I get too clever with my speech then the cross of Christ becomes void because people get drawn to the preacher and the rhetoric and the oratory and not the truth...and not the truth. He disdains that worldly wisdom, that human oratory, that flowery speech for the word of the cross, verse 18, "To those that are perishing is foolishness." The people who are perishing, the unregenerate people, it might seem like simple, plain, bland, foolish folly to them, "But to those who are being saved it's the power of God," isn't it?

You can preach the gospel, the clear, simple, straightforward gospel and somebody can walk out and say, "Well, he's certainly not much of an intellect. I didn't hear anything very intellectual. He doesn't seem well read. He's..." There's an awful lot of intellectual pride today...so much intellectual pride today. And people can walk out and say, "Well, I don't think he's a very astute person." At the same time, somebody else at the end of that service can say, "I want Jesus Christ as my Savior." That's what you're after. And in the end, God's going to destroy, verse 19, "The wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever He's going to set aside. And then where is the wise man and where is the scribe and where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

You know why the wisdom of the world is so foolish? Because of verse 21, "The wisdom...in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom didn't come to know God." The reason the wisdom of the world is foolish is it can't lead anybody to God. It leads everybody to hell. The way to come to God is through the foolishness of preaching, not just the preaching but the message preached. So verse 23, "We preach Christ crucified. May be a stumbling block to the Jews and may seem like foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

We preach a simple message and we are simple preachers. Verse 26, "Consider your calling, brethren, there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. God

has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong." A simple preacher confronts a massive worldly, wise, philosophical intellect and humbles him by the power of the gospel. So here we are, the weak, the humble, the simple, the not many noble, the not many mighty, the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world and we preach the gospel that tears down Satan's fortresses and we shame the things that are strong and therefore God is glorified, verse 29, because no man can boast.

Down in verse 1 of chapter 2, "When I came to you, brethren, because of these things...he said...I didn't come to you with superiority of speech or of wisdom." And wisdom means all this Greek sophistry. "I didn't come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in the forms of superior speech and human wisdom, I just came wanting to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified and I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God. Yet...verse 6...we do speak wisdom, a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away."

Paul says...I'm not going to compete in an oratory contest. I'm not interested in getting into a bout on rhetoric. I'm not interested in a popularity contest for who is the most polished speaker. I am here to preach the simple straightforward word of the cross. I am here to bring down the wisdom of this world with the foolishness of the gospel and I am here to preach a straightforward simple inescapable message of salvation so that you can hear it and believe and your faith can rest in the power of God and not the wisdom of men.

It is wisdom, but it's a wisdom hidden...verse 7...wisdom in a mystery, hidden previously and God has predestined before the ages to bring it to us for our glory. It's the wisdom, verse 8, which none of the rulers of this age understood. If they had understood it, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory.

What wisdom is it? Verse 10, "It's the wisdom God revealed through the Spirit." What he's saying here is Scripture. He was an inspired writer. "We preach the Scripture, the wisdom God revealed through the Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, the deep things of God; for who among men know the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is within him. Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. The Spirit of God brings to us through revelation...verse 10...God revealed them. So we have received...verse 12...not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God. We have these truths taught by the Spirit...verse 13...spiritual truths coming in spiritual words." At the end of verse 16 he says we have the mind of Christ.

What's he talking about? Talking about the revelation of God, talking about Scripture, talking about the Bible, talking about Scripture. Now Paul...note this...Paul is not saying he's an ineffective

speaker. He is a very effective preacher. He's not saying he lacks power and influence. He has tremendous power and immense influence. What he is saying is he's not interested in clever tricks of human communication. He's not interested in nuances of human philosophies, not interested in just being culturally relevant and playing to the charms of his hearers. He disdained theatrics. He disdained artificiality. He disdained any fancy manipulations of clever words. But when it came to what mattered and when it came to the truth, he excelled. And that's why we read there in our text that he says, verse 6, "I might be unskilled in speech, but I am not so in knowledge." In fact, he brought the knowledge of God, the truth and that is exactly what concerned him. He wasn't interested in human wisdom and technique producing converts of men. He was interested in the truth and he brought the truth.

On the other hand, the false teachers came with all the tricks of rhetoric and oratory and they came in trying to seduce people for their own personal gain. They were more clever and more entertaining than he but they brought lies and he had the true knowledge. There wasn't any...the implication here is they had the secret extra...there was no more than he gave them. It's not like the false apostles came into Corinth and said. "Now look, guys, we know you've got some blanks in your doctrinal statement here...got some categories missing, got some holes in your theology and we'd like to fill them in." No, no.

Paul says in verse 6, "I am not at all unskilled in knowledge. In fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things," that means on all subjects. What does he mean by that? We've given you the whole counsel of God. We've covered it all. There aren't any blanks in your theology. There aren't any white spaces in your doctrinal statement. There aren't any holes in your belief system. We came there unembellished, unself-conscious, clear, simple, straightforward and spoke to you the whole counsel of God...as he calls it in Acts 20. We gave you the true knowledge. You have it and you know it.

The contrast is between what is temporal, artificial, shallow, affected, superficial and human and what is deep and eternal and heavenly and divine and life-transforming truth from God. Please, he says, don't be disloyal to God, don't be disloyal to Christ, don't be disloyal to the gospel and don't be disloyal to the truth. I think this is what every pastor would long to see in his church and this, as I said, is what verse 28 of chapter 11 means when it says there's a daily pressure upon me of concern for the church. That's not administrative duties, that's concern that the church be kept a pure and loyal virgin. We're not interested in the kind of preaching that plays for applause because it's conducive to human adulation. I really think...I know...I suppose they don't mind some applause occasionally when people applaud a preacher, but usually when people applause a preacher, it seems to me that they're applauding something...some short of mental manipulation, some sort of catch phrase or catch statement or some...some clever thing said. And on the other hand, that's not always true. But on the other hand, it seems to me that when people are by the preacher brought face to face with the profound reality of the living God...applause is the farthest thing from their minds.

Paul says...Look, I brought you knowledge. In every way you know it because it's been evident to you in all things. They had crystal-clear insight into the truth and here they were being seduced. This is the challenge of caring for the church, isn't it? There couldn't be a better pastor than Paul and there couldn't be a human being who laid a better doctrinal foundation than he did and still he had to fight for the loyalty of his congregation. Just being gone a little while and the seducers come. They're there, folks. By the grace of God and the discernment of the Holy Spirit, they're not going to get into this pulpit, not while I'm here. But they're all around. They're all around. They come at you through books, tapes, radio and television, and whatever other means and media...they're out there. I just was dealing with a couple in our church recently who after many, many years in our church, many, many years of being taught were drawn away. I just scratch my head. You know, how can people be seduced? It happens...it happens and I'm doing what I can and the harder I try to pull them back, the more they see me as the enemy. It's not that they have any blanks in their doctrinal statement, it's just sheep wander. Boy, they're an apt illustration. And we have to call you to constant loyalty, just as Paul did. Paul wanted it for the Corinthians, Christ wants it from us, doesn't He? Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning, it's been just a great morning and we give you the thanks. Everything we trust has been a tribute to Your honor and Your glory. We want to reaffirm our loyalty to You, God, our loyalty to Jesus Christ, our loyalty to gospel, our loyalty to the truth of Scripture. We want unwaveringly to commit ourselves to that because You are worthy of that loyalty...unthinkable to be disloyal to You, to betray You, to be a Judas. It's just inconceivable that we would ever get to the place where we had been so seduced that we could abandon our devotion to Jesus Christ or be drawn away from the truth, to lies and confusion, or to some confusing of the gospel. O Lord, the false teachers are everywhere, but You've given us the truth. You've given us true teachers. And, Lord, we want to be loyal, want to love You with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength and we want that to manifest that in our faithfulness in all these areas. May we remember that the Christian life is very, very simply defined...it is purity of devotion to Jesus Christ. We don't need to get sucked off and pulled off into higher things and deeper things and stranger experiences, we just need to be focused on Jesus Christ. "For to me to live is Christ," that should be our cry. "Oh to be like Thee, dear Jesus, my plea, just to know Thou art formed fully in me." That was Paul's prayer that Christ might be fully formed in us. We want to be loyal, Lord, and we need Your strength for it. Be gracious to us in that and we'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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