

Marks of a True Apostle: Humility

2 Corinthians 11:7-9

47-75

Now we come in our study of God's Word to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. And the text before us in this particular study is from verse 7 down through verse 15, although we'll not be able to cover all of that this morning. In fact, I can make a few confessions to you that this is a somewhat historical portion of Scripture, it really deals with the debate between the Apostle Paul, as it were, and the false teachers in Corinth. It is a comparison that Paul makes between himself and those false teachers for the benefit of the Corinthian church. It largely concerns itself with a historical incident. It doesn't really have anything in it that's particularly doctrinal, at least in the first part which we'll cover today. It doesn't even have anything in it in the first part that appears on the surface to be very practical.

And, of course, as I read the Scripture I'm always looking for those things that are true about God, those things that are true about Christ, those things that are true about the great doctrines of the faith, those things that apply to me as an individual Christian, and those practical issues of life. As I was reading through this some weeks ago, realizing that there isn't a lot there that isn't just related to the historical event itself, I decided that maybe I ought to dig a little bit deeper. So I dug a little bit deeper and that's really all there was...was just a reference to the issue between Paul and the false apostles and his interaction with the Corinthians. And yet I know the Spirit of God has put it in the Scripture because it is instructive for us. I don't know how in specifics the Spirit of God will apply all of these things to our hearts, but I'm confident that He has used it in my life to strengthen my resolve to be faithful to the truth and to be guarded against the seducing error that Satan so subtly brings across our path.

It's another one of those passages and I've entitled it, "Beware of Gullibility." It's another one of those passages that deals with the potential gullibility of the church and its susceptibility to satanic deception and seduction. And throughout the history of the church, the most damaging assault on the church has not come from atheism. It has not come from the rise of scientific skepticism and humanism. Those aberrations are damning error but they don't threaten the church. What has always threatened and devastated the church is the convergence of spiritual deception and public gullibility: Christians who lack discernment, who lack wisdom, being seduced by what appears to be divine truth but is not.

G.K. Chesterton said that when people abandon the truth, they do not believe in nothing, they believe in anything. And history has verified that statement. As the church has been assaulted through its life by false doctrine and deceptive lies about God and Christ and the gospel, there have developed thousands and thousands and thousands of sects and cults and aberrant groups within the larger picture of believing in God. Bizarre and unbiblical systems by their success verify what Chesterton said, that when people don't believe the truth, they believe anything.

Roy Clements, a pastor in England, wrote, "The church does not have to worry seriously about

atheism. That is an ephemeral superstition. It does not seriously threaten the religious consciousness of the world. Marxism, which is atheism, sustained whatever limited success it had in promoting it only by vicious policies of repression. No, the real danger is not unbelief but wrong belief, not skepticism but superstition, not irreligion but religion, not the doubter but the deceiver. And again and again church history has proven this true. It is not external assaults on Christianity by its ideological, philosophical or religious rivals that have represented the most serious threat to its survival, it is the subtle infiltration of saboteurs who exploit the gullibility of Christian people," end quote.

The bottom line is what really threatens the church is what sounds Christian, what sounds biblical, what sounds spiritual. Those are the people who do damage to the church. Those who say they represent God, those who say they represent Christ, those who say they teach the truth of the Bible or have the right interpretation of the Bible, deceivers who present themselves as true Christian preachers and ministers and teachers and succeed in duping the gullible church with their false claims to spiritual authority, these are the people who do real damage to the church and have throughout the church history. The Bible warns about this, it warns about it over and over and over and I will not beg the issue by dragging you back through all the myriad of passages which you're already familiar with. We've covered them many times in this series. But there always have been false teachers, there always will be false teachers and they will escalate the closer we get to the end of the age. There will be those who have fabricated a false gospel, a false Jesus come in the power of a false spirit, those who are prompted by seducing spirits, sprouting doctrines of demons, those who come as deceivers, those who come wanting to steal the souls of men and women for damnable purposes, those who profess the truth but in attitude and behavior deny the truth...those false teachers are ubiquitous, they're everywhere all the time. And Scripture literally is loaded with such clear warnings about them.

Nonetheless, the church has still proven to be gullible. Here we are living this far after the biblical record is completed, 2000 years ago, here we are this far after refining our theology for 2000 years, here we are as well taught as is possible with the proliferation of theology and books that have been written through the years, of all Christians in all times we should be the most discerning...we should be the most able to discern truth from error, we should be the most impervious to the subtle deceptions of Satan. But I've watched over the last ten years and seen the evangelical church in its massive gullibility slide into deception after deception after deception. Satan is very powerful, he is very clever and he is very subtle. His disguises are myriad and they are well designed. His seductions are alluring and Christians continue to be gullible. Christians find it hard to believe today that anyone who is nice, friendly, charming, sound spiritual and is clever with words, talks about God, talks about Jesus could ever be a hypocritical liar espousing demon doctrine. Christian gullibility or if you want another definition for that it's the absence of discernment, Christian gullibility has made the church today subject to the wiles of the devil. They're working successfully and effectively to seduce the church.

That's exactly the way it worked in Corinth and that's the way it works now. The church today is being beguiled and the church then was being beguiled. And this is a good passage to look at to see how...how clever the beguiling tactics of Satan really are and how Satan can shift and move depending on what happens to carry out his seductions. He'll play the game anyway you structure it and if you're not discerning, you can be seduced.

In fact, the 2 Corinthian letter, the letter before us, is written by Paul to act as an antidote to already

beginning seduction. False teachers have come in to Corinth, they had begun the seduction. Paul realized it was going on and he wrote this letter to reestablish in their minds his apostleship, the integrity of his ministry so that they would turn back to him because he spoke the truth. This whole letter was written then to defend Paul's true apostleship and bring the Corinthians back under the true authority of Christ's apostle speaking the Word of God.

Now he's been defending his own authority all the way through the end of chapter 10. That section did make some references to the false apostles and the false teachers, but primarily that whole ten chapters was devoted to Paul defending his apostleship and its integrity and his character and the place he had in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Starting in chapter 11 now he moves directly to dealing with the false apostles. He saved that for the last. Starting in chapter 11 and running all the way to the middle of chapter 12 is really a comparison between himself and the false apostles. And it's helpful to all of us because it gives us some criteria, it gives us a model by which to compare true teachers today with false teachers. Remember in the opening six verses he addressed the crucial matter of spiritual loyalty and he asked really the question of the Corinthians...are you going to be loyal to God, Christ, the gospel and divine truth, or not? Because if you're disloyal to me, you are disloyal to God, Christ, the gospel and divine truth. If you're loyal to the false apostles, you are disloyal in every sense to those matters. So he called for their spiritual loyalty in the first six verses, and then starting in verse 7 and flowing from verse 7 all the way down, as I said, to the middle of chapter 12 he contrasts himself with the false apostles. As I have told you, this is something he hates to do. He doesn't like doing this. He doesn't want to compare himself with others, as he said in chapter 10, but he is forced to do it.

And so the opening section is verses 7 to 15 and here he compares himself as a true apostle with what he calls in verse 13 false apostles, deceitful workers who are disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. So here is the passage that shows how he is the true apostle and how they are false apostles. He compares his humility with their pride. He compares his sacrificial unselfishness to their greed. He compares his integrity to their masquerade. He compares his love to their abuse. True apostles are characterized by humility, truth and love. False apostles are characterized by pride, and by the inherent element in pride called greed, by lies and by abuse. And that's the contrast.

The section provides this contrast in very stark terms, between those who lovingly, humbly proclaim the truth and those who hatefully, deceptively abuse the church by seduction. This is nothing new. This is very pertinent. But the structure of it here deals specifically with the issue in Corinth.

Now the underlying theme, this sort of behind the major theme of the contrast, the underlying issue at first here is the issue of money. And it's important to note that because always, as I told you through the years, false teachers in the Bible are motivated by money. Greed always drives them, the love of filthy lucre. And so the underlying element of this comparison has to do with money. And we'll see how that unfolds because false teachers are always in it for the money, whereas true teachers disdain greed, don't operate out of filthy lucre, seek nothing but the souls of men, minister sacrificially in every sense as you well know. False teachers don't. They want the money.

Now as you remember, Paul had been forced to this distasteful necessity of making the comparison by the defection of the Corinthians. And so unwillingly but necessarily he gets into this contrast. They were in danger, the Corinthians were being brainwashed by the false apostles and Paul wants to save them from that so this is an antidote to that.

Now as I said, there's a comparison here between the true Apostle, verses 7 to 11, and the false apostle, verses 12 to 15. The true apostle is characterized by humility, truth and love. The false apostle is characterized by pride, deception and hate, or abuse. Now this morning we'll just get a start in to this passage because I have to give you some historical background and I'm going to feel more like the professor in a class than I am the preacher, this morning. But this is all part of expositing Scripture, you have to deal with what the Lord puts before you. I don't feel I need to make any excuses for that, nor do I need to spiritualize it to turn it into some little...little idea that you can somehow implement into the practical matter of your daily life. It's enough for me to give you the truth the way God gave it to us and watch the Spirit of God weave it into the fabric of your life which will issue in combat as God sees fit.

But let's look, first of all, at the true apostle, verses 7 to 11...the true apostle. You will notice that he is marked by humility, first of all. Verse 7, "Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you. And when I was present with you and in need I was not a burden to anyone. When the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so."

Secondly, the true apostle is characterized by truth, verse 10. "As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia." And thirdly, the true apostle is characterized by love, verse 11. Why? "Because I do not love you, God knows I do."

And there in those statements Paul essentially defines himself as a true apostle by virtue of humility, truth and love. Let's start with humility, verses 7 to 9, and for this morning, actually, that's where we'll start and that's where we'll end because it gives us so much to talk about. The true apostle is characterized by self-effacing, self-sacrificing humility.

Verse 7, "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?"

Now you feel like when you read that verse you're just kind of jumping in somewhere because the first word is "or" and actually you are jumping in. But let me just say, first of all, before we find out what the jump...where the jump came from, Paul is asking a very simple question, but it's full of sarcasm and it's full of irony. He is saying...Has my preaching to you the gospel without accepting any money made me guilty of some sin?

Now the implication is that that is exactly what he was being accused of. And herein lies the subtlety of Satan's approach. You say...Well, what do you mean by that? I mean that the Corinthians had been convinced that one of the evidences that Paul was a charlatan, that Paul was a fraud, that he was a fake was that he didn't take any money. Paul was trying to take the high ground, not take any money. Satan through the false teachers twisted that so that it became a reason to question Paul's integrity and authority.

How can that be? Well you have to go back to verse 6, the "or" takes us back. Let's go back to verse 6. "But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I'm not so in knowledge. In fact, in every way he had made this evident to you in all things."

Now Paul admits here to being unskilled. Let me give you the Greek meaning of that word, I gave it to you last time, but I'll give it to you again. The root meaning is "amateur." Even if I'm an amateur. You remember back in chapter 10 verse 10 the false teachers trying to discredit Paul, obviously, if they were going to be successful they had to wipe out Paul's influence and they did that by endeavoring to attack his credibility and integrity. And one of the things they said about him is his letters are weighty and strong but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible. They said the man lacks any oratorical skill. The man is a lousy public speaker. The man is dull, he's uninteresting, he has none of the flair and fancy rhetoric. He can't even compete in the circles of rhetoricians and magicians and philosophers. He doesn't even belong there. He's...he's common, he's an amateur and all he ever does is drone on about the cross. He disdains clever words of human wisdom.

And so they...and he admitted it. He said in the first letter, 1 Corinthians, he didn't come to you with the words of human wisdom, he didn't come to you in clever words, but he came in simple terms, preaching only Christ and Him crucified. He really disdained any of that flowery, fancy rhetoric that was so popular among the Greeks. They said he's an amateur. He said...Okay, I'm an amateur. And this is what brings up the issue of verse 7. Among the Greeks, a skilled orator, a recognized orator, a recognized philosopher was considered a professional. That's how he made his living. He traveled around as a public speaker. He traveled from city to city, or traveled around a city or go daily to the gruel of the marketplace or the forum or somewhere to be heard and he would gather a crowd and he would charge them a fee to hear him speak. He lived by his craft. He would be polished, erudite, articulate and he was a professional and he lived by his speaking. For a teacher to refuse remuneration, for a speaker to refuse pay, to refuse money would be to label himself as an amateur. So that's exactly what the false teachers said. Can't you see Paul won't take any money because he knows he's an amateur. He doesn't even belong with us in the same breath. He shouldn't even be standing in this place and speaking to you he's such an amateur. His presence is unimpressive and his speech is outright contemptible. You ought to be suspicious of the credentials of that man because the very fact that he won't charge you for his preaching is how he values it. He's put the price on his own preaching, it's worthless. He himself has made that clear.

And because it had none of the flair and none of the fancy and none of the cleverness of the popular rhetoric, because it was simple and straightforward and plain language, unembellished, this seductive idea had some...some power in their minds. If he really had something to say that was worth hearing he would charge for it like all the other professionals, wouldn't he? He himself has put the price on his own stuff, it's worthless.

Greek culture actually, and this is...you can find this in Greek history, Greek culture actually measured the importance and value of a philosopher by the fee he could command. The more he could command, the more valuable he was. Antiphon was recorded to have told Socrates who used to make no charge for his teaching, that was Socrates' custom. Antiphon said, "If you consider your conversation to be worth anything, you would demand for it no less remuneration than it was worth. And accordingly the just, though he might be because he deceived nobody through covetousness, wise he could not be since he had no knowledge that was worth any value."

Professional philosophers and sophists who sold their wisdom for money were a familiar feature in Greek society, not only in Socrates' time but later on in Hellenistic times and times and times of Paul. So here is another one of those subtleties that Satan will use to get his way in, another false

accusation against Paul. He was not a genuine apostle, he was not a genuine spokesman for God...he didn't bring profound truth and knowledge and that ought to be obvious since his teaching was so worthless to himself that he wouldn't even accept money for it. How could it be worth anything to you? A man with such reluctance is declared himself to be an amateur, unworthy of people's acceptance as an authoritative apostle. That was their argument and the Corinthians bought into it...so gullible. And they bought into it in spite of what Paul had written in 1 Corinthians.

Go back to 1 Corinthians 9. It wasn't that they didn't understand why he didn't take any money, he told them why. It wasn't that he put no value on his teaching, he put great value on his teaching. Back in 1 Corinthians 9 in a letter he had written them earlier, the issue came up about money and this is what he said starting in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 9, "My defense to those who examine me is this..." He's going to get into this whole defense about support. "Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Don't those who teach and preach the gospel, those who travel around and plant churches have a right to daily sustenance?" Of course they do. Verse 5, "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas...Peter? Don't we have a right to have a wife and to bring the wife with us and have her sustained as well? Don't we have a right to be supported in this labor, in this work? Or do only Barnabas and I have a right to refrain from working?"

Don't we have a right to eat? Don't we have a right to bring a wife along? Don't we have a right to stop our job so that we can spend all our time in ministry and be supported by that? And the answer to each of those questions is of course you have that right. You have a right to eat and drink. You have a right to be married and bring your wife along. And you have a right not to work because you give all your time to the ministry. After all, he illustrates it in verse 7, from just practical life analogies, "Who at any times serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit of it? Who tends a flock and doesn't use the milk of the flock? I'm not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Doesn't the law say these things?"

In other words, beyond the human analogy, can't we go to the law of God? Didn't Moses say you shall not muzzle the ox while he threshes? In other words, the animal that's doing the threshing should be able to eat while he's threshing. "And God's really not concerned about oxen, is He? Wasn't He speaking all together for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written because the plowman ought to plow and hope and the thresher to thresh and hope of sharing the crops."

The point is, you ought to be sustained by your work. And so verse 11, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" It's not too much to ask, is it? That's pretty normal. It's a normal way of life. It's been said to be so in the law of Moses.

Well, but you just said he didn't take any money from them. He didn't. And in verse 12 he says why. "If others share the right over you, do not we...do we not more?" In other words, if you've paid other preachers and other teachers, wouldn't you pay us? "Nevertheless we didn't use this right." Paul refused it. He had a right to it. He wanted to make it clear he had a right to it. He didn't use it. "We endure all things, we suffer whatever we need to suffer and we will not take money from you that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ."

Paul believed that when he went into a new place to found a church that if he charged the people for his preaching it would be a hindrance to the gospel. And so he didn't do it...not only in Corinth but really that was his pattern everywhere. Down in verse 14 he says in verse 13, "The priests who serve

in the temple are supported by that service." And verse 14 he says, "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." If you preach the gospel you can earn your living preaching it. Verse 15, "But I've used none of those things." I don't use those. I...why? End of verse 15, "It's better for me to die than to have any man make my boast an empty one."

Why is he not taking money? Well he says in verse 12, "I don't want to cause a hindrance to the gospel." He says in verse 15, "I'd rather die than have anybody take away my boast in the gospel and make it vain."

What's he saying here? He didn't charge wherever he went to preach the gospel because...one, he did not want to be compared with all the other false teachers. He didn't want to put a fee on himself like everybody else put a fee on them. He didn't want to just be another in a long line of orators and charlatans and frauds and philosophers and hucksters and con-men and so forth. He just did not want to be identified with that at all. He didn't want anybody to ever question his motive and he didn't want to be a burden to anyone.

Furthermore, on a number of occasions both to the Ephesians in Acts 20 and to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Thessalonians 3, on all those occasions he told them, "I have worked with my own hands to earn my own way and one of the reasons was to show you how a Christian should work." So he disdained taking money from the church when he was founding the church, when he was planting the church, when he was evangelizing the area. One, because he did not want anything to hinder the gospel and he didn't want people to say, "Oh, he's just in it for the money," he didn't want anybody questioning his motives. He didn't want to follow the standard Greek practice of establishing a fee or charging a fee or taking an offering because he didn't want to be just another in a long line of guys who were plying their profession. And he worked, I believe, to give the believers a pattern of work, to show them how Christians work hard to support themselves. And further, he didn't want to be a burden to anybody. He did not want to be a burden to anybody.

Now let's go back to our text of 2 Corinthians. When he says in verse 7, "Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?" There's irony there and there's sarcasm there. He's saying, "Have I committed some sin by breaking the Greek culture or pattern? Have I committed some iniquity by not following the norm that a teacher's worth is determined by his fee? You know why I didn't take any money."

He had worked, by the way, the whole time he was there, nearly two years. He had worked as a tent maker or literally a leather worker...tents being made out of hide. According to Acts 18:3 while he was there he worked as a tent maker, he worked as a leather worker. And he worked to pay his own way while he ministered. He did the same with the Ephesians in Acts 20:34, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me." He was so skilled at his trade, he was so good at it he could not only make a living for himself but everybody who traveled with him. And he did it. And there he established a pattern of work and there he relieved a burden, he didn't want to be a burden on the people, and he distinguished himself from the popular sophists and philosophers and false teachers. And he put no hindrance to the gospel and didn't want anybody to question his motives. He wanted it clear that he was not in the ministry for the money.

He held himself then to the place of a common worker. And he labored with his hands rather than preach the gospel for a fee and give any opportunity to any of his enemies to say he had selfish, monetary motives, like false teachers all do. He was glad to support himself.

Now one footnote to this. His policy throughout his ministry was not to take money from churches while he was establishing them. Okay, mark that in your mind because it's very important. His policy was not to take money from churches while he was establishing them. But he would receive gifts from already established churches after he had left. That was his pattern. It is still, I think, wise in new ministries to follow that pattern. When workers go out, and men go out to found a church, plant a church among unbelievers, winning unbelievers to Christ and building a church, I think it's wise for them to be supported by already established churches so that the folks they're trying to reach don't have to pay their support. When people go to the mission fields or places where Christ is not named to establish churches in other cultures, they are usually supported by their home churches, aren't they? Even when national pastors go out to found and plant churches in places where there are no churches, they will be supported by a home church. That..that's a pretty solid pattern throughout the history of Christian mission and church planning. And I think it's a wise one.

It was in the course of Paul's second missionary journey that he visited Corinth and founded the church there, around 52 A.D. And there he lived and worked with his friend Aquila in the craft of leather work so that he would be free to preach the gospel and never have to take any money for it. He stayed there, as I said, nearly two years. It was during that period while he was at Corinth in that 20 months or so that he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And in these letters this is what he said, "You remember, brethren, how I labor and travail working night and day that we might not burden any of you we preached to you the gospel of God." So he had done the same thing in Thessalonica and he reminds them of it. And again he wrote, "Neither did we eat bread for not at any man's hand, but in labor and travail working night and day that we might not burden any of you because we don't have the right," 2 Thessalonians 3:8 and 9.

He reminded them that he had done the very same thing that he was doing at Corinth. And as I noted earlier, the same thing is true in his case at Ephesus. He was there for three years and in the time he was there he continued to work with his hands and not be chargeable. Wherever he went to start a church, he did the work and he charged them nothing. And later on when he left, out of love they would send gifts which he would receive.

Now look back at verse 7. "Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted?" They had been exalted, what does he mean by that exalted? Lifted up...lifted up out of the darkness into the light, lifted up out of sin to righteousness, lifted out of hell to heaven, lifted from Satan to God, lifted from death to life. He said, "Did I commit some sin in humbling myself to lift you up?" Is that a sin? This free preaching elevated you from damnation to glory, had I committed a sin in doing that?

Well he makes it such a sarcastic statement because it's so foolish. They know better than that. Paul had lived in a measure of material poverty, that's right. He had lived in a measure of material poverty so his hearers could become rich. He had followed the pattern of Jesus in 8:9 of this same letter. Chapter 8 verse 9, Jesus who was rich but for your sakes became poor that you through His poverty might become rich. Paul could have been very wealthy, he was an astute man. He was a brilliant mind. He was a highly trained man. He was obviously a very skilled craftsman. He could have done very well for himself. But he put that all aside and operated really from hand to mouth, working to earn his daily food...not only his but everybody who traveled with him. He became poor that he might make others rich. And in that he was like his Lord and therefore he demonstrates the humility that marks a true apostle.

Then verse 8 further explains his modus operandi, "I robbed other churches taking wages from them to serve you." His pattern, as I said, was to take money from other churches already established but not the one being established so that he could offer the gospel without charge, 1 Corinthians 9:18. So he says I robbed...it's interesting that he uses that word, it's a strong word and it's a word used in a military context to plunder or to pillage. It's used in classical Greek of stripping the armor off a dead soldier. It's a word for plundering.

Now you say, "What is Paul saying that for? Why would he choose a word like that? Why would he say 'I plundered and pillaged other churches?'" Well not because he actually robbed them, not because he pillaged them, but because in his mind...he was such a humble man...in his mind he looked at these churches which were already poor and they sent him gifts to support him which even made them poorer. It was like a plundering in his mind. These churches were very poor and they gave to him generously and thus furthered impoverished themselves as if they had been plundered by some invader. Specifically he has in mind here the churches in Macedonia. You know, Greek...Greece is divided into two parts, the northern part, Macedonia, the southern part, Achaia with a little isthmus in the middle. He is now in the southern part, Achaia, on the western shore where Corinth is but he's been up in Macedonia where Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea are the cities the churches have been established in.

And you remember in chapter 8, go back to chapter 8, that the churches of Macedonia are mentioned in verse 1, that would be Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica. The churches of Macedonia, verse 2, were in a great ordeal of affliction and were characterized by deep poverty. Macedonia was very, very poor and the churches were very, very poor. But in the middle of their affliction, in the middle of their deep poverty, verse 2 says they overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. And verse 3 says they gave beyond their ability. We know that the church at Philippi sent him gifts because he refers to them in Philippians chapter 4 verses 10 to 18. In fact, they sent him a gift that was so significant that he can say, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance," Philippians 4:18. "I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent and it's a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God and my God shall supply all your needs." So he received this gift from the Philippian believers. He also received a gift from the Thessalonian believers, most likely.

And so he says in verse 8, "I wasn't at all taking wages from you, I robbed other churches taking wages from them to serve you." Wages is simply a word that means sustenance. It was used of a soldier's pay, a soldier's ration. I got my rations from them to serve you.

Here was this humble man, utterly selfless, taking nothing so as not to be thought of as an ill-motivated man, not to be motivated by greed, not to be accused of being like all the rest of the phonies. He gave up everything and worked with his own hands and sacrificed and other churches became even more impoverished to help him so that he could serve the Corinthians and not provide any opportunity for the false teachers to accuse him of anything and not to make the gospel chargeable and not to hinder them at all in believing. And now the church was so stupid, so gullible as to believe that the apostle who had humbled himself and given them his life and ministry freely was a fraud because he didn't charge them. That's how Satan had twisted everything.

Then in verse 9, for the first time he tells them something about his exigency, something about his need. "And when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone." Wow, this is the first they've heard of that. "When I was present with you, when I was there, I was in need." And

what does he mean? "I didn't have food, I didn't have the necessities of life." He had been working at his trade from Acts 18, I told you we know that, that is his ministry was getting more and more intensive and maybe the demands of that ministry were curtailing the time that he had for work and maybe work had run out and his resources were depleted. Whatever it was he was in a dire situation. He says, "Even when I was in need I was not a burden to anyone." That word "burden" means dead weight. It literally means to cause numbing by pressing against. I was not dead weight to you, even when I was...they didn't even know about his need, he didn't even tell them about it.

Then verse 9, "For when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so." Some brethren came down from Philippi and most likely down from Thessalonica and they brought some money, they brought some gifts. They arrived at exactly the time of Paul's need. They arrived when the situation was acute. And even in that extremity he said, "I didn't ask anything out of you." He wanted to give no occasion to anyone to accuse him of greed. And by the way, the occasion of that coming of those brethren is indicated in Acts 18:5 as the occasion when Timothy and Silas came and they fully supplied my need. In the wonderful sovereign omniscient providence of God they brought exactly all that Paul needed. So he says, "In everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and I'll continue to do so."

What does he mean by that? Well, on an upcoming visit should I come back, believe me, I want nothing...I want nothing. I think there were probably some of the Corinthians who thought, "I wish he'd take something, we love him so much." But he wouldn't give those false teachers any opportunity or any satisfaction. He didn't want them to have any opportunity to accuse him of greed. So what they did accuse him of was not loving the Corinthians, that he wouldn't take their money cause he hated them. And we'll deal with that next time.

The Philippians by God's movement of the Spirit on their hearts stepped in with the generosity. They sent him gifts and they did it more than once in his ministry. Even ten years after this they sent him gifts by Epaphroditus to Rome where he was waiting trial before the emperor, that's when he wrote Philippians. The Philippians showed him great generosity. When he was in Thessalonica they sent it to him a couple of times. On his journey south from Macedonia they sent him a gift, as I said, ten years later when he was in Rome. So he would be supported by the loving gift of churches already established. He had learned to trust God's supply through generous friends and beloved churches and not change his policy in Corinth or anywhere else which could grant a victory to his enemy.

So here is a selfless and humble man and this selflessness and this humility is so crucial to his distinctiveness from the false apostles. But it is just this issue that Satan twists and uses against Paul...he is so clever and so subtle. "Oh, Paul, you won't take anything. Ha, that shows how valuable your teaching is." And then they went on to question whether he was teaching the truth and then they went on to question whether he had any love at all for the Corinthians since he wouldn't receive any gifts from them. And he had to answer those accusations as well. And we'll see that next time and then we'll see how he turns the tables on the false teachers and describes them as proud, lying and abusive. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the example of the Apostle Paul. We thank You for the model of virtue and character that he was. And, Lord, we see not only in this passage the model of Paul but we see the illustration of the gullibility of the church, that even when you've done everything you can possibly do to prevent false and destructive accusations, Satan can find a subtle twist, a subtle way to attract

gullible people. And we can only pray, Lord, that You will give us a great understanding of Your truth that we might not be children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, or by the sleight of hand, the cunning craftiness of Satan. He would want to destroy our church, he would want to destroy Your work and if he cannot find overt and blatant ways to do that, his clever disguises and subtleties can be very effective where there are people who lack discernment. Well we could pray constantly, unceasingly that You would give Your church discernment, that You would open their eyes to the truth that they might not be led astray so easily by Satan. Your own heart must be grieved with such gullibility then and now. We pray, Lord, that You will help us all to have the care to search the Scriptures that therein we may have the understanding that allows us to recognize true teachers, true apostles and false ones, that we might be the guardians of the truth and the protectors of Your church. We thank You for Paul's example. We thank You that true teachers marked by his humility, marked by his preaching and teaching of truth as can be measured accurately against the Word of God and marked by his love. And, Lord, deliver us from those false apostles, those deceptive and proud deceivers who seek only to abuse the church for satanic purposes to the triumph of the evil one over against You. Protect Your church, Lord, and raise up many true apostles, true preachers and teachers who can call Your people back to Your Word. And bless us this day, Lord, and work Your Word in our lives and help us to be all that You want us to be for Christ's sake. Amen.

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