

Marks of an Excellent Shepherd: Selflessness

Scripture: Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:17

Code: B130311

False teachers take advantage of people. They manipulate and intimidate their followers, hoping to strip them of anything and everything they can. Their selfishness drives them to always pursue a higher profile, broader influence, and all the material perks that come from fame. Micah 3:2-3, 5 graphically depicts false teachers as greedy, grasping, and self-centered:

You who hate good and love evil,
Who tear off their skin from them
And their flesh from their bones,
Who eat the flesh of my people,
Strip off their skin from them,
Break their bones
And chop them up as for the pot
And as meat in a kettle. . . .
When they have something to bite with their teeth,
They cry, "Peace,"
But against him who puts nothing in their mouths
They declare holy war.

True men of God are the opposite; they are selfless and sacrificial. Instead of looking for what they can obtain, they look for ways to expend themselves for the benefit and blessing of God's people.

One of the many slanderous accusations the false apostles made against Paul was that his treatment of the Corinthians had been selfishly substandard. And it's in the midst of Paul's self-defense against those lies (2 Corinthians 12:12-19) that he reveals another mark of an excellent shepherd: *selflessness*.

In 12:13, Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthians, "In what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches?" As he previously indicated in verse 12, Paul had ministered in the same way in Corinth that he had in other churches.

The only way the Corinthians were treated differently was that Paul "did not become a burden to" them (2 Corinthians 12:13); the only thing they did not get from him was a bill. Although he had a right to their support (1 Corinthians 9:1-18), Paul chose not to accept it, preferring to distance himself from the money-loving false apostles.

They, of course, took everything they could get from the Corinthians and hated Paul for making them look bad. To salvage their reputations, they attempted to put a negative spin on Paul's selflessness. They argued first that he refused to take money from the Corinthians because he knew his ministry was worthless. A second and more sinister allegation was that Paul did not want the Corinthians' money because he did not love them and thus did not want to be obligated to them. But as Paul has

already shown, those allegations were completely false. In 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 he wrote:

Did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

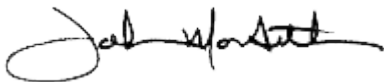
Resorting again to sarcasm (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:19-21; 1 Corinthians 4:8-10) to bring the Corinthians to their senses, Paul exclaimed in verse 13, “Forgive me this wrong!” The false apostles’ claim that he had mistreated the Corinthians by not taking money from them was ludicrous. The only thing they had been deprived of was the burden of supporting Paul and his companions.

On Paul’s first visit to Corinth he founded the church (Acts 18); his second was the painful disciplinary visit described in 2 Corinthians 2:1 (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:2). When he visited Corinth for the third time he would still refuse to be a burden to the church. Paul’s selfless pastoral love for the Corinthians meant that he did not seek what was theirs, but sought *them*. He did not want their money; he wanted their hearts. He wanted their lives for the kingdom of God, and for them to live in righteous obedience to the Word for the glory of God.

Paul illustrated his point in using the analogy of parents caring for their children, pointing out the axiomatic truth that “children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children” (2 Corinthians 12:14). The Corinthians were, of course, Paul’s spiritual children (1 Corinthians 4:15), and he willingly sacrificed himself for them. He would, he wrote, “most gladly spend and be expended for” their spiritual well-being (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Paul was not reluctant or hesitant to sacrifice for the Corinthians; he was thrilled and overjoyed at being able to give himself for their benefit. He was willing to expend himself for his people until he had nothing left to give. To the Philippians he wrote, “But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all” (Philippians 2:17, cf. Colossians 1:24). He followed the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said of Himself, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The excellent shepherd isn’t interested in what he can get from his flock, but what he can give them. He’s happy, even *eager*, to be poured out for the sake of his people. He knows he’s not the focus of the ministry—he’s a vessel for it, as the Lord works through him in the lives of his congregation.



(Adapted from [2 Corinthians: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#).)

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