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

The Pattern of Sanctification: Obedience and Integrity
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:7-10
Code: 47-95

Well, we are coming now this morning to the final section of the letter of Paul to the Corinthians we call 2 Corinthians. Turn to chapter 13. This morning we're going to look at the last formal portion of the letter and we will leave the final closing greeting for the next time. But we'll wrap up the main body of the letter in our message this morning.

As you know, we have been looking at this last part of 2 Corinthians under the title "The Faithful Pastor's Concerns." Way back in chapter 12 we started to see Paul unload the things that were on his heart, something he has done all through the book, but here is kind of a summary of the matters that concern him as a faithful pastor. We saw that the primary issue with him, as noted in chapter 12 verse 19, end of the verse, is for the upbuilding of the people and that is repeated at the end of verse 10 chapter 13 for building up and not for tearing down. The section in the middle is all about the pastor's concern for the upbuilding of his people. We are responsible for what is called the edifying of the saints, the building up of the saints. Our responsibility is the nurturing of believers to maturity. And in that sense we're not unlike a parent, not unlike a father.

In the New Testament, which is rich with images and metaphors to describe and define the duties, obligations and responsibilities of pastors, the pastors are identified in a number of ways, by a number of pictures. They are leaders, overseers, shepherds, teachers, guides, heralds, warners, servants, comforters and examples. And when you think about it that's precisely what parents are. No human image is complete in pulling all those functions together as the image of parents. Parents are also leaders and overseers and shepherds and teachers and guides and heralds and warners and servants and comforters and examples. There's a real parallel then between the pastor's work with his church and the parents' work with their children. Pastors are like parents. In a sense they are sort of a composite father and mother over their family which is the church. And Paul understood that.

Look back at chapter 12 for a moment and be reminded in verse 14 that Paul said here, "For this third time I'm ready to come to you and I will not be a burden to you for I do not seek what is yours but you for children are not responsible to save up for their parents but parents for their children." There he likens himself to parents who is responsible to care for the children rather than the children caring for the parent.

Back in his first letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 14, he said, "I do not write these things to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children." And then verse 15 says, "If you were to have countless tutors in Christ, all kinds of people instructing you, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." There again he uses a parental model to define his relationship to the church. But nowhere is this parallel more clearly laid out than in 1 Thessalonians, and I want you to turn to it for a minute. First Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 7 to 11, I want the message today to faithfully treat the passage but also to address the issue of parents and fathers on this special day.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 7 we read this, Paul here is defining his relationship to the Thessalonian church, "We proved to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives because you had become very dear to us, for you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses and so is God how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory."

Now here Paul in verse 7 identifies himself as like a mother and in verse 11 as like a father. There are a number of characteristics surrounding the picture of a mother. He talks about being gentle, being affectionate, being sacrificial, being loving, laboring, toiling night and day as mothers do in the rearing of their precious children. And then when it comes to the father he ties around that concept things like being devout and just and blameless and exemplary and exhorting and encouraging and imploring, which is another word for commanding. And that parental responsibility is all designed to produce what is in verse 12, a child who walks in a manner worthy of the God who calls him into His own Kingdom and glory. This is very much the pastoral role. As pastors we are like mothers in the sense that we are to come to our people as gentle, affectionate, sacrificial, loving, laboring, toiling, night and day on their behalf. And we come also as fathers who are the family priest, as it were, the devout one who bring justice and blamelessness and virtue, exemplary lives who become the exhorters or the ones in charge of discipline, the encouragers and the ones who lay out the law, as it were, those who command. Such loving balance, such combination of care and leadership marks every faithful pastor as well as every faithful parent. And certainly it was true of the Apostle Paul, he was like a loving parent who was consumed really of the process of nurturing his spiritual children to the place of real maturity.

Go back to our text now in 2 Corinthians and be reminded, as I pointed out in chapter 12 verse 19, chapter 13 verse 10 that brackets this passage in the middle, his concern was for their upbuilding.

And what we said to you is that the faithful pastor is literally concerned as a main issue with the spiritual well-being of his children. That's what consumes him. He is not career oriented. He is not concerned about building a kingdom, or building a church, or building buildings or building a reputation, he's not concerned about how many people attend the church. He's not concerned about those kinds of things that are peripheral. He is concerned about the main issue, the spiritual well-being of his children. He is consumed with their spiritual maturation, their spiritual maturity, their spiritual growth.

And as Paul brings this letter to a close he summarizes the elements contained within that concern. If one is going to grow spiritually, he has to deal with sin in his life. And Paul talked about the importance of repentance and discipline and authority. We saw that in the end of chapter 12 and the beginning of chapter 13. Paul talked about repentance, discipline, authority.

And then he talked about authenticity in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 13. If one is going to grow one has to be a true spiritual child, authentic, genuinely in Christ. Anybody who is concerned about their child, any parent concerned about their child, any father would have the same concern. You would be concerned that your child was dealing with the sin in his or her life and confessing that sin and repenting of that sin. You would be concerned that in an appropriate amount of discipline was brought to bear upon that child to bring that child back to the path of righteousness. You would be concerned that the child understood the authority that God bears in their lives through the Word of Christ which is the Scripture. You would be concerned about their authenticity, that they were, in fact, genuinely Christ's.

But there would be two other things that would concern you as a father that also concern me as a pastor and they are the last two elements of this pastoral/parental concern that we find in the passage and they're in verses 7 through 9. First, obedience; second, integrity...first, obedience; second, integrity. Paul is concerned about repentance, discipline, authority, authenticity and then obedience and integrity. We're going to look at these two and then a comment or two about verse 10 and wrap up the main body of the epistle this morning.

Now I confess to you, this is not theological, this is not profound, this is not particularly erudite, this is straightforward, simple, bottom line truth that you will be familiar with if you're familiar with the Word of God and I hope still that it will be another encouragement to you to faithfulness in this regard, and to my own heart as well to fulfill the role as a pastor that God has given to me. First is the issue of obedience, look at verse 7. "Now we pray to God that you do no wrong, not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved, for we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth for we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong." And we'll stop there.

The second point is introduced in the same way when he says in verse 9, "This we also pray for." He's praying for two things, one-obedience, two-we'll see in a moment, integrity. But let's look at obedience for a moment. Again I want to stress to you because it has to be there, it's just a fact of life in dealing with 2 Corinthians, but the background is colored. Everywhere in this passage, every text is colored with the presence of false teachers and false apostles. They have come into the city of Corinth, they have confused the church, they have turned the church, in part, away from the Apostle Paul. The church has become enamored by the false teachers and the false apostles who viciously attack Paul, denied that he spoke for Christ, denied that he was a genuine apostle, denied that he preached the truth of God. In fact, the people had come to the place where according to verse 3 they were actually seeking for proof that it was Christ speaking in Paul. They should have known that. They had had enough contact with him through the mail, through his letters and so forth and his second visit. They should have known that but they were beguiled, deceived by the false teachers and were asking again the question...did Christ really speak in Paul? Is he really God's spokesman? Does he really give us the truth?

He wrote this whole epistle to affirm his authenticity so that he would remove doubt and denial of it. He wrote this to end all the discussion about whether he was a true apostle. He wanted the church to be sure of that. He wanted the church to know he was real, he was genuine, he spoke for God, he was a messenger of Jesus Christ. His ministry and his message were from the Lord. And this whole epistle is a defense of that legitimacy, that reality. So throughout the letter he writes about his credentials as the true messenger of Jesus Christ. He's not trying to convince the false teachers and the false apostles, he's not trying to convince the unbelieving world, he is trying to assure the church because his reputation is being maligned in their presence. And he is very aware that if the church turns away from him, in effect they turn away from the truth and they turn away from Christ because he is the minister of Christ who speaks the truth and the false apostles are liars who represent Satan.

So, you get the picture as you've gone through this book that Paul's reputation was an issue here, that the people needed to know he was genuine. And this is a crucial feature throughout this entire epistle. That fact makes this passage quite remarkable because notice what he says, "We pray to God...verse 7...that you do no wrong, not that we ourselves may appear approved but that you may do what is right even though we should appear unapproved." Listen to this, as important, as crucial, as essential as his reputation was to his ministry and to people trusting him and believing what he said came from God, as critical as that was he would set that aside in favor of their obedience. He was preeminently concerned not about himself being approved but about their obedience, that they would not do what is wrong, but would do what is right. A man's reputation is crucial. Paul's was crucial. It was important that people know he spoke the truth and spoke for God. And no man wants his reputation unfairly maligned. And Paul was concerned that the church know he was a real apostle. He wasn't so concerned about the world, but the church. But even more than that. He was concerned about their spiritual well-being. And if it had to mean that he would not be approved, he

would rather have them do what is right and obey than to have some personal approval for himself.

This is quite remarkable. The man was utterly selfless. The epitome of his selflessness is found in Romans 9 and it's the only passage like this that takes it a step further. It's one of the most amazing things that he ever wrote, if not THE most amazing. And it tells you the most about the man. "I'm telling the truth in Christ," 9:10 of Romans, and by the way, he wrote this from Corinth on his third visit, we'll talk about that later, but he was in Corinth when he wrote this. "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit." Now that's a lot of stuff to say before you say what you're going to say. But what he was going to say was so unbelievable, so remarkable, so astounding and so amazing that he had to say all of that because people wouldn't be prone to believe it. So he says, "I'm telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying and my conscience affirms that bearing witness in the Holy Spirit." Of what? "That I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israelites." That astonishing?

You know what he's saying? I could wish to go to hell if they could go to heaven thereby. It's one thing to say I'll sacrifice my health, I'll sacrifice my time, I'll even sacrifice my earthly, physical life. It's something else to say I'll give up my eternal life for the salvation of my brethren in Israel. Amazing selflessness and that for unbelievers of Israel.

But here we find him in 2 Corinthians chapter 13 preeminently concerned not about himself but about his spiritual children. His deepest longing was for the obedience of his church, his beloved church. And if that meant that he had to go on appearing to be disqualified, which is what the word unapproved means at the end of the verse, in the eyes of the outsiders, in the eyes of the false apostles and false teachers, that's fine as long as they are obedient that doesn't matter at all.

Let's look at the verse more closely. "Now we pray to God," could be "I," some of the manuscripts read "I," in either case it's Paul. Sometimes he uses that editorial "we" because it's just a humbler expression. But he says, "I pray to God," what are you praying for, Paul? "I'm praying that you do no wrong." You know what my prayer is? My prayer is that repent as he called them to back in chapter 12 verses 20 and 21. My prayer is that you deal with the sin in your life, my prayer is that you stop doing wickedness and sin. My prayer is that when I get there on that third visit, you're all obedient. That's my prayer.

Now this demonstrates some of his selflessness because he says as a result of that, "Not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right even though we should appear unapproved." Now what he means by that is this, the false apostles were always saying Paul is weak, weak, weak. He doesn't have the persona, he doesn't have the charm, he doesn't have the powerful personality, he doesn't have that domineering stature, he doesn't have that impressive

presence. He doesn't come in and command. He's just weak. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 2:3 he said, "I came weak in fear and trembling then I disdained to use the words of man's wisdom." He says I was nothing but a broken clay pot, every...everybody knew he was in prison, beaten. He was terribly persecuted, punished. The man appeared weak. He seemed to be a failure, a miserable failure, always in and out of jails everywhere he went. And the false teachers parked on that and loved to lift up the fact that Paul was so weak.

Now had the Corinthians been in sin, Paul would have come in with a rod, as he said in 1 Corinthians 4:21, to deal with that sin. That's what he meant back in verse 20 of chapter 12 when he said, "I may...when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and be found by you to be not what you wish." In other words, if you want, I'll come with a rod. I'll come with discipline. Over in chapter 13 verse 3 at the end of the verse, the end of verse 2 he says, "If I come again I'll not spare anyone." If I come and I find sin, I'm taking out the rod and we're going to deal with sin and I'm going to come with authority. And those of you, verse 3, who are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you but mighty in you, you're going to see it. You want to see my authority? You want to see my power? You want to see Christ mighty in me? If I come and find sin, you'll see that authority. You'll see that power. I'll come t punish. I'll come to discipline. I'll come to confront sin. I'll come and put on a power display. I'll show you the authority that Christ has given to me to apply His truth to His church.

Now, you know, in the flesh, in your humanness when you're being just massacred and maligned and your character is being assassinated and you're being ridiculed and mocked as a weakling, and a man with nothing to offer, with no great strength and no great person and not impressive, there would be something in you that would say, "I'd like to put on a display for those guys, I'd like to come in and show them what I can be if I have to be." But that would be so self-serving. Rather he says then put on display my authority which might elevate me in some people's eyes and move me from being unapproved to being approved, rather than putting on some display that's going to cause me to be approved, I would rather pray to God that you do no wrong. He didn't care whether in the eyes of those people he was approved or not approved. He didn't care what the world thought. You remember back in 1 Corinthians 4 he said, "It's a small thing to me what men say about me." I don't care what men say about me. I don't care what people think about me. I only care what the Lord says about me. Their godliness and their obedience if it came about would preclude, would eliminate any necessity of Paul using his authority through discipline. And he might...he might appear to be just as weak as they always thought he was because there would be no need to exercise authority.

But like a loving father, and any loving father understands this. I understand this and I'm sure you do as a father, I would rather that my children obey than that I would have to put on a display of authority and discipline, wouldn't you? That's a very painful thing to do. That's why back in chapter 2 Paul

says, "I don't even want to come. If you're going to be sinful I don't want to come, it's too sad, it's too sorrowful, it's too painful." He said, "I wrote and confronted your sins, chapter 2 verse 4, in anguish of heart and tears." It hurt him just to confront their sin in a letter, to say nothing of having to go physically, personally and discipline them. You know as a father you...you've given that line to your son, "This hurts you more than it does me..." Or that's the other way around, isn't it? "This hurts me more than it hurts you." If you're a loving father, that's how you feel about it. If you really care about your son, it hurts you to discipline. It's a painful thing. If you care about your daughter, it hurts you to discipline, it's a painful thing. And you wish that your child had never needed that discipline because the child was obedient. That's where Paul is. I don't...I don't need to put my authority on display, he's saying, I don't need to make a demonstration of authority for the sake of my own reputation. I would far rather you be godly. I don't care if the outside people think I'm weak if you're virtuous.

So that's what he prayed for. "We pray to God that you do no wrong." Nothing would make Paul happier than to show up and the church would be pure and he would have nothing to confront. That would fulfill his desire to the...to the pinnacle.

In Philippians 1 you get the idea of the same thing. Paul prays for the Philippians that your love may abound more and more in real knowledge and discernment. Verse 10, so that you may approve things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ, having been filled with the fruit of righteousness. That's what he was after....righteousness, goodness, blamelessness, virtue, godliness, holiness. And he says this is what I want, "Not that we ourselves may appear approved." I don't need to prove my authority by punishing you, I'd rather not need to punish you. I just want you to do what is right even we should appear unapproved.

I suppose you could take that over into the parental area. Sometimes you see a father, let's say, disciplining a child and you say, "Wow, he's firm. He's tough. He's strong. Boy, that's strong discipline," as he whacks the kid around and speaks to him in a firm and strong confrontive voice. And you might conclude there's a strong person. On the other hand, you might see a father who never puts on that kind of display at all, and you might conclude that that is a weak father. But a better test would be to look at the child. Where the child is obedient, the father may appear weak because he doesn't need to be strong in terms of authoritative discipline. Where the child is disobedient, then he has to take that role upon himself. It's not necessarily any evidence of weakness that you do not see parents disciplining children, it may on the other hand be a great testimony to the wondrous work of God in the heart of the children through the parenting process and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is saying I don't need to display my...my power in front of you, I would rather see God transform you spiritually through the instruction that I've given you. I want you to do what is right.

You know, even as a parent I think you've got to get over the hump of wanting your children to be obedient because it helps your reputation. You know, there are a lot of parents who...who want their children to be a certain kind of child because it will enhance their reputation, so it's an ego thing. I always cringe a little when I see that bumper sticker that says, "My child is something-or-other, I don't know, I can't read it, something or other at the school or something or other somewhere, student of the year, or whatever it says, student of the week," or...I'm glad for the child to be student of the week, but what does that have to do with your car? In fact, why don't you give honor to whom honor is due, why don't you put a bumper sticker on the rear end of the kid that just says, "I'm student of the week?" I don't understand why somehow, you know, you see this in the Little League baseball and all of that where all of a sudden this kid is out there and what he's doing has very little to do with him and everything to do with his mother and father and who they are in the community or what kind of reputation they want. And the poor little guy is a victim of this drive to be elevated in the eyes of peers on the part of parents. I hope that you're consumed with the spiritual well-being of your children, even if it brings nothing to you, even if it gives you no opportunity to display your power as a parent because of their obedience. I would pray as a parent from the out said that I would only have to discipline my children ever so infrequently, ever so rarely and ideally never because they would be so obedient to the things that they're taught. And so I would rather, like Paul, appear weak than to appear strong because you have disobedient children.

Paul says I just pray for your obedience. I pray that you'll not do what is wrong, but that you'll do what is right.

Paul was content with the way he was perceived by the world. He was content to be perceived as weak and fearful and trembling. He was content, he says in 1 Corinthians 4 some strong, strong language, he says, "We are weak...verse 10...we...we are without honor, we are both hungry and thirsty...verse 11...poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless. We toil working with our own hands. When we are reviled we bless. When we're persecuted we endure. We're slandered, we try to conciliate. We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things." That was Paul, so selfless. That was all right. If he appeared weak, that's fine as long as his children were strong. And you know something? It's in our weakness that God becomes strong through us. He learned that and wrote about it in 2 Corinthians 12. He was a very, very selfless man, selfless shepherd, like a selfless parent whose true and honest desire is that his children do what is right before God, for the children's sake, not for the sake of the pride of the parent or the reputation of the parent. Godly pastors are like parents, they seek the spiritual obedience of their children even if they may appear weak.

And then in verse 8, Paul says, "For we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth." What does he mean by that? Well first of all, the truth used twice in the verse, *aletheia*, refers to the blessed revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ from justification through sanctification to

glorification, the whole of God's revelation, the message that comes from God. The Scriptures. If you're obeying the truth we can do nothing against that so we can't put on some big authoritative display, is what he's saying. If you're doing what is right, if you're obeying the truth of God's Word, then I can't come in with some kind of confident confrontive show of authority and punishment. He would do it if he needed to. In the letter that he wrote, the first Corinthian letter, he really went after the man who was having an affair with his father's wife in 1 Corinthians 5 and told the church to throw him out. And when he wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:20 he talked about Hymenaeus and Alexander whom he himself had punished and put out of the church and turned over to Satan, he says. I mean, if needed he could act. But if they were all obedient and they were all living the truth of the Word of God, then he could do nothing. By nothing he simply means there would be no display of authority. There would be no discipline, no punishment.

But on the other hand, he could act for the truth, in behalf of the truth. In other words, to rejoice in it being honored by the Corinthians. That was his passion. The desire of his heart was to come and find his people obedient so that he would not have to go against them but could line up alongside of them. And together they would be for the truth and he would gladly appear weak if his children were strong. Verse 9, "For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak, but you are strong."

Paul had learned that in weakness he became strong. Back in chapter 12 verse 9 he said, "I boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." At the end of verse 10, "When I am weak I am strong." He had learned that when he set pride aside and became humble and accepted weakness and had disdain for his human abilities, that he became an instrument of great power in the hands of God. He didn't need to gain some...some strength, some human reputation. He needed rather to be weak. He had learned that weakness is the path to power. So he says we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you're strong. I'm happy to appear weak to the world if you're strong. And the fact is if they were strong that would be a verification of his true apostleship because he was the source of the truth that made them strong.

As a father, which would you choose, father? Would you rather appear to the people around you as a strong, domineering, disciplining, punishing parent because you had an unruly kid and you can display your prowess? Or would you rather appear weak because you never display those things due to the fact that you have an obedient child? Why you'd far rather appear weak, wouldn't you? It's an apparent weakness, not a true one. It's an appearance of weakness. That's what he says. He doesn't say he is unapproved at the end of verse 7, he says he appears that way...he appears that way. You would rather appear docile, quiet, tranquil with an easy peaceful relationship with your children because they're obedient, than to display your strength in the midst of their disobedience which, of course, is painful for you. So that's the heart of Paul. I just want you to be strong. Strong is a synonym here for obedient.

The second thing he prays for is their integrity. And this really reaches the pinnacle. We go through repentance and discipline and authority and authenticity and obedience, and now we come to integrity. Repentance is grappling with sin, turning from sin. Discipline is the process that moves someone into virtue. And authority, they come under the Word of God, there's a reality check at authenticity. Then you come to the place of a pattern of obedience that leads to integrity.

Look at verse 9. Here's the second thing he prays for, the first one was in verse 7, obedience. The second one here, "This we also pray for that you be made complete." Now there are a lot of different words I thought about, but I really think integrity grips the issue here. Let me tell you why. It comes from a mathematical term, integer which means one. An integer is one. That's a whole, that's a unit, that's an undivided element, or reality. And he's saying, "I just want you to be whole." We hear a lot about wholeness today, holistic, wholeness. It is that idea but it's the Greek word *katartizo*. The verb basically means to put in place, or to put in order. And its usage really fills up its meaning, it was used to refer to restoring something that was broken. For example, reducing a fracture, taking something that was broken, doing the reduction necessary to put it back together. It was used of something that was out of joint, whether it was a dislocation, talking about anatomically, where there was a dislocation, the something was placed back into location, it was *katartizo*, it was put back in its appropriate place. It was used also of reconciling people where there was some kind of breach, or some kind of dislocation in relationships and people were reconciled. It means to put back into wholeness, to bring into wholeness. And that is what integrity is. Integrity is wholeness. That's why the word comes from integer which means one. It's when everything in your life connects. It's when your thoughts and your words, your belief system and your actions all are in perfect harmony. It's the absence of hypocrisy. It's the absence of double-mindedness. It's the absence of being two-faced, or duplicitous, or speaking out of both sides of your mouth. It is that wholeness, that honesty that can be defined only as one where everything comes together. What you believe, what you think, what you say, and what you do are all perfectly in harmony and accord. Nothing is inconsistent. Nothing is out of sync.

I mean, you understand this from the negative standpoint. Somebody presents to you a certain face, they show you a certain kind of quote/unquote Christian testimony or Christian life and you watch it for a while and then they do something that is...or say something that is completely out of sync, dislocated from everything that they have affirmed to believe and be. And you say to yourself, "That's utterly inconsistent with what they say. That's not consistent." That's the lack of integrity. Anytime you breach that wholeness of what you believe, what you think, what you say and what you are, that is a lack of integrity.

Now the perfect picture of integrity, who is the singular perfect picture of integrity? Jesus Christ in whom there was no sin, in whom there was perfect harmony among all elements of His being, what

He believed, what He thought, what He said, what He did never varied from perfect integration. They were always absolutely consistent. So that the goal of integrity is to become like Christ, and that's...that's what Paul wanted for his people, that's what any father wants for his children. You pray for their obedience, and then you pray for their integrity. You pray for their wholeness.

Colossians 1:28 Paul says, and here's a summary of his view of ministry, "We proclaim Him...meaning Christ...admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete, or perfect, or whole in Christ. It's for this purpose...verse 29 says...that I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me." Everything I do I do because I want this man to come to wholeness. In Galatians 4:19 he said, "I'm in pain, I'm agonizing until Christ is fully formed in you." That's the same idea. I want to see you like Christ. I want that wholeness there. In Colossians again, the end of Colossians is a comment about Epaphras who was a member of the Colossian church and known to Paul, worked with Paul. He says that Epaphras, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, Colossians 4:12, "Sends you his greetings always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers." And what's he praying for? "That you would stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God, that you would come to a full confidence of real integrity." He's praying for your fullness, your wholeness, your integrity.

I mean, that's the bottom line. In the end that's what we desire. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:10. He said, "Night and day we keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and complete what is lacking." Whatever is out of location, whatever is broken, whatever is disconnected. We had a Swedish preacher here a number of years ago named Teddy Donabaur[??] and he was trying to illustrate integrity. And I thought it was a helpful illustration. He said, integrity is like making bread. Now he didn't know how to make bread, he admitted, and I don't know how to make bread either, so I'm just going to pass on perhaps his ignorance. But I'm going to make a run at this. If you took a pan and you wanted to make bread, and you put flour in there, just dumped it in and just dumped in some water and dumped in some what....salt, sugar, I don't know, yeast, whatever else. And you just took it and stuck it in the oven and baked it for a while, what you got wouldn't be bread. The key to making bread is to mix it, that's the very most important step. And it doesn't become bread until every ingredient touches every other ingredient. That's in the spiritual sense when your life really becomes bread, when everything connects, when what you believe and what you think and what you say and what you do all connect. That's integrity. And I don't know about you but certainly as a father, that is my passion for my children. Not simply a pattern of obedience, but moving in that pattern of obedience toward that spiritual wholeness in which every feature of their life is touched by the truth of God's Word. Right? How they view their personal life, how they view their public life, their private life, how they view their work, how they view their marriage, their parenting, the connection they make with their neighbors, with colleagues. How they view recreation, how they view their money. Everything in life connects, nothing is disconnected,

that's *katartizo*. And as a father, your greatest joy in your children is to see that integrity coming together. You can work on obedience when they're young and you can work on obedience very hard and you can gain that obedience. What's really wonderful is when they transfer that obedience out of the category of love and fear toward a parent, to love and fear toward God. And then when they're consumed with the heart desire to be like Christ and move toward that level of integrity. Everything consistent.

Well the consummate goal then for the pastor is not unlike the consummate goal for the parent. He wants to see his children dealing with sin in their life. He wants them to understand the need for discipline and authority. He wants them to be genuine and authentic. He wants them to be obedient. And he wants them to develop real integrity.

Psalm 15, by the way, is a good thing to study for that because Psalm 15 sums up integrity in all its categories. Let me just read it to you, just portions of it. Psalm 15 asks the question, "Who may abide in Thy tent? Who's going to come before the Lord? Who's going to dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity." What does that mean? "Well he works righteousness and he speaks truth in his heart." Starts in his heart. "He doesn't slander with his tongue, he doesn't do evil to his neighbor. He doesn't take up a reproach against his friend. In his eyes a reprobate is despised." In other words, he hates what should be hated. "He honors those who fear the Lord. He swears to his own hurt, that is he will harm himself to help another and doesn't change. He doesn't put out his money at usury." In other words, exorbitant interest rates, taking advantage of people in need. Doesn't take a bribe against the innocent, etc., etc. In other words, integrity starts with the heart and it starts inside with righteousness in the heart and it works its way out the mouth and all the way out of the life. That's the kind of person who has real integrity.

That was Daniel. He couldn't be broken. He had so much integrity. When I wrote the book on integrity some year or so ago, Daniel was the main character because of the manifest integrity of his life in which everything in his belief system affected everything in his life and there was never any dislocation.

Well, Paul concludes then this letter, really the main body of the letter, with one sentence. Verse 10, and this is a one-sentence summary of the epistle, one-sentence summary. "For this reason I am writing these things," these things means the whole 13 chapters, "For this reason I'm writing these things while absent," you remember now, he's not there with them, "I'm writing while absent in order that when present," and he's coming, he says that in chapter 12 verse 14, chapter 13 verse 1, he's coming for a third time, "that when present I may not use severity." The word "severity" is sharpness, a sword. "I'm writing these things while I'm absent in order that when I am present I may not use severity." I really don't want to come there and have to take out a sword, I really am writing these

things now so that you can get things in order so that when I get there I don't have to use severity, "And that in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up. I would rather come and take the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and use it rather than tearing down." He will tear down. And by the way, that's another warning just thrown in there at the end. If I have to tear down I will, the word is destroy in the Greek. "But the authority which the Lord gave me He gave me for building up." That's why He gave it to me. He gave me the authority He gave me to edify, to strengthen, to build you up. I really don't want to come and destroy. I don't want to come and tear down, so that's why I'm writing. I'm writing these things while I'm absent so that when I come there I won't have to use severity because you will have already dealt with these issues and then I can just take the authority the Lord has given me through the truth of His Word and I can use it to build you up and I won't have to spend my time tearing down the false things that have been erected.

Better...better a letter, he says. Better to be rebuked in this letter so that in my third visit it can be different than the second visit which was so sad and so painful. So he's finally pleading, "Please, folks, please deal with these issues so when I come it can be a time of building up."

Well verses 11 to 14 we'll save for another time, he just sums it up and we can just read it and go, but there's too much in there so I'm going to give a message on it. But before we...before we leave, listen to this. Did they? What's the end of the story? Don't leave me here, I've been here three years. How does the deal end? Did they listen? Did they respond? Did they clean up their church? Did they deal with the false teachers? Did they welcome him when he came? Did he come?

Yes he came. It's recorded in Acts 20 verses 2 and 3. He came on the third visit. And there's no specific statement made anywhere in the New Testament that says this is how the Corinthians acted when he got there. We don't have that explicit a statement. But there are some evidences that when he got there it was a positive meeting. There's some evidences that the church read this letter, responded to this letter, and turned back to Paul totally so that his third visit was joyful and that it was a time for building up which was his passion, not having to tear down.

How do we know that? I'll give you four reasons. Reason number one, during his third visit, as I said recorded in Acts 20 verses 2 and 3, he was there three months...three months. Three months probably would have been too short a time to deal with issues that had been extremely serious, it was just long enough for some sweet fellowship. But during those three months he wrote the book of Romans so that the book of Romans becomes a window on Paul's attitudes while he's at Corinth during the third visit. Perhaps it was the winter of 56 or early into the year 57 A.D. and it was there in Corinth that he wrote Romans. Romans contains some personal notes, as you well know, in chapter 15 and 16 . But there are no concerns expressed by Paul for his present condition. No negative concerns are expressed at all which leads us to believe that he was in a very happy and joyful and satisfying time in Corinth. He makes no reference to anything negative whatsoever. Knowing his

passion for that church, he would have been hard pressed not to have expressed some serious issue.

Secondly, in Romans when Paul was writing from Corinth, chapter 15 and verse 24, Paul says to the Romans, "Here's my plan. I'm writing you because I want to go to Spain and I want to see you in passing and be helped on my way there by you." In other words, here was his plan. He wanted to take the gospel to Spain. He's in Corinth, that's in Macedonia, west of Macedonia is Italy and Rome, further west, of course, is Spain as far as you can go on the continent of Europe. He wanted to get the gospel to Spain and his plan was...I'm going to come to Rome and I want you to outfit me, I want you to help me, give me the resources I need to outfit me to go with the gospel to Spain.

Now he was seen to be in a very hurry to do that and it's very unlikely that he would have had a brief stay like this in Corinth in a hurry, getting on to Rome to get on to Spain if he had some serious issues to deal with in the Corinthian church. If that Corinthian church was not in order, it's unlikely that Paul would have been in a hurry to leave he had invested so much in that church. But the very fact that he was really in his spirit on the move when he wrote Romans is indicative of the fact that things were well in Corinth.

Thirdly, in Romans also chapter 15 verses 26 and 27 it says, and this is a very important note, "Macedonia and Achaia," remember Corinth was in Macedonia. Macedonia was the southern...was the province of Greece as we know it and Achaia as well. "Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so." Now that indicates that the Corinthians finished giving their money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Remember in chapters 8 and 9 Paul was trying to get them to finish the collection of money to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem? Well, here he says when writing the Romans from Corinth on his third visit that they were pleased to make a contribution. He says they were pleased in verse 26, he says they were pleased in verse 27. Indication that there was a very pleasing relationship between Paul and the people. The people in Jerusalem, he says in verse 27, are indebted to them because they have shared with them in this way. "Therefore when I have finished this, verse 28, and put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain and I know...look at verse 29...when I come I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." I think he was just engulfed in blessing. They...they responded in every way, I believe. They responded to the offering, to the poor saints. They embraced Paul. He sat down with a clear mind and a deep, deep devotion to the gospel and penned this massive glorious tome, the book of Romans, while he was there. I think the environment was as...was as good as we could have imagined it would be. And the fact that they would give their money to the poor saints and to Paul who was the man collecting the offering indicates their attitude toward him.

Finally and fourthly, the acceptance of this letter by the Corinthian church and its inclusion in the New Testament is indicative of the fact that they responded appropriately. If they had received the letter and rejected it, it would have been hard to have them accept it as the Word of the living God. They would have then been rejecting God. But when they did receive it, they were affirming that it was the Word of God. It found its way thereby into the New Testament canon. Its very introduction into the canon of Scripture, its acceptance as the Word of God certainly indicates a good response. And furthermore, because it was the Word of God, had the Corinthians not responded well, probably everybody else in the churches of the ancient world would have severely ganged up on them at that point.

It is an indication, I think, of the fact that the Word of God is powerful and it accomplishes its purpose, Isaiah 55, it doesn't return void, it accomplishes the purpose God desires it to accomplish. And I believe it did in that church in Corinth. And, beloved, I hope this letter has accomplished a great deal in our church as well. Amen? Amen.

Father, thank You for Your gift to us in the treasure of the truth of Scripture. What a joy to work through this text this morning, and even though it's practical and straightforward and simple and yet it bears upon our hearts a great weight because we are responsible to pursue obedience and integrity. Help us as pastors to be concerned about those things and to help us as people to be concerned about them in our lives. Help us as parents to be concerned about them in our children. We bless You for this great, great gift of truth in a world that has turned its back on truth. We thank You for Your true Word. In Jesus name. Amen.

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