

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

Paul Identifies with Suffering Believers

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:26-29

Code: 47-80

For this morning we come to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 again. We're looking at a portion of Scripture that starts in verse 22 and runs down to verse 33. The general category that we're studying in this portion of the epistle falls under the title, "Apostolic credentials." As you well know, the apostle Paul is here giving his credentials. He is comparing himself to the false apostles in Corinth and showing his superiority to them. They are messengers of Satan, they are disguised as angels of light but they are deceivers and they are liars and they false apostles. They are doing the work of Satan to destroy the church and pervert the gospel. But the people unfortunately have listened to them and Paul is forced to defend himself against them. And so he is reluctantly comparing himself in this section to the false apostles, and in most remarkable ways demonstrates his superiority to them. He wants the people to trust in him because he is the messenger of God.

And I've titled kind of the general tone of this "Humble Boasting...Humble Boasting." Paul is forced into boasting but never to the point of sacrificing his true humility and thus he demonstrates and maintains his godliness, even when forced against his will to have to boast about himself as superior to the false apostles.

Let me begin our look at this section on humble boasting with a quote that is taken out of a book called Future Grace, written by John Piper. This is what he writes, "Humility is not a popular human trait in the modern world. It's not touted in the talk shows or celebrated in valedictory speeches or commended in diversity seminars or listed with corporate core values. And if you go to the massive self-help section of your sprawling mall bookstore, you won't find many titles celebrating humility. The basic reason for this is not hard to find. Humility can only survive in the presence of God. When God goes, humility goes. In fact, you might say that humility follows God like a shadow. We can expect to find humility applauded in our society about as often as we find God applauded."

"In my local newspaper," he writes, "recently a guest editorial captured the atmosphere of our time that asphyxiates humility. This is what the article said: 'There are some who naively cling to the nostalgic memory of God. The average church goer takes a few hours out of the week to experience the sacred, but the rest of the time he is immersed in a society that no longer acknowledges God as an omniscient and omnipotent force to be loved and worshiped. Today we are too sophisticated for God. We can stand on our own and we're prepared and ready to choose and define our own

existence.' " Then Piper adds, "In this atmosphere, humility cannot survive. It disappears with God. When God is neglected, the runner-up god takes His place, namely man. And that by definition is the opposite of humility, namely the haughty spirit called pride. So the atmosphere we breathe is hostile to humility," end quote.

Well he's right. When God goes, humility goes because humility is an appropriate response to an understanding of the presence of God. And when God goes and man becomes his own god, man becomes proud. Pride is then turning from God to trust in oneself and most of us are very familiar with it and it is a sin to be forsaken. We're commanded repeatedly in Scripture to humble ourselves, both in the Old and the New Testament, particularly in the light of God who's worthy of our humble praise and adoring worship.

Humility then in a sense is the purest and highest of virtues. We could say that the humbler you are, the more you have bowed your knee to God. When you truly know God and love God and adore God and worship God and honor God and seek God's glory, it is consequent upon that commitment to be humble. Therefore the purest and highest of virtues is humility. At the same time, the most heinous sin of all is the opposite of that which is pride. All sin is an affront to God, all sin reflects a turning from God. For example, the sin of covetousness is turning away from God and God's provision to find satisfaction in material things and things you don't possess. Lust is turning away from God's gift of sex to find satisfaction in sexual sin. Anger is turning away from God's justice and God's retribution to find your own personal vengeance and satisfaction. Impatience is turning away from God's will and the circumstances God has allowed to find satisfaction in the design that you have made for your own life at your own pace on your own timetable. Anxiety is turning away from God's sovereignty to seek to control your own life. Fear is turning away from God's power to succumb to the dread of other powers. And so it goes for all sin. No matter what sin you define, all sin is somehow a turning away from God. And pride, of course, is the ultimate idolatry because it turns away from God to replace him with oneself. Pride is most wicked because it is turning from God to find satisfaction in self. Godly people are not proud, they are marked by humility. And that was true of the apostle Paul.

Because he was a godly man, he resisted pride. In writing to the Philippians he said that we're not to look on our own things but on the things of others. We're to consider others better than ourselves. We're to have the mind of Christ who thought it not something to be held onto to be equal with God but gave Himself up, divested Himself of all of those glorious prerogatives, took upon Himself the form of a servant, became as a man and humbled Himself to death.

So it is precisely at a very difficult point that we find Paul in 2 Corinthians. Because he is a godly man, because he is a humble man, and because he has been forced to have to defend himself and prove himself superior to other men, he is caught in a very difficult balancing act. On the one hand,

he is a humble man, on the other hand, he must boast about his superiority. This is a serious tension and a very distasteful one to him that he is being forced to defend himself as the true apostle of Jesus Christ, he's being forced to compare himself with false apostles, and demonstrate his superiority to them, and at the same time manifest the true humility of his heart. And that's a tough balancing act. He is therefore forced into this humble boasting. These false teachers, as we've been saying all along, have begun to corrupt the church and the church is at stake and the gospel is at stake and the truth is at stake and Paul can't sit idly by and let them succeed. And the best way to call a halt to it is to demonstrate his own superiority to them and then remind the people of the truth of God.

As we come to chapter 11 and verse 22 we come to the section of Scripture in which Paul compares himself to these false apostles. It is something he does very reluctantly. Clear back in chapter 10 verse 12 he says, "We are not bold or anxious to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves." He starts there by saying...I really don't like to do this. And he's been giving disclaimer after disclaimer after disclaimer, all the way from 10:11...or, 10 verse 12 through chapter 11 verse 21. That whole section is one long disclaimer. I really am forced to do what I don't want to do. He is very reluctant to boast about himself, to even say what is true about himself. He's very reluctant to compare himself with others, but he's been forced to do it for the sake of the church and the sake of the gospel. And I'm so glad that he was forced to do this, in a sense, because therefore he has given to us this magnificent look at his truly humble character. He has maintained his humility all through this section, even while having to boast about his superiority. It is a great glimpse of true humility in operation.

Now as we come to verse 22, just a brief reminder. He starts out in verse 22 by showing that he is at least the equal of the false apostles. He does it by three times in verse 22 saying, "So am I...So am I...So am I." They parade their credentials, their racial credentials, their national credentials, their religious credentials. They are Hebrews, they're Israelites, they're descendants of Abraham. Well so am I. So on the level of nationality, on the level of race, on the level of religious heritage, he is at least their equal. And those were important with regard to apostolic privilege. One needed to belong to Israel and be a part of the seed of Abraham and be a Hebrew in order to qualify to be an apostle. And on that, he is their equal. In the category of racial and religious heritage, he is their equal. But starting in verse 23 he talks about his superiority and it is basically expressed in the phrase, "I more so," and then, "far more," "far more." He goes from the area of equality in verse 22 to the area of superiority in verse 23 and following. And all the way down to chapter 12 verse 13 he is presenting himself as superior to the false apostles. And again I remind you, this is something he doesn't really like to do, he is forced to do it and we're glad he was forced to do it because of the richness of this passage and how it indicates the humility of the man even in the midst of comparing himself with others.

He starts then in verse 23 with his credentials. Here are his credentials of superiority. Number one, we started with this one last time, his experience of suffering. Verse 23, "Are they servants of Christ?"

I speak as if insane. I more so, in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I've spent in the deep." We'll stop at that point.

It's quite remarkable because you would assume that if a man is going to show his superiority as an apostle and as a teacher, he might start out by talking about his heritage, his background, his education, his mentors, his schooling, his experience, his success, his achievements, his accomplishments and all of that. But he doesn't do that. He goes right to the most dominant feature of his life as an apostle, which was suffering. And suffering is the truest and purest evidence that he is the minister of God because if, in fact, he is an effective minister of God, we would expect suffering to follow. Why? Because he is representative of the light invading this dark world. This world is fallen, this world is wicked and sinful, this world is unbelieving, this world is cursed, this world lies in the lap of the evil one, Satan the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world. It is his domain. It is his kingdom. It is his chaos. It belongs to him. And if this man is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ invading that kingdom of darkness, if he is bringing the light to bear upon it, we would expect that he would be marked by suffering. And the greater the impact of his ministry, the greater the consequent retaliation by the kingdom of darkness. So the more suffering, the more his credential is manifest.

And that is precisely what he's saying here. The dominant feature of his life has been suffering and that's proof positive that he has brought the truth to bear upon a kingdom of lies. Verse 23, he starts out, "Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane." He says that for the sake of argument. They go around proclaiming to be servants of Christ. We know that. Back in verse 13 of chapter 11, there are false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. They're in disguised like Satan who has disguised himself as an angel of light. But they claim to be servants of Christ. All the effective false teachers claim to be servants of Christ. And for the sake of argument, Paul says, "Are they servants of Christ?" And then parenthetically he adds, "I speak as if insane." In other words, it's an insanity to even suggest that, but I suggest it sarcastically for the sake of argument. The whole discussion here is insane to start with. How is it that a man with the reputation of Paul, a man with a character of Paul, a man who had spent so long, so many months with the Corinthians, who had endeared himself to them, who had manifested his character day after day and night after night, they knew him very well, they knew his teaching very well, they knew his character very well, they knew the patterns of his life very well, and they knew well his effectiveness and his ministry had been spread abroad everywhere and word had spread from church to church and place to place about the man, it wasn't as if he was a mystery to them. But here came some false teachers, told some lies about Paul, and these people who knew better believed the lies. Why is it that people do that? They do. It is because of the subtleties of Satan's deceptions. Satan is wily and cunning and crafty and subtle.

I never cease to be amazed that that goes on even today, that you can spend years and years and years teaching and ministering and living your life in front of people and there's really no mystery about it and everything is an open book, and everything is known and it's all out there for people to see, and the character of your life and ministry is clearly established, someone comes along subtly, deceptively, spread lies, people buy them and they change their viewpoint. And you find yourself in the amazing position of having to try to defend in a conversation an accusation made against you that if measured against the years of ministry and life that is visible for everybody, are nothing but insanity. And that's what Paul is saying. The whole thing is insane, why am I even doing this? Why is this even being discussed? It's not as if you don't have enough information about me. And to even suggest on top of that insanity that these people are servants of Christ is another kind of insanity. But for the sake of argument, I'll ask the question...are they servants of Christ, then I more so. And here he launches into his superiority.

Their claim to be servants of Christ fall short. I am far more a servant of Christ than they are. And how does he prove it? "More labors, more imprisonments, more beatings, more shipwrecks," that's how he proves it, with his suffering. And we noted last time that what he mentions in verses 23 to 25 is really just a sort of a summation and the book of Acts doesn't record even all of those events. Those things happened to him, no doubt, more things happened to him, this is fairly even early in his ministry when he writes 1 Corinthians and there's a lot more that's going to happen later on of this same order of suffering. But Paul in wanting to prove himself an apostle starts out with his suffering.

Now that shouldn't really surprise us. If you have a little bit of history in your mind about what happened in the past before Paul to other preachers and prophets of God, you will understand why he uses this argument. You go back to the Old Testament and what did the people of Israel do to the true prophets? What did they do to Jeremiah? What did they do to the other prophets? Tried to silence them, threw them in a pit. What did they do to Isaiah? Well, we believe they sawed him in half. It's not anything new, it's the same age-old battle that those who spoke the truth of God against the kingdom of lies and darkness received retaliating persecution. In Matthew chapter 21 it was our Lord Himself who taught about how His spokesmen were always being mistreated. In Matthew 21 He gives a parable about a man who had a vineyard and he got it all prepared and then he gave it to a man to run for him. He hired a man to run his vineyard and he went on his long journey.

And when harvest time was come he sent his slaves to the vine growers to receive his produce. He sent some of his servants back to get the crop that had been harvested and the vine growers, the ones who had been running the vineyard in his absence took his slaves, beat one, killed another and stoned a third. And he sent another group of slaves larger than the first and they did the same thing to them, they just murdered them all. And what Jesus is talking about is simply this, the vineyard is

God's vineyard, meaning the nation Israel, the people of Israel. Those who have been given the responsibility to work that vineyard in behalf of God, serve those people and produce a harvest are the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders. And the servants, or slaves, that are sent back to check on the crop are the prophets. And the whole picture of the parable is that the Jewish leaders have been massacring the prophets. That's what Jesus says. And finally, you remember, the man who owned the vineyard sent his son and what did they do to him? They killed him. Jesus is saying they killed the prophets and they're going to kill my son as well.

In Matthew 22 Jesus teaches the same thing in another story. He says in verse 2 there's a kingdom of heaven compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited, that's Israel again. And he sends the prophets to call them to come and embrace his son. And what do they do? Down in verse 6, "They seize his slaves, mistreat them and kill them."

In chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus again addressing the same issue, verse 37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her." Jerusalem became known as the city that killed the prophets.

So this isn't anything new. The apostles wound up being martyrs. It goes with the territory. It's like 2 Timothy where Paul says, "All who live godly in this present age will suffer persecution and the more godly you live, the more persecution and the more influential your godliness, the more persecution. Suffering marks God's righteous preachers. Not all of us will suffer to the degree that the apostle Paul will, few will. But suffering, nonetheless, is the mark. And the more suffering, the more evidently is this man the true spokesman of God.

Mark it out. The preachers who live in comfort and ease and wealth and prosperity are not the preachers of righteousness. The suffering preachers are.

Not finished with what he said for the sake of making the point firmly in verse 25, he adds verse 26 and 27, let's look at them. Still talking about his experience of suffering, verse 26, "I've been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights and hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure."

Now he goes on with this litany of suffering. He says...let's go back to verse 26 and just briefly touch these things so you'll understand what he's talking about..."I've been on frequent journeys." We've only had three major missionary journeys, they're mostly outlined in any study of the book of Acts.

But within and around and after those three major journeys, there were many, many other trips. And in all of that travel that he did in the ancient world, he was in danger. He was in a high-risk operation because of threatening people, and threatening circumstances. And he lists some of the issues that he had to contend with.

First of all, he starts with the physical realm. Dangers from rivers. Bridges were few and floods were frequent. That sums it up. Bridges were few and floods were frequent. And fording rivers to get to where he had to go was a great, great challenge and posed the threat of drowning. He adds that he was in danger from robbers. The highways of the ancient world were littered with the carnage that was wrought upon people by brigands and highwaymen, as they were called, robbers. In fact, just one journey that Paul took, according to Acts 13, from Perga to Antioch of Pisidia required him to travel through the Taurus Mountains, very rough, very rugged terrain and famous for being infested with highwaymen because there were so many places where they could hide. And in order to cross the Taurus Mountains on that one journey alone, he would have had to forded two very dangerous and flood-prone rivers, as well as having to content with the potential of robbers.

And then he mentions in verse 26, "Dangers from my countrymen," meaning the Jews. The Jews frequently sought his life. Every town he went into he started preaching in the synagogue. Some of the Jews responded and believed in Jesus as Messiah and were saved. But the majority of them generally reacted with hostility and fury and sought his life and he literally had Jews all over the place plotting his death. Acts 9 records it, it happened in Acts 13, 14, Acts 17, Acts 18, Acts 20 and Acts 21 where he refers to the plotting of the Jews. In fact, Acts 20 he mentioned the plotting of the Jews as a general category. They hated his gospel because they hated the idea that Jesus was their Messiah and they wanted to silence Paul and they wanted to silence him by executing him, or assassinating him.

And then he adds that he had also been in danger from the Gentiles, not as often as from the Jews, but there was danger. For example, in the town of Philippi in Acts 16 where he was thrown into the Philippian jail, and, of course, he was in danger of losing his life there. And then in Acts chapter 19 when a riot started in Ephesus, he was in danger of losing his life to the mob there. So there were times when the Gentiles would have taken his life if they could, and there were many, many times when the Jews would have done it.

He adds this relentless danger in the city, and there he just has in mind every place he went where a mob scene responded with some kind of violence. Ephesus, that would be Ephesus, Jerusalem, they tried to take his life in Jerusalem, you remember, when he returned. Philippi, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, it happened in Berea, it could have happened there, certainly could have happened in Corinth, as well, according to Acts 18. He had dangers in the city from those who wanted him dead.

And then he adds "in the wilderness." And these would be the dangers of exposure and that would be an exposure not only to the elements, to the cold and the rain and the snow and whatever else might have been there from the standpoint of the natural elements, but also the wild animals that inhabited those mountains would have been a threat to him...bears and lions and things like that.

It also indicates to us, in the wilderness, that he didn't stay on the well-traveled roads all the time. A lot of times you travel off the beaten path because you could avoid the robbers if you did that. Maybe because of some of the places he was going and some of the escape routes he had to take, he was unduly exposed in the wilderness because he left the well-traveled paths.

Then he adds in verse 26 that he had faced dangers on the sea, on his many sailing journeys which we talked about in connection with verse 25. And there were even more of those yet to come, including the wreck that would occur as recorded in Acts 27 which hadn't happened yet when he wrote this.

But on top of all of that, the worst and most potentially harmful danger of all, verse 26, "Dangers among false brethren." Is there anything worse than Judas traitors? Is there anything worse than people who come alongside you, claim to be your brother and do everything they can to destroy you? He refers to these false brethren also in Galatians 2. In Galatians chapter 2, I think it's verse 4, yes the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty. False brethren were sneaking around trying to undermine Paul. They were pretending to be true Christians. Among them would be the false apostles at Corinth and the Judaizers who dogged his steps everywhere and tried to confuse his churches. They were the wolves in sheep's clothing. They were the perverse men that would rise up, he talked about in Acts 20, in the church. He despised the threat of false brethren who faked love and affection like Judas and were at heart traitors and betrayers. So in addition to the danger around him from natural peril, the danger around him from people who wanted him dead, the danger from mobs, the danger from exposure to the elements and wild animals, there was the danger of the destruction of his ministry by the false brethren who followed him, doing Satan's work of destruction. The man had a heroic devotion to ministry to go through all of this, just a heroic devotion to the ministry in the face of severe danger every day...every day.

And then in verse 27 he adds to that which came upon him his own struggle. "I've been labor and hardship," he means by that he had to work in his own ministry to sustain himself. Labor and hardship are two words that have to do with one's work. Labor means...it's *kopos*, to work to the point of exhaustion. And *mochthos*, hardship, is a hardship related to a prolonged trial, a prolonged difficulty. So what he's talking about is this long-term relentless, unmitigated, unending difficulty of life in just trying to eke out a living. He uses labor and hardship to refer to his work and he does that on a

number of occasions. First Thessalonians 2:9, "You recall, brethren, our labor and hardship," same two words, "how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you." In other words, he's talking about his earning his living, his leather work, his making tents. On top of all of the suffering and all of the danger and all of the difficulty that he faces and mentions and all of the pain and suffering that he talked about in verses 23 to 25, he has to earn his own way and do that as well as preach and minister everywhere.

By the way, in 2 Thessalonians 3:8 he uses those two words again. He says, "We kept working night and day with labor and hardship so that we might not be a burden to any of you." He didn't want to have to depend on them for his support so he worked.

The result of that, back to verse 27, "Through many sleepless nights." It wasn't because he was worried and full of anxiety and couldn't sleep. It wasn't because he had insomnia. The reason he stayed up all night is because he had to work. All day ministry, all day preaching, and then he had to work all night in order to support himself. He had to work all night to earn his living and the living of all those who traveled with him. There were sleepless nights because they were nights of labor. In fact, sometimes he even preached all night. That's right. You can go back to the twentieth chapter of Acts and you can see that the believers met on the first day of the week in the morning to break bread and Paul began to preach to them and it says he preached to them until midnight. Now that's a long sermon. He started in the morning and he's still preaching at midnight and there's a guy on the third floor and a guy falls out of the window because he fell asleep during the sermon. And he fell down three stories and was killed. And you know what they did? Acts 20, they went down and raised him from the dead and brought him back up because Paul wasn't finished. Brought him back up from the dead and said, "Now sit down, I'm not done." And listen, the text of Acts 20 says, "He preached until morning, until daybreak." That's a long service, a 24-hour sermon. Some of the sleepless nights were sleepless nights because he was feeding hungry, hungry, hungry sheep. Some of them were because he was working with his hands. Many sleepless nights. He didn't get proper rest. But I guess it worked out all right for him because the Lord never intended for him to die a natural death of old age, he was going to get his head chopped off prematurely.

He also found it difficult even working all night, preaching, traveling, staying out of danger, he found it difficult to make enough to sustain himself so he says in verse 27, "In spite of all his work, in spite of many sleepless nights of labor, he had experienced hunger and thirst often without food in cold and exposure." There were times when he didn't have enough to eat, he didn't have enough to drink, he didn't have enough to keep him warm and he didn't even have a place to stay. Inadequate food, that even happened when he was at Corinth, he mentions in chapter 11 verse 9, "When I was present with you and in need." I didn't even tell you about it. When he says "often without food," he's not talking about spiritual fasting. Just as an interesting footnote, there's only one occasion in the New

Testament where you see Paul fasting and that's in Acts 13 with the pastors of the church at Antioch as they prayed and fasted before the Holy Spirit while the Holy Spirit was selecting from them, Paul and Barnabas, to go on this missionary tour to the Gentiles. After the commencement of his missionary work, there is no evidence that Paul ever fasted again. So this is not some kind of spiritual fast, this is a man who just doesn't have enough money or a place to purchase food. And he's cold. The end of his life, 2 Timothy 4:13, he tells Timothy to go find Crispus [Carpus] and get his coat and bring it to him. How did Crispus [Carpus] get it? Well he probably needed it so he left it with him. But he needs his coat. It's not like he has a wardrobe, he's here and his coat's there and it's the only coat he has, please could you bring it, I'm cold. It was a...it was a eking out a bare existence. Frankly this is enough to embarrass us today who suffer so little for the ministry and the gospel. We might hide our faces in shame.

But note this. When you're looking at the purest and truest apostle, he's going to be measured by his power against the kingdom of darkness. And that's going to be demonstrated by the level of persecution and suffering the man endures. The man endured the suffering of persecution because he was invading the kingdom of darkness and he endured just personal suffering and deep privation because he was so sold out to ministry. You know, the true and pure servants of God through the years are not the fat cats. They're not the people who are living at the highest level of comfort and wealth and prosperity. Those are the false teachers.

Paul would have this all reversed though and he knew what he wrote in Romans 8 was true, that sufferings in this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us and he has entered into that glory now. And his eternal weight of glory must be monumental...monumental. And in all of this suffering his faith never diminished. In fact, it was just the opposite. In all of his suffering, his faith was strengthened. In Romans 8 he says in verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation?" No, I've been through that, it didn't do it. "Shall distress?" No, I had that, didn't do it. "Shall persecution?" No, I experienced that and it didn't do it. "Famine?" No, that won't do it. "Nakedness?" No, that won't do it. "Peril?" No, that won't do it. "Sword?" No. Now how do you know that won't do it? I've been through all that. None of that separates you from the love of Christ. In fact, in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." He was more than a conqueror through it all.

So the first credential of true apostleship was suffering, and it is still the truest evidence of devotion to Christ. It's not how rich are you, it's how sacrificial are you. The false apostles never can demonstrate those credentials because they're in it for the money and personal gain.

Let me give you a second credential, and we'll stop with this one and do the other one in this chapter next time. The second credential, first, his experience of suffering; the second thing that marks him

as a true apostle is his experience of sympathy...his experience of sympathy. Let me tell you something. If there's anything true about false apostles that can be added to the fact that they're in it for the money, for filthy lucre, it is that they are abusive of people, that they do not attempt to help people, they only use people. But notice the difference. Paul contrasting himself again with the false apostles who manipulated, abused and used these people for their own ends, he says this, "Apart from such external things," and I'll comment on that in a moment, "there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

Now let me help you to understand these two verses. They're very important. Verse 28, "Apart from such," and the translation is, NAS, is such external things. Literally "such other things...such other things." The Greek, *tan pareictos[??]* can mean "the things not mentioned." And that's what I think is the best usage here. So what he's saying is, in verses 23 through 27, "I've mentioned a lot of things, additionally I could mention other things but apart from other unmentioned things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." That's the basic gist of the translation. So the issue here is not external, the issue is exception. He's not saying these are all external things, that...that translation doesn't get at it. What he is saying is beyond what I've just listed and other things I didn't list there is the daily pressure of concern for the churches. I could have gone longer on the physical suffering, I could have gone longer on the persecution, beyond all of that what I said and what I didn't say, in addition to the list in verses 23 to 27 and other things not listed, there's even this...the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. He's talking about his heart here. He's saying, "I feel the pain of the church's weakness. I feel the pain of the church's suffering." This man loved. That's why he could say to the Galatians, "I have birth pains until Christ is fully formed in you." That's why he can write the Philippians and the Thessalonians and all the other churches and say, "I don't cease to pray for you daily, praying for you, always in my prayers asking the Lord to make you strong, to build you up, to show you discernment and wisdom and knowledge and insight and understanding and to make you noble and to desire what is excellent," all of that because his heart was for his people.

Physical suffering was easier to endure, actually. He says in Philippians 4, "I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, I know how to live in prosperity. I've learned the secret of being filled and going hungry. I know what it is to have an abundance and suffer need, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." That's the easy part of it. That's...that takes patience and trust in the Lord, but the hard part is enduring the suffering and the pain of the pressure of the churches. The man was concerned about his people, and that's the mark of a true apostle. He cared about his people.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 he talks...he talks about his love for the people and he says, for example, "We prove to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." That's having a fond affection for you. I mean, he says down in verses 17 and following, "We were eager to see you, to see your face. You are our hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. You are our glory and you are our joy." The man had a true and honest and genuine sympathy for the people. His emotions were challenged to their limit. His endurance and stability was challenged to the max. Remember now, when he first heard that the Corinthians had bought into the lies of the false apostles, chapter 7 says he was depressed. You remember that? He was so depressed he had no heart left for ministry and he had an opportunity to preach in Troas, turned his back on an open door and bolted the place because he was so depressed. The man felt the pain of the weakness of his churches. He grieved over them. He agonized over them. He sweat over them. He prayed over them. He pled with them, he wrote them, he confronted them. He worked with them. That's the daily pressure.

Let me just take that apart. Daily...it never, ever went away, it was there every day. It never went away. He was burdened by the moral and spiritual and doctrinal issues among believers. He was...he was burdened by these matters. It applied, he says, "Pressure upon me," *epistasis*. By the way, that word is used, that word for "pressure upon me," is used in Numbers 16:40 in the Septuagint to refer to the hostile group led by Korah against Moses. It's...it's...it's like a rebellion, it's like a harassing, relentless, wailing assault. He says, "It assaults my peace and it assaults my joy and it assaults my tranquility and my satisfaction and my fulfillment. I...I'm all caught up in concern over the disobedient and immature believers in the church.

You can tell a true apostle because he's passionately consumed with the lives of his people. He wants to defend his church. That's why he's writing all of this. That's why he's making all these issues. How deeply does he feel this burden? How sympathetic really is he? Verse 29 answers the question. "Who is weak without my being weak?" That's real sympathy. Sympathy means to suffer with, empathy, to get in somebody else's skin. He's saying, "I care so much that when you're weak, I'm weak. When you hurt, I hurt." Like 1 Corinthians 12:26, "When one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers."

False teachers, on the other hand, they don't care about the maturity of the believers. They don't care about their struggles. They don't care about their temptations and trials. They don't care about their...their drifting off into this and that. They don't care about anything. They are marked by selfishness. They are marked by abusive pride. They are exploiters of people. They ruthlessly take advantage of the weakness of people to come...to become rich and powerful. Just like Jesus said, "You devour widows' houses, you take the most weak of all and you consume them, you take all that they have." That's what false teachers do. They use people to make themselves rich and powerful. They're abusive, they're self-centered and their exploitative.

Paul's very opposite. He says, "When you're weak, I feel the pain. Your weakness does not work to my advantage, it works to my disadvantage. Your weakness works to the advantage of a false teacher." A false teacher likes nothing better than to move into a church of weak people and just exploit them. A true shepherd moves into a group of weak people and it becomes the biggest burden of his life. Their weakness did not work to his advantage, it worked to his disadvantage. It caused him immense pain.

Not only is he saddened at the failings and struggles and stumblings of the weak, and he talks about that in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, how important it is to strengthen the weak, but he was furious at the instigators of the fall of the weak, and he says that...look at it...verse 29, "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" "Intense concern" is not a good translation, in my judgment, it's the Greek verb *puroomai*, that verb means "to set on fire...to set on fire, to inflame." When you lead one of God's people into sin, I am inflamed. That takes you back to Matthew 18:6, doesn't it? "You'd be better off if a millstone were tied around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea, than to lead one of these little ones who believes in Me into sin," right? You better be careful how you treat God's people. Paul says, "Those of you who are leading these weak into sin, you're inflaming me," this is righteous indignation, holy indignation toward any who led his people into sin and turned them away from him as their teacher and from the church and from the truth.

Mark it down, folks, love is not the enemy of moral indignation, it is the partner of it. Sometimes when you get angry at false teachers pulling people away and people lying and destroying people's confidence in the church and having them leave the church and go away from the shepherds who love them and care for them, and you become confrontive about that, you're accused of not being loving. That's just the opposite of the truth. Holy indignation towards somebody leading people into sin is an expression of the purest kind of love. Somebody tries to kidnap my child, it's not unloving for me to defend him and to rescue my child from a would-be kidnapper. False teachers have no sympathy, they simply exploit people. Second Peter 2 says, "In their greed they exploit you with false words." That's what they do. Paul says, "I am on fire, I am inflamed about these false apostles leading you into sin."

Now there's the mark of a true apostle. Suffering...his experience of suffering first is experience of sympathy second. True marks of God's man. We'll save the third one for next time. Join me in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this good word to us this morning and how it reminds us of the responsibilities of spiritual leadership which are ours, how we thank You that the word of instruction to us is so clear. We thank You for Your faithful shepherds, faithful leaders. We pray, O God, that You

would cause Your people to be strong and not led astray, that You would give them good shepherds that truly love them and protect them. Lord, thank You for this word to us, help us to be faithful in whatever calling You've placed us, to be willing to suffer for the truth and to feel the pain of our brothers and sisters in their weakness and their struggles for these are not patterns of life from which all of us are exempt, but rather patterns of life which should characterize our living. We should all know a measure of suffering as we confront the lie with the truth, we should all demonstrate sympathy as we live within the body of Christ. We pray to that end that You might be glorified, for our Savior's sake. Amen.

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