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

Concerns of a True Pastor: Integrity, Reverence,Sanctification
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:16-19
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Concerns of a True Pastor: Integrity, Reverence, Sanctification

Well we come to that highlight of our time of worship when we hear the voice of God, when God speaks to us. I never cease to be amazed at the rich variety of texts in the Word of God. Every word of God is pure, the Old Testament says, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Some Scripture is profoundly theological, some Scripture is richly experiential, some Scripture is exhortation and instruction, some Scripture is narrative and example. The variety is so wonderful and so rich. And one of the joys I have as an expositor of Scripture is just to take what comes in the flow of the study of God's great Word. What a treasure we have.

And as I told you last week, I have had a special love for 2 Corinthians because it is the heart of the Apostle Paul. No epistle written by Paul, and he wrote thirteen of the New Testament epistles, no epistle gives us a better look at the man's heart than this one. This is so important to me and it should be to all of us. We live in a day when we analyze everything, when we think we can accomplish everything we need to accomplish by sophisticated methodology. We can do just about anything we want to do if we can figure out the best method for doing it. Churches, church leaders, pastors, people involved in spiritual ministry are forever, it seems, looking for new methods, new patterns, new understanding of the demographics of the society around them, of the hot buttons of the culture in which they minister trying to find the tools and trying to find the schemes and plans in which to have effective ministry. And I suppose that does have a place, but I am convinced that the greatest impact in ministry will always be made from the inside out, that what God is looking for is people whose hearts are totally devoted to Him. And that's what makes 2 Corinthians so rich.

It's not a book about methodology and yet it's one of the most, if not the most, pastoral of all Paul's letters. It doesn't tell us anything about his techniques, it just tells us everything about his heart. And the ministry of the man and the immense success of the man was a result of the overflow of what he was before God. That's why it's been such a cathartic experience for me to have spent these last many years studying 2 Corinthians because we've been interacting in the depth of the heart of the Apostle Paul, this great Apostle who was more than a great teacher, who was more than a gifted communicator, who was more than an astute and profound theologian, he was a man who walked with God. He was a man whose heart was given toward God. He was a man who was consumed

with all the right things, driven by all the right passions and motivated by all the right desires. That's what makes him so attractive to me. Here was a man that God used to affect the world and he's still affecting us, and he affects me every time I read anything he wrote. Here is a man whose impact is incalculable, whose impact will only be able to be understood in eternity. And here is a man about whose techniques we know very little, but about whose heart we know very much. And you must understand that this Christian life that we live, this Christian ministry in which we're engaged is all about walking with God, it's all about knowing God profoundly and deeply. It's all about having righteous and pure, holy aspirations and longings and motives. It's all about the inside. It's all about our hearts. It's all about our attitudes and our motives. This is the word that needs to be preached today. This is the message that needs to be told today to young pastors and those who are training for ministry. This is what we're committed to in the Master's Seminary. It's fine to teach technique, it's fine to teach methodology, but in the end a man will be no greater in the hands of God than his own spiritual character will allow. What he is in his heart is what he is, and that's what God can use mightily.

And we've seen that all the way through 2 Corinthians. We find ourselves in the text, this morning, in chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians and we're looking at this last section of this great epistle. Second Corinthians chapter 12 starting in verse 12 and running all the way to verse 10 of chapter 13 is really one final section and we'll be taking it as such, though we'll break it down into a number of messages. Paul is bringing his letter to an end. He's concluding this profusely personal and profoundly rich letter. He's summing it up and you wouldn't expect him to go anywhere else but back into his heart. He's going to tell you what he's feeling here. He's going to let us in on his desires. He's going to let us in on what motivates him, what drives him, what compels him. In fact, I've entitled this section, "The Faithful Pastor's Concerns...The Faithful Pastor's Concerns."

In so doing at the end of this great epistle, he gives us a benediction. He pronounces on us a blessing and the blessing is to learn from the heart of this man, is to touch base with the motives of this man and pursue those very same motives in our own lives. If you were to read the literature available today on the church you might come to the conclusion that it's a very complex thing to lead a church, it's a very complex thing to pastor a church, very complex thing to be a spiritual leader, very complex thing to lead a Christian life, to function within the church because there's so many different options, there's so many different viewpoints, there's so many different approaches. In actuality, however, I think ministry from a pastoral standpoint, from the standpoint of spiritual leadership, from the standpoint of life in the church, ministry is not complex, it is confoundingly simple because the direction for it is laid out in Scripture. And methods come and methods go and cultures come and cultures go and the whims of people come and go and the mood of the mob shifts and changes in every climate, but the principles of godliness and virtue that effect ministry powerfully never change. And power and effectiveness in ministry is confoundingly simple because it's a matter of having a right heart before God and being passionate about the right things. And that's Paul...that's Paul. And we're going to learn from him, not by explicit instruction but by model and example as he opens his

heart to us in this great passage.

Now the occasion for writing 2 Corinthians must be understood. And we've learned as we've gone through this epistle that the occasion is very clearly indicated to us by our study of the New Testament. False teachers had come to Corinth. Paul had founded the church there. He had written them three letters before he wrote this one, two of them, of course, are in the text of the New Testament. There were two others that he wrote. He had a tremendous burden for that church where he had literally spent almost two years of his life ministering. False teachers had come to his beloved church.

The first thing they did was assault his character to try to destroy him so they could replace hm as the reigning teachers and then teach their damnable lies. But before they could get a platform, they had to destroy him because he was the beloved teacher. And so they started an assault on Paul. Sad to say, the Corinthians bought into their assault, believed some of the lies and began to follow the false teachers. And Paul's heart was literally broken. He was so depressed he lost his heart for ministry and he walked away from an open door in Troas, as he indicates in chapter 7, because he had no heart for the ministry he was so broken hearted over the defection and the mutiny of the Corinthians.

The background then of this epistle is he is reaffirming his integrity, he is reaffirming his authenticity as a true Apostle, he is reaffirming his character to the Corinthians in contrast to the false apostles and the false teachers who have captivated them. That's the background. This is a very personal letter. All through the letter he describes his own character and his own personality and his own virtue and his own authenticity and his own integrity and his own motivation because he wants them to see what a true Apostle is like in stark contrast to false teachers.

And that's what we find as we come to this closing section. I told you last Sunday that there are five things that typically characterize all false teachers, you can look for them, they'll always be there. Number one is pride. False teachers invariably seek for notoriety, popularity. They want the big crowds. They want fame. They want the world to recognize them. They want to be famous in the world. Pride drives them.

Secondly, they're characterized by selfishness. They do what they do to get money. They do what they do to acquire things, to gain prosperity and comfort in this world. They are selfish.

Thirdly, they are characterized by the word "deception." Their agenda is to corrupt the truth and they are really the emissaries of the enemy himself. False teachers then are always characterized by pride, that is their concern for their own notoriety, their own popularity, their own esteem, their own honor in the world...by selfishness, they want by virtue of that honor and esteem to gain money and

wealth and prosperity and build their empire...thirdly, they function on the basis of deception. They are subtle and sometimes even blatant in their effort to deceive. The fourth word that characterizes them is irreverence. They are of all people on the face of the earth the most irreverent because they carry out the agenda of Satan against God. God proclaims truth through His true preachers and teachers, and Satan proclaims lies through false teachers. So false teachers are the most irreverent of all. They do the work of Satan explicitly. They are irreverent, or to borrow another word from the Old Testament, blasphemous. And the fifth word is destruction. They're known by pride, selfishness, deception, irreverence, and destruction. They abuse people. They use people. They manipulate people for their own good, their own ends, leading them into error. Error leads them into sin. And sin destroys.

Paul wants us to understand and certainly wanted the Corinthians to understand that that was the very opposite of his own motivation. Rather than being motivated by pride, he was motivated by humility. Rather than being driven by selfishness, he was driven by the desire to sacrifice himself in an utterly unselfish way. Rather than being characterized by deception, he was a man of complete integrity and honesty. Rather than being irreverent, his whole life was an act of worship and homage to God. Rather than being given over to things that destroy, he was committed to the edification of the church. And so the things that we see in this passage that characterize Paul are humility, unselfishness, integrity, reverence and edification...the very opposite of what characterizes false teachers.

These are the attitudes of his heart and they go in a number of different directions. Let me give you just a brief review of what we talked about last time. First of all, in verse 12 he refers to the first attitude, the first motive, the first concern of this true pastor and it's with regard to the world. With regard to the world, his concern was simply faithfulness. And therein was the evidences of his humility. Look at verse 12, "The signs of a true Apostle were performed among you," and he had done those signs...signs, wonders and miracles which are referred to in that verse, and we've covered that in a past message. But he says all of that was done in a ministry with all perseverance. Perseverance is from the Greek word *hupomone*which means to get under and remain there and it has to do with the ability to endure a very difficult and trying experience. His whole ministry was conducted under persecution from the time that he was first commissioned, called on the Damascus Road, until an axe head flashed in the sun and cut his head off his body, the whole time he lived in the imminent reality that every day he lived could be his last, he could be executed at the hands of Gentiles or Jews, both of which were always plotting his death. He was under the constant threat of imprisonment and consequent execution. He chronicles that all the way through this entire epistle, as we noted starting in chapter 1. He sums it up, as you will see, back in verse 10 when he says, "I'm well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak then I am strong." That's all he ever had in his life, he had to be content with it.

He wasn't asking anything from the world. From the world, the false teachers want popularity, notoriety. They want the crowds. They want the accolades. They want the hoopla. They want the fame. All that Paul ever wanted from the world was what God intended the world to give him and that was persecution because persecution had a positive effect. Verse 7, "To keep me from exalting myself there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me to keep me from exalting myself. Considering this...concerning this I entreated the Lord three times it might depart from me, and He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" God wanted him to suffer because suffering kept him...what?...humble. And when he was humble he was useful. He didn't want anything from the world, the world had nothing to give him.

The world offers nothing to us, nothing at all. He never sought popularity with the crowd. He never sought popularity with the politicians. He never sought popularity with the world around him. He never sought acceptance by the reigning philosophers and educators of his time. He never wanted honor from the unconverted, the unconverted couldn't give him any kind of just honor. He only sought to be faithful to the truth and he knew that if he was faithful to the truth it would create a hostility that would result in persecution and that was the character of his life. That's the way it always went.

Look back at 1 Corinthians chapter 4 for a moment, back in the very first letter that he wrote them. He warns them about being arrogant. Arrogance is always a virtue in the secular world. Pride is always seen as a virtue in the ungodly world. But not to God and in verse 6 of 1 Corinthians 4 Paul warns people about becoming arrogant in behalf of one against the other. In other words, letting your arrogance affect your relationships with others, always thinking of yourself as superior, and then in verse 7 he says, "For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive but if you did receive it why do you boast as if you had not received it?" Who do you think you are?....he's saying. There's no place for boasting, you don't have anything you didn't receive. And if you received it from somebody else, why do you boast as if you deserved it or earned it?

And then he gets really sarcastic with these Corinthians. "You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us. Aren't you something?" That's all sarcasm, dripping sarcasm. Boy, you think you're hot stuff, we would say in the vernacular.

Well he says in verse 8, "I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you." I wish it were true. You're proud, you're arrogant. They were so arrogant they were even parading their iniquities, according to chapter 5. Aren't you something...he says. You're rich, aren't you? You're filled, aren't you? You've arrived, you're kings.

Quite the contrary, listen to how he describes himself. Verse 9, "God has exhibited us apostles last of all." Here we are the greatest of men, anointed by Jesus Christ, called as eyewitnesses of the living Christ, as eyewitnesses of the exalted and glorified Christ whom Paul had seen on the Damascus Road for himself. Here we are the Apostles, the chosen, called to be the writers of the New Testament truth, called to establish the foundations of the New Covenant doctrine, here we are and what are we? We're nothing. We're men condemned to death. To the world we're nothing but a spectacle. Verse 10 gets sarcastic again. "We are fools for Christ's sake but you're wise. We are weak but you are strong. You are distinguished and we're without honor." That's irony. And he is again mocking their arrogance.

Verse 11, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty...here's the facts...we are poorly clothed, we are roughly treated, we are homeless, we work to the point of sweat and exhaustion...that's what the word toil means...we work with our own hands. When we are reviled, or cursed, we bless. When we are persecuted we endure...the same term again...when we are slandered we try to conciliate.: And this is how he sums it up. "We are become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things even till now."

You arrogant Corinthians, you who think you're superior, you who think you're kings, you who think you reign, you who think you've arrived, you are the wise and you are the prudent and we're just scum and dregs. Very graphic language. Scum is just what you think it is in the Greek, it's scum. That's what's left after the food at the bottom of the garbage can hardens, scrapings of food scoured off dirty dishes, pots and thrown away. Dregs, that was the bitter residue in the process of making the wine into pure wine, they would let it sit in skins in the dregs, the bitterness would all go to the bottom and there would be this terrible, bitter dregs that would eventually hardened at the bottom and be thrown away. We're the ones, we're the discards, we're the scum, we're the dregs.

Paul wanted nothing from the world. He didn't expect anything from the world. The world had nothing to offer him because the world has nothing that lasts. It all gets burned up. He didn't seek anything from the world. He only sought persecution which was inevitable because all that live godly in this present age will suffer persecution. That's what it says, 2 Timothy 3:12. That's what he sought. He sought to be so faithful that the inevitable hostility of an ungodly system would come against him. He sought, as Peter put it in 1 Peter 5:6, to be humbled under the mighty hand of God that he might be exalted by God at the appropriate time. He knew his reward was heavenly. False teachers are proud. False teachers want the notoriety. True teachers are humble, faithful and are willing to preach the truth and garner the hostility of the environment in which they live, they are willing to be called the scum and the dregs. They're willing to be regarded as criminals and outcasts. They're willing, through history it's been proven, to be sacrificed as burnt offerings on pagan ceremonial altars. That's fine. They will persevere for the truth.

Secondly, I just remind you of what we saw last week with regard to himself. With regard to the world he was content to be faithful and to persevere humbly. With regard to himself he was content to be a sacrifice. False teachers, they don't want to give up anything, they want to get everything. They're selfish, self-aggrandizing, self-consuming. They want everything they can get and they use and abuse people in order to get it. Not Paul. Look at verse 13, we remember this from last Lord's day. He says, "For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches?" See the false teachers had come to Corinth and they said, "Ah...you've, you've got a phony guy who came here, Paul was a fake, he's not a true Apostle. We're the true Apostles. Paul wasn't, he was a phony, he was a fake so you've got a substandard ministry here, you've got a substandard man coming with a substandard life, bringing a substandard message and consequently you've got a substandard church here. You're a real inferior group to the rest of the churches because you had this man in your midst."

They were...the false teachers were telling the Corinthians that they had a substandard, inferior ministry in their presence. Paul says in verse 13, "In what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches? The only thing that you didn't get that they got? Except-he says in verse 13-that I myself didn't become a burden to you." The only thing that you didn't get that the other churches got was a bill for my services rendered. I was never a burden, I didn't take anything. Didn't take any money, didn't take anything from you. He..he was very wise, he knew that the man who preaches the gospel has a right to live with the gospel, he had said that in 1 Corinthians 9, he told them that no soldier goes to war and doesn't expect to get fed. No farmer plants a field and doesn't expect to eat the crop. The workman's worthy of his hire. You can't muzzle the ox that treads the grain, you've got to feed it. He knew he had a right to it but he also knew that false teachers plied their trade to get money out of the pockets of their unwary subjects and he didn't want to be associated with that. And the Lord protected him from that and the Lord knew that false teachers would come in and they would have had something with which to accuse him had he taken anything. So the Lord made sure that while he was in Corinth he never took any money and he never took anything from them. "I was never a burden to you."

Earlier, you remember, in chapter 11 he says there was a time when I was in great need, didn't have daily necessities, probably didn't have food, didn't have what he needed to make it from day to day. He said, "I never even told you about that, I waited till somebody came from far away and met my need. I didn't want to be chargeable to you at all. I have never been a burden to you."

The reason, verse 14, "I do not seek what is yours but you." I want you, I don't want your...I don't want what's yours. False teachers, they want what's yours, they don't want you, they don't care about you. They just as soon damn you, they just want what you have. True teachers don't want you...they

just...they don't want yours, they just want you...and that was Paul. He just wanted you for the Kingdom, you for God, you for eternal glory.

And then he makes an analogy. "For children are not responsible to save up for their parents but parents for their children." This is just normal, I'm your spiritual father and I care about providing what you need. I don't expect you to provide for me.

How far will you take this, Paul? Verse 15, "I'll most gladly spend.." What does he mean by the word "spend"? To literally spend, it's a Greek word that means to exhaust your resources. I'll spend everything I have...money, time, talent, energy, everything I have. I'll do that gladly, most gladly and then I'll spend it till it's expended. That literally means to be exhausted. I will give you everything I have, I will exhaust my money, I will exhaust my time, I will exhaust my talent, I will exhaust my energy, I will exhaust my life, everything because your souls are at stake. This is sacrifice.

With regard to the world his concern was faithfulness. With regard to himself his concern was sacrifice. This is the mark of a true man of God. He wanted to give his life away. He told the Philippians, "I want to be offered on the sacrifice of your faith." I'm willing to die getting the gospel to you for your eternal souls. And sad, and here's the pathetic part of it, end of verse 15, "If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?" Is this the thanks I get? If I love you the more as evidenced by my ongoing sacrifice, do I get this in return? Your hostility? Your diffidence? Your mutiny? Your rebellion? As I love you more are you going to love me less? Is this my reward?

It can be, folks, I tell you, it can be. And I'll tell you, it can be a heart-crushing experience for a faithful pastor when some people come in and lie about him and distort his character and win favor with people who falsely accuse one who has sacrificially loved them. That was Paul's experience. That is a very painful thing to endure.

Now that takes us to the third element in Paul's concerns. His concern with regard to the world was that he would be faithful. His concern with regard to himself, sacrificial. His concern with regard to his ministry, his concern was to be honest. His concern was to be honest. Verse 16 he says, "Be that as it may, whether you love me or you don't, I didn't burden you myself. I've been faithful never to be a burden to you. Nevertheless...he says...crafty fellow that I am...and here he gets sarcastic again...crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit." That is ludicrous. That is ridiculous. What man runs a scam which benefits him nothing? That's his point. What are you...what do you think I did? Come in there, spent two years of my life, write all these letters, make these trips, send Titus, go through all this grief, travel all over the place trying to sort you out, aren't I clever? Aren't I deceitful? Boy, I really took you in. And what did I get? Nothing... Some scam.

The whole thought is ludicrous. And they knew it because they knew he had never taken anything. Those who are engaged in true ministry are honest and up front and straightforward. And you can look at their life for a long time and it has integrity. False teachers are deceptive. They're deceitful. Paul uses the term "crafty fellow," it's a Greek term that identifies an unscrupulous deceptive person up to every trick. And that's probably what the false teachers said about Paul, "Yeah, he's a really crafty guy," and they're sort of scratching their hair trying to figure out how that all works when you don't get any benefit from it. You just get a lot of grief. Yeah, he says, "I took you in by deceit." That's an interesting phrase, it looks real benign in your Bible, I took you in by deceit, it's not. I took you in is a fishing word, it means to catch. I caught you. Are you ready for this? The Greek word *dolos*, deceit...it means fish hook. I hooked you. And nothing, frankly, is more deceptive than fishing to the fish. I mean, the whole idea is you don't drop your line down in there with a lure that says, "I would like you for dinner." And you don't just drop a great big hook down there that's obvious. You put something down there that looks like dinner and you deceive the fish.

Now those were terms used in the Greek word for chicanery and deception. It also can mean hunting because the word "deceit," *dolos*, can also be used to mean trap. I baited the trap and got you, I baited the hook and I'm really a clever guy, aren't I? I went fishing for you and I hooked you. I went hunting for you and I caught you in my trap. I took you in by deceit.

These false teachers had gone to Corinth and said Paul was a liar and a charlatan and a fraud and a fake and a deceiver and he come in there and he trapped them and he caught them in his deceptive hypocritical scheme. They circulated these vicious lies about him. And the sad, sad thing is the people had believed them. They believed them.

There's probably another little thing I need to mention here that's behind the scenes but it's in the epistle elsewhere, as I'll show you in a minute. The problem here was they were saying to those people, most likely..."Well Paul just hasn't brought his scheme yet to its final end...in fact, he's so subtle you can't really see what he's doing yet because he hasn't taken anything yet." I mean, they tried to use everything they could. And my guess, and I think it's a fairly educated guess, is Paul, you remember, before he wrote 1 Corinthians had sent Titus there. Titus was his companion, his son in the faith. He had sent Titus there before the writing of 1 Corinthians with a prior letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5, a letter before 1 Corinthians, not an inspired letter but a letter surely of good, sound instruction. Titus delivered that letter and at that time Titus told the Corinthian church about an offering, about a collection that was going to be taken. Go back to chapter 8. Now verse 6 says, "Consequently we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well." What he's talking about here, this gracious work, is referred to in verse 4 as the support of the saints. Let me just give you a quick statement. The church was

founded in Jerusalem initially. And when the church was founded on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims because it was the time of Passover and then the feast of First Fruits and all of that, all that great Jewish holiday period caused pilgrims to flood into the city of Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean world. So they were all there in Jerusalem for this great time and this great event...Pentecost being that great event.

Well on Pentecost the church was founded, the Spirit of God came. And many of these people were converted to Christ in that first crowd, and then the second crowd. And in a few chapters you have 20-30 thousand people making up the church very rapidly. And now they have a problem. There are pilgrims there and they should go home but the problem is, there's only one church in the world and it's in Jerusalem. There aren't any other churches. So they can't go home to their home church because there is no church. And so they're drawn to stay. And so the church in Jerusalem has to absorb all of these people who basically have no homes and no livelihoods and no nothing and that becomes a huge drain on the resources. Early in the book of Acts, you remember what happened? The people in the church are selling things they have and taking the money and spreading it around and they're bringing money in, laying it at the Apostles' feet and you remember some people were actually selling land, they're liquidating their capital assets in order to get the cash to help these people. And it goes on like that. Well eventually they ran out of money. And these people don't leave because now they're a part of the church.

Furthermore, the Jews who believed lost their status in the family. Many of them lost their careers, lost their jobs. They don't have any support anyway in Jerusalem because the Jewish community is so hostile against the church and persecuting the church with a fury, right? So this church has tremendous financial need.

Paul realized that meeting that need he was going to have to go somewhere else and by then the churches in the Gentile world had been planted so he went from place to place making a collection to take money back to the Jerusalem church to aid the believers there. It was to meet their need, first of all, and two, it was to conciliate the Jewish church and the Gentile church. Jews and Gentiles had a huge gulf between them but in Christ they were one, as Paul points out in Ephesians 2, the wall was broken down. It was time to practically bring them together and money coming from Gentile churches to the aid of the Jews in Jerusalem would go a long way to conciliate and to build bridges across old gulfs and chasms. And Paul knew that and so he started this collection. Originally he had sent Titus with this preface to 1 Corinthians, and he had told Titus to start the collection, keep the collection going. Then when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he referred to that collection. First Corinthians 16 he says, "Keep collecting so that when I get there I don't have to take a big collection, you'll have it already collected when I arrive and I can take it to Jerusalem."

Well, you can just hear the false prophets. "Aha, I see, here's the scam, it's unfolding right now. This thing never gets to Jerusalem, folks, this is going into Paul's pocket. Paul's not telling you the truth, he's going to get this money, he's going to pocket this money." I mean, they only could think like deceivers, right? So they projected their own attitude toward everything on to him and assumed that he would have done just what they would have done.

There's really a dead giveaway. "To the pure all things are...what?...are pure, and to the defiled, everything is defiled." So they projected their own defilement on Paul and said he's going to take this money and keep it. "He never claimed to be a burden to you, well he just soft-soaped you, this is something else. You're going to get this huge collection that you've been collecting over years and he's going to come and walk off with this deal. He is a liar. He is a thief. And you have been deceived."

Now how is Paul going to refute this bizarre, ludicrous, ridiculous accusation? How's he going to refute it? Verse 17, back to chapter 12, "Certainly...he says...I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? I sent Titus. I didn't take advantage, there's no record. Let's go to the facts. Have I taken advantage? Is there any evidence that I've ever defrauded you of anything ever anytime? I have never been a burden to you." Verse 14, "I will not be a burden to you." Verse 16, "I did not burden you." That's the fact. "I've never taken advantage of you through any of those I have sent to you." Verse 18, "I urged Titus to go to come to you. I didn't send him alone but I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps? Weren't we exactly the same? There wasn't any difference."

You see, if they were impugning Paul's motives and calling him a deceiver, then they were impugning everybody with him because it had to be collusion. Everybody had to be in on the scam.

Go back to chapter 8 again to fill in the gap here. In chapter 8 of this epistle he reminds them not only of the first time Titus came but the second time Titus came. And Titus actually went three times, the third time delivering 2 Corinthians. He went the first time, started the offering and brought the first letter. Went the second time with the severe letter and kept the offering going. The severe letter was the one written between 1 and 2 Corinthians, as you remember. And now he goes back a third time with this epistle and he says in this letter in verse 16, "Thanks be to God who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. Titus feels the way about you that I do. He not only accepted our gospel but being himself very earnest has gone to you of his own accord," and here comes the key, verse 18, "We have sent along with him the brother." This is for accountability sake just so there's no possibility that this is a scam. Paul's aware of these things. We sent the brother.

Who is this? "Whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches." He doesn't even name the guy. We didn't need to name him because he had already been there with Titus so they knew who he was, everybody knew who he was. And he was famous as a preacher. He was appointed by the churches. Paul looked for some outside person outside his own little group of friends who was appointed by the churches so there would be no question about collusion here. "And his job was to travel with us in this gracious work which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself and to show our readiness." Verse 20, "Taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift." I don't want to do anything that's going to cause anybody to criticize us, so we had the churches pick a man and send him along for accountability.

"We have regard," verse 21, "for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men. We're concerned not only about what men think but about what God thinks." And thirdly, here's another person, "We've sent with him our brother," this is another unnamed man whom they would have known because he had already come. We've often tested him. We found him diligent in many things. Now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner, fellow worker among you. As for our other brethren, these other two, they are messengers of the churches of glory to Christ."

Let me ask you this. Could somebody describe you that way? A glory to Christ...that's a pretty high commendation, isn't it? Paul says I've covered those basis, you know the facts. You know I never took anything from you, you know Titus never defrauded you. And you know he came with a brother widely known and famous among the entire church for his preaching, and you know there was another brother sent as a...as appointed by the churches as well and you know we did all this so no suspicion could be grounded in any reality whatsoever. Titus went at that beginning...beginning the collection. A year later 1 Corinthians was written, encouraging them to keep the collection going. Titus went back after 1 Corinthians, brought the Severe Letter, encouraged them to keep it going. He goes back with this letter and he's there again for the third time. They knew Titus and they knew the men that were with him and they were all trustworthy, more lies by the false teachers, more deception, more untruth, more assault. Paul says in verse 18, "Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps? Was there any difference in any of us? Weren't we all the same? Didn't we all treat you exactly the same? We were beyond legitimate accusation. We were beyond any justified suspicion. You know there was no deceit in our ministry. There was no cunning craftiness. There was only honesty. There was only integrity."

Beloved, this is characteristic of a true man of God. Paul in Romans 9:1 says, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying. My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit." This was an honest man. And whenever he wanted to affirm his honesty, he called upon his conscience. Second Corinthians 1:12, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the

world and especially toward you. I have a clear conscience." Let me remind you. The conscience is the highest court on earth. God is the court in heaven. But on earth the conscious is...the conscience is the highest court. It is a God-given device that every person possesses which triggers feelings of shame, remorse, fear and guilt when we sin. Paul says I look deep into my heart and my conscience does not accuse me. That's a great testimony to his integrity, isn't it? We conducted ourselves appropriately, all of us did, you have no reason for such foolish suspicion. I have conducted my ministry with complete integrity and honesty.

In Galatians 1:20, "Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying." Isn't it sad that he had to say that so many times? That's because there were so many gainsayers going around telling everybody he was a liar. And the only thing he could do would be to say, "I appeal to God, before God I'm not lying. I appeal to my conscience, my conscience is clear, I'm not lying." A man of great integrity.

Second Corinthians 4:2, the false teachers had accused him of all kinds of terrible things. But he says here in 4:2, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." He says before God I'm telling you the truth. My own conscience affirms I'm telling you the truth. And I even appeal to your conscience, you've seen my life. The false teachers said he's crafty, he's subtle, he's deceptive, he adulterates, twists, perverts the Word of God. Paul says I've renounced that, I don't walk in shame, I don't walk in craftiness. I don't adulterate the Word of God, I just proclaim the truth. My conscience is clear and yours should be too, you've seen my life, you've watched me. The man was a man of great integrity.

In the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians, verse 31 he says, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever knows that I am not lying." It's sad, isn't it? He keeps saying he's not lying, he's not lying, he's not lying. So many accusations. Such a man of integrity must have become weary trying to defend his honesty. First Timothy 2:7, I love this passage. "There's one God, verse 5, one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all the testimony born of the proper time and for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I'm telling the truth, I'm not lying." What else can you do when people say you're a liar and you're a fraud and you're fake, what can you do? You can say I'm telling you I'm not lying, before God I'm not lying, my conscience is clear, your consciences should be clear too, you know my life, you've seen me. And look at the facts." There's no deceit in his ministry.

With regard to the world he was humble, faithful. That's the way it needed to be. With regard to himself, he was selfless and sacrificial. With regard to his ministry, he was honest, had integrity. Just the opposite of false teachers. Fourth, the next thing that's concerning Paul is with regard to his Lord and with regard to his Lord his concern was reverence...reverence. Verse 19, quite an interesting verse. All this time you've been thinking we're defending ourselves to you. How about that? "All this time, all this time you thought all this lengthy explanation of my personal integrity and all this defense of my apostleship, you thought that it was all for you because you're the judge and you're the jury and you're the tribunal that's going to sit in judgment on my life, huh? You thought probably all this time because maybe that's what the false teachers have told you that I've been making excuses for my character and my conduct failures and trying to justify myself to convince you as if you were the judge, as if I was on trial before you. You've been thinking that all along, haven't you? Wrong! You're not my judge. You're not my jury. You're not my tribunal." First Corinthians chapter 4 he had told them in his earlier letter, this is very straight, "To me...verse 3...it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by any human court." It is minuscule. It is well nigh immaterial. It doesn't matter. It's unimportant. It's insignificant what you think of me, or what any human court thinks of me. Verse 5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring delight the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God. He says you're not my judge, God's my judge. You're not to sit in judgment on me, you don't have that right. That right belongs to God. You're not my tribunal. You're not writing all of this so you can render the final verdict on my life.

Back to verse 19, "Actually, it is the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ." What's he saying here? You're not my judge, who is? God is my judge, not you. God is my judge. We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, he said in chapter 5 verse 10. In chapter 2 verse 17 he said, "We speak in Christ in the sight of God." He was conscious all the time that God was watching. God would be his judge. Everything had to be finally rendered in God's hands. God was his only judge. Second Timothy 4, you know the familiar words. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing in His Kingdom, preach the Word...preach the Word." Why? Because God is your judge. Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy verse 8 he says, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day." God will render the final verdict on my life, not you. That's why he was so reverent. As you see the life of Paul in the book of Acts and you go through all his epistles, you're overwhelmed with his reference for God, always talking about God, rejoicing that he was in Christ but everything was in the sight of God, in view of God to the glory of God, to the honor of God, to the majesty of God. He's not subject to some self-appointed kangaroo court made up of men.

You say, "Well then why does he bother to tell them all this stuff? Why does he bother with this defense?" Well that comes to the last point with regard to the church. With regard to the world his

concern was faithful humility. With regard to himself, sacrifice. With regard to his ministry, honesty. With regard to God, reverence. And with regard to the church, listen his concern was sanctification...sanctification. Verse 19, "Why then are you giving this all to us?" End of verse, "It is all for your...what?...what's the word?...upbuilding, beloved." At the same time that he was seeking to reverence God, at the same time that he knew who his judge was and that he was seeking to please God and God alone, he also sought the spiritual well-being of the Corinthian church. And here's the point. If he was discredited, they wouldn't listen to him. If they didn't listen to him, they wouldn't hear the Word of God. If they didn't hear the Word of God, they wouldn't grow. Bottom line, their sanctification was dependent on listening to him. He wanted to convince them that he was the true spokesman of God, not so they could sit in judgment on his life, but so they could listen to his teaching. It was all for your upbuilding, it's all for your edification. You're not my judge but you are my spiritual responsibility. You're not going to sit in judgment on my life, but you are going to sit under my teaching and only if you trust in me as the true Apostle of Jesus Christ are you going to hear what I say and believe it and therefore grow.

He calls them "beloved" tenderly here. He's been sarcastic and I think putting in the word "beloved" sort of balances it off a little. You're not my judge but all that I'm teaching, all that I'm trying to accomplish here ultimately benefits you because when you hear the truth you're built up in the truth. God has given to the church apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and teaching pastors for the edification of the saints, for the building up of the saints. And Paul was one of those. He was given to the church for the building of the church. Chapter 10 verse 8 of 2 Corinthians, "The Lord...he says...gave him for building you up and not for destroying you." Chapter 13 verse 10 as he closes out this epistle, he says that his task which the Lord gave him, end of verse 10, was for building up and not for tearing down. Peter says, "As babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby," and the pure milk of the Word was coming through the Apostles, at that time it was coming through the Apostle Paul, thirteen New Testament epistles coming through him. The Word coming to him by revelation. He was the source of divine truth and their edification was dependent, their spiritual growth was dependent on that truth. And if they stopped listening to Paul, then they stopped getting fed to divine truth and they would not grow. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...profitable to make the man of God thoroughly furnished unto all good works, whole, complete, perfect." Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:32, he commended them to the Word of God so that it would build them up." So Paul says you're not my judge, but you are my spiritual responsibility. You're not the tribunal that's going to set the verdict on my life, but you are my children and I'm responsible for your nurture. And that's why all of this effort so that he would reposition himself in the place to be heard trustingly and believed so that they could grow. We can't grow apart from the Word, you know that? And in those days they couldn't grow apart from this Apostle. If they didn't trust his preaching and teaching and writing, they would be missing what God had provided for them.

Now, that introduces the subject of sanctification. All of this, he says, for your upbuilding. And that then becomes the theme clear to the end of chapter 13. Everything left now is going to come under the subject of sanctification as Paul closes out this epistle and gives to us the elements of a sanctified church. This is a great section of Scripture and we'll start into it next time, the elements of a sanctified church. Join me in prayer.

Father, what a joy to get into the heart of this beloved Apostle. What a testimony. What an example he is to us. Here was a passionate man, here was a driven man. Here was a man consumed, compelled. I suppose some psychologists might say he was an obsessed man, certainly compulsive but compelled by all the right things, compelled by humility to be faithful and endure endless suffering, seeking nothing from the world, humble. Here was a man with regard to himself sacrificial, willing to spend everything he had until he had exhausted it all, including his own life and breath...sacrificial. Here was a man honest. Though his life has been searched and searched and searched, there is no hint of deception anyplace. Such great integrity. This is a man who sets a standard for us to follow. Here is a man who's reverent, a man who lives his life before you, not before men, who is more concerned about what heaven says than what earth says, who wants your commendation most of all. And here is a man with regard to the church who is consumed with the church's building up, so much so that he goes to these lengths to protect his platform not for the sake of personal gain because it didn't come and wouldn't come in this world, but for the sake of teaching his beloved children. May this model of ministry be restored in churches around the world. May such men be raised up and may all who already stand in places of ministry be faithful to this pattern and may this model be the very pattern that all of us follow who should live our lives humbly and sacrificially and honestly, living our lives reverently before You in order that we might be the source of the strengthening of all those around us. This is a high calling, this is a noble man and we desire to be like him, even as he was like Jesus Christ who set the standard of humility, sacrifice, integrity, who set the standard for reverence and who is the true builder of His church. We pray in His name and for His glory. Amen.

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