

Paul, A Father-Like Shepherd

2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14

Key Verse: 12:15a

“So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.”

Throughout 2 Corinthians we have seen that Apostle Paul served the Corinthian believers with the heart of a spiritual father. Sometimes he was tender, and sometimes he was fierce. His goal in writing this letter was to reconcile with them after an unfortunate division in the church. In carrying out reconciliation, he helped them to first be reconciled to God through repentance; then they could reconcile with him. Paul has taught us the ministry of reconciliation. In today's passage Paul shares his final words with the Corinthians. In various ways, Paul reveals his heart as a father-like shepherd. It is a picture of the heart of Christ for his people. Let's learn the heart of Christ, and pray to be father-like shepherds like Paul.

I. Paul wanted not their possessions, but them (12:11-18)

In this part, Paul shares that he did not burden the Corinthians financially, in contrast to "super-apostles." Paul defends himself in order to restore his love relationship with the Corinthians. Look at verse 11. "I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles,' even though I am nothing." Paul should have been recognized and honored by the Corinthians as God's servant. Yet they regarded him as inferior to the "super-apostles." So Paul had to boast about himself, sharing how God had used him as an apostle. Look at verse 12. "The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance." Wherever Paul preached the gospel, God supported him by doing signs, wonders and miracles. Paul did not disappear after working miracles, but he stayed with God's sheep and loved and served them with great perseverance. The false apostles were impatient and easily angered and would slap the Corinthians in the face. But Paul was patient and loving. They should have recognized Paul as God's servant. However, the fascinating rhetoric of the false apostles dazzled them and they forgot what God had done through Paul.

Here we learn that we must remember how God has worked in our lives. Many of us were changed through one-to-one Bible study. But sometimes we ignore this and become vulnerable to impressive people. One-to-one ministry may seem small, but it is very powerful to change people. For example, Dr. Joseph Schafer began one-to-one Bible study with a Korean missionary who could not speak English

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well. But this missionary taught the Bible with great passion, often spraying Joe with saliva as he taught. The word of God worked powerfully in Joe's heart and changed him into a man of God. Dr. Schafer could not forget how God worked in his life and humbly acknowledged God's grace. So he grew continually and has become a prominent national figure and an important spiritual leader in our time. As we have prayed for people around the world, God has worked in many ways. These answers to prayer are the sign of God's presence with us and the sign of his work in and through us.

In verses 14-18, Paul wanted to clear up a misunderstanding the Corinthians had in regard to finances. Look at verse 14a. "Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you." The phrase "not be a burden to you" is repeated five times in chapters 11-12 (11:9[2]; 12:13, 14,16). Why? Verses 16-18 tell us that the false apostles poisoned the Corinthians with the idea that Paul was cheating them out of their money. They portrayed Paul as a crafty fellow who caught them by trickery and exploited them. UBF has received some of the same criticism that Paul received. So we are greatly encouraged by Paul. However, I want to make clear that the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability thoroughly investigated our church, was satisfied with our integrity, and accepted us as a member.

The Corinthians thought Paul was interested in their money, but Paul was interested in them. Paul compared his relationship to them with that of a father and his children. Look at verses 14b-15a. "After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well." Paul had become a spiritual father to the Corinthians through the gospel (1 Cor 4:15). What does it mean to be a father? A father should provide for his children, spending everything for them. Abraham richly provided for Isaac, even finding the perfect godly woman for him to marry. A father should protect his children, even risking his own life, as Moses' parents did (Heb 11:23). A father should discipline his children for their good, teaching them the word of God (Dt 6:7; Heb 12:9-10). Eli failed in this; his sons perished in their sins (1 Sa 2:29; 3:13; 4:11). A father must not exasperate his children with unreasonable demands, great expectations, or harsh use of authority (Eph 6:4). A father must not show favoritism, like Jacob did toward Rachel's sons, causing great trouble in the family (Ge 29:18,31). A father must love his wife and not break his family as long as he lives. Recently, one young man thanked God that his parents did not divorce, even though they fought seriously from time to time. It is amazing that Paul, who had been an exclusive Pharisee, became a father to generally low-class and unclean Gentiles. It was Christ's transforming work in

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Paul's heart. As a father, Paul would gladly spend all he had for the Corinthians, and expend himself as well. Paul was not trying to get some benefit from them; he would sacrifice anything to raise them, establish them, and make them fruitful and successful. When children are grateful, it is a great joy to do so. But sometimes when fathers love their children more, their children love them less (15b). Then it is harder to sacrifice for them. However, Paul would do so one-sidedly. Paul had grown to have Christ's heart toward his children.

In this pragmatic society, we expect to get something in return if we give something. We are very familiar with "give and take," but not with "give and give, and expect nothing in return." When we love others, we expect to be loved by others. Some young people seek love in relationships. If one feels unloved, he or she terminates the relationship. This is pragmatic love. God's love is different. God loves without expecting anything in return. God's love is unconditional. If God loved us conditionally, we would always fall short of his conditions. But God loves us unconditionally. God sent his one and only Son Jesus to this world to die on a cross for our sins while we were sinful, weak and helpless (Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8). God loves his children like the father of the prodigal son in Jesus' parable. Isaiah 65:2 describes God's heart for his people. It says, "All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations...." Paul had learned this love of God. That is why he could spend everything he had, even his own life. We learn here how to take care of God's flock. When they are obedient and thankful, it is a joyful experience. But when they are rebellious, unthankful, and critical, it is not easy to serve them. We can become angry and easily give up. So we need a parent's heart, that is, God's heart. Lord, give us your heart.

II. Paul urges them to repent for their strengthening (12:19-21)

In verse 19 Paul clarified why he defended his apostleship. In verses 20-22, we see many problems in the Corinthian church, such as quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. There were many who had committed sexual sin and indulged in debauchery. Paul wanted them to repent before he arrived. Though Paul loved them, he did not compromise with their sins. Paul wanted them to be pure and loving based on the truth. Here we learn another side of a spiritual father's love. It is to help God's children repent.

The Christian community or church must maintain spiritual purity. It is true that all of us are sinners, but we repented of our sins and we are forgiven sinners. As such, we have the privilege of participating in the Christian community. However, we

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cannot stop repenting or we will become like Pharisees and stop growing as God's children. Therefore, we must repent of our sins continually based on the truth. As forgiven sinners we can forgive one another and encourage one another to stand in God's truth and grow. Then our church will be strong, pure and healthy, and God can dwell among us and use us. This is why Paul urged repentance.

III. Examine yourselves (13:1-14)

Paul wanted to visit the Corinthians for the third time to settle matters among them. Slander, rumors and gossip obscure the truth. So the testimony of two or three witnesses which establish facts was necessary (Dt 19:15). In verses 2-4, Paul warned those who refused to repent of their sins. Paul would not spare them when he came. They had greatly misunderstood Paul, thinking he was weak and unimpressive and a pushover. But Paul clearly warned them that he was coming in the authority of Christ.

Look at verse 5. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" Until now, the Corinthians had tested the apostleship of Paul. Paul had patiently borne with them and defended himself humbly in the sight of God. But now, at the end of his letter, Paul challenges them to examine themselves. If they have Christ in their hearts they will pass the test. Otherwise, they will fail.

When we examine ourselves, we find many sins to repent and ways to improve; we have no time to criticize others. You know, if we point a finger at someone else, usually our thumb points up to God and three other fingers point back to us. We must examine ourselves first. This is especially true for Bible teachers. Romans 2:21a says, "...you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" We must examine our Bible study, testimony writing, prayer devotion, and care for God's sheep. This can be an external examination. We must also have an internal examination. Are we bearing the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control? (Gal 5:22) Or are we hateful, grumpy, and angry. Of course, we will not always pass the test. But when we repent, gradually we can grow to bear the fruits of the Spirit. Then we become truly happy and gracious to others, and slander and factions disappear.

In verses 6-7, Paul wanted them to stand on the truth by doing what is right. Look at verse 8. "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth." The authority that God gave Paul could only be exercised in support of the truth. In supporting God's truth Paul was mighty powerful. God wants to build up his

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church in the truth. God dwells where truth is honored. In God's church there must be both truth and grace. So we must work for the truth, without compromise. Today the USA is in danger of becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. In this time, it is essential that our church stand on the truth. Our primary purpose is to preach the truth and to defend the truth.

If the Corinthians were strong in the truth, Paul had no need to exercise apostolic authority. Paul prayed for their perfection (9). That is why he wrote a challenging letter to help them prepare for his coming. Paul would use his authority to build them up, not to tear them down. In the same way, we must use authority to build up others. We must not try to exercise authority to tear down others. When we share testimonies in small groups, we should not be too negative and corrective. This can tear others down rather than building them up. We must be overwhelmingly affirmative and supportive and encouraging. Then we can have a proper spiritual environment in which people can open their hearts, share their real struggles, and love and pray for one another.

In verse 11, Paul gives his final instructions. Look at verse 11. "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." To aim for perfection refers to striving for sanctification. Our goal is to be perfect like Jesus. Wow! We have to grow in the image of Jesus throughout our lifetimes. Paul wanted them not to quarrel, but to forgive each other and love one another. Then they could live in peace. Paul earnestly prayed that the God of love and peace would be with them.

Verses 12-13 are Paul's final greeting. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In the early church, according to Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) the holy kiss was a regular part of the worship service. However, according to one UBF staff shepherd, the holy kiss may be replaced by two by two prayer.

Verse 14 is Paul's final benediction. Paul blessed them with these words, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen.

In today's passage we learned Paul's father-like heart as a shepherd. He was willing to spend everything he had, and even his own life. That is the reflection of God's sacrificial love. Also, Paul wanted to help them to repent of their sins so that they may stand in the truth. That is the reflection of God's holy love. As a conclusion to our study of 2 Corinthians, let's pray that each of us may grow as a father-like shepherd like St. Paul.