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A1413 – March 30, 2014 – 2 Corinthians
True Ministry

We have completed our verse-by-verse study of 2 Corinthians and nobody put any questions in the box so I can only assume that we've done a masterful job of covering the material! However, I myself always have questions at the end of a book and so what we want to do is look at my question. Whenever I get through a book study I like to ask, "Alright, so what?" "What am I supposed to do with this book?" "What is the application?" "What is the main point?" And when I reflected on these types of questions and read through and meditated on the book the chief thing that kept coming to the fore was "ministry." Paul is ministering and he is trying to get the Corinthians to minister. Two related words are used for "ministry" a total of 17 times in 2 Corinthians. The first word *diakonia* is used 12 times and is variously translated in the NASB as "ministry," "support" and "serve" (2 Cor 3:7, 8, 9 (2x's); 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13; 11:8). It's a word that always relates to the selfless rendering of service to others. The second word *diakonos* is used five times and is translated in the NASB as "servants" (2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:15 (2x's), 23). It is a word that relates to the individual who is rendering service to others. From these uses there is no question that from start to finish Paul is concerned about ministry. You will say, "Well, Paul was a minister. He was an apostle. But what difference does it make to me? I am not a minister." Well, friend, you are thinking of the term "minister" in its modern clerical sense as someone who is a vocational minister, someone who serves the church in an official capacity, someone who is a pastor or a youth minister or a music minister. That is not the sense of this term in the NT. As I have related the word "minister" simply refers to the selfless rendering of service to others and can be applied to anyone who renders that type of service. In that sense all NT believers are ministers. As Paul said in chapter 5, "Christ gave us the ministry of reconciliation" and "we are ambassadors for Christ." So today we will go through ten aspects of true ministry.

Before we do let me state that what Paul is doing with the Corinthians is trying to get them in shape so that they are able to fulfill their ministry effectively. When you become a Christian by grace through faith in Christ who died and rose again you are not fit to minister. Ministry is where you're going, not where you're beginning. Often when a person becomes a believer they are so excited to tell other people the good news. That is fine and admirable as far as it goes. But what they typically find is that they need some training because they talk to people and end up getting confused themselves. So ministry is where you are going, not where you are beginning. Now Paul expected the Corinthians to be there already. This was the problem. They had five years to get to ministry but they were still fighting and arguing with one another. They were spiritual brats when they should have been spiritually mature. So Paul's goal for them is to grow from a prolonged spiritual infancy into spiritual maturity so that they could minister effectively. The way Paul did it, as far as the norm and standard of his ministry, was he would trek along the major highways to the major population centers. He never got off the beaten path except once when he fled for his life into in Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:4-7). Outside of that one instance he travels only to major cities like Antioch, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Athens and Philippi. When he arrived he would minister the gospel and then train his converts. Train them for what? To extend the ministry to the local and rural areas. Paul couldn't do it all and Paul wasn't called to do it all. Paul stuck to the major population centers, deposited the gospel, followed up quickly with training and then left, occasionally returning to check up on them and give them more advanced training. He was itinerant; others were not itinerant. John, for example, pastored at Ephesus for over 30 years. But in all of this the goal is that the converts become disciples and go out with the gospel into the surrounding regions and make more disciples. I think the last time I checked this was called the great commission. This model was so effective at Ephesus that after Paul spent two and a half years at Ephesus it was said, "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Now did they all hear it because Paul visited every two-bit town in Asia? No, Paul stayed in Ephesus and taught the word in the school of Tyrannus day after day after day. It was his disciples who were transformed by this teaching and went out into all Asia and preached the word of God. That was always Paul's procedure; unfortunately the procedure was not working at Corinth because they were too busy quarreling among

themselves, dividing into factions and stunting their growth by listening to false teachers. What a waste of time. We are here to minister. Not flake out arguing with one another and discussing every new-fangled doctrine. These people needed to mature so they could spread the ministry into the surrounding areas (2 Cor 10:15-16). If they didn't then he was going to come and spank their little rear ends (2 Cor 10:1-2; 13:1ff). This was no joking matter. They were wasting time not getting ready for the judgment seat of Christ. Grow up and minister. That's what we are here for. We are His ambassadors!

Now the first of the ten things, if we are to minister outside this local training center, in the surrounding area; Kerrville, Mason, Llano, Johnson City and everywhere in between, what's to be the content of our ministry? We always start with content. We can't start with application. We have to start with what is it we are ministering because if we can't get that right we shouldn't be ministering. There are three ways at least that Paul describes this ministry. First he describes it as the new covenant. 2 Cor 3:5-6, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." We have a life giving ministry that is in radical contrast to the old ministry of the law that killed. We are proclaiming the new covenant. Jesus Christ died for you! So we have the new covenant. Every covenant is founded on blood sacrifice. The blood of Christ is the foundation of the new covenant. What's the new covenant? Just to be clear. It's the covenant God promised to make with Israel and Judah wherein He would pour out His Spirit on them and give them a new heart and write His word on their heart and give them a new life. This covenant was founded at the cross through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And when we trust in Him there is an application of the new covenant to us. He gives us His Spirit, He gives us a new heart, He writes His word on our heart through hearing the word and He gives us eternal life! This is one way Paul describes your ministry, you are ministering the new covenant. You are not ministering the old covenant of Moses. That covenant only kills, condemns and has faded away. The ministry of the new covenant of the Spirit is much greater. It gives life, righteousness and never fades away, it's eternal and transforms people's lives. How does Paul put it? "But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." So when you minister the new covenant and a person responds

positively to the message of the new covenant they are set free from darkness into spiritual light! So the first way Paul describes your ministry is as the new covenant, “we are servants of a new covenant.” People become believers through this ministry.

Second, he describes your ministry as the gospel. The gospel and the new covenant are synonymous. 2 Cor 4:1ff. “Therefore, since we have this ministry,” that is the new covenant, “as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, 2but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 3And even if our gospel is veiled,” there he refers to the ministry of the new covenant as the gospel and says, even if it is “veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. 6For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;” See, you are an earthen vessel and within you there is a treasure, it’s the treasure of the gospel, it’s the good news of Christ Jesus, it’s the new covenant that Christ founded in His own blood. What are you waiting on? Let the light shine! It’s the power of God unto salvation! Its effectiveness doesn’t depend on you. It depends upon Him. You are simply His bond-servant to carry the greatest message to a lost and dying world. So the second way Paul has described your ministry is as the gospel and this is nothing more than another way of describing our ministry of the new covenant. People become believers through the preaching of the gospel.

Third, Paul describes your ministry as the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Cor 5:18-20, “Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an

appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” This is the core of your ministry, equivalent to the gospel, equivalent to the new covenant. What you are doing is proclaiming to people that God is not counting their sins against them any longer. God is not angry with the world. The problem is the world is angry with God. But we preach that God is friends with the world, if only they will become friends with Him. This is your ministry. This is my ministry. It’s the ministry of all believers and we are to take this out to the surrounding world. And it doesn’t depend on you to be effective, God makes the appeal through us to the unbeliever. He works through the message of reconciliation. So it’s not up to you, it’s through you but it doesn’t depend upon you, its results depend upon God. God through you saves people. Isn’t that great that He brings you into it? He gets the ultimate glory, but we’re vessels mediating that glory.

So this is your ministry, according to Paul, you are a servant of the new covenant gospel of reconciliation. The three are merely different ways of emphasizing aspectual differences of the same good news. Are you doing this? Are you ministering this content in some capacity? If not, Paul would say, what are you doing? Why aren’t you ministering? You’ve been given this message and you’re not ministering it. This is what you are here for. How else did all Asia hear the word of God? How do you expect all Central Texas to hear the word of God? They didn’t have a special evangelism program. People’s lives were transformed and they went out and lived their life and proclaimed the new covenant gospel of reconciliation. And what happened? Did everyone in Asia become a believer? No, but all Asia did hear the word of God.

What did Paul teach us about ministry? What is it going to be like? Ministry is going to be difficult. Paul had a lot of trouble in the ministry. Physically the kind of itinerant ministry Paul had was very tiring and dangerous. In terms of the travel alone, journeying through the Roman world was dangerous. They had military outposts stationed along the Roman roads but in between there were robbers and Paul was the victim on multiple occasions. At sea he was shipwrecked multiple times and had to tread water for a day and a half in the deep. On multiple occasions he didn’t get any sleep because he was teaching the word of God all night long. On some occasions the gospel caused such a disruption that he was arrested and beaten. On one occasion he was stoned and left for dead. Yet Paul went on. Why was Paul so tireless

in the ministry? Why did he risk life and limb for others? Because he considered the time to be short. Because he knew the day of salvation was already drawing to a close. If Paul had known the time Christ was returning he probably wouldn't have been so tireless. But Christ left us this doctrine of imminence so that every generation would think they were living on the edge of history and would have the kind of urgency Paul had in ministry. The question we all have to come to grips with is "Are we living with a sense of urgency?" "Do we really care about men's souls?" Or "Are we only concerned about ourselves and preserving our little corner of the world?" Paul also had a lot of struggle mentally and spiritually. Ministry is extremely draining when you actually care about people. He had a lot of converts and he planted a lot of churches. In this sense he was a spiritual father and they were his children. When they were struggling spiritually he got right down with them like a father and helped them out. When they were led into sin he was intensely concerned. In a daily sense the spiritual and mental strain of the ministry is more difficult than the occasional physical. The question here is, "Do we have the guts to stick it out with people?" "Will we put up with all their dirty laundry?" Or "Do we throw in the towel?" Paul would not throw in the towel.

However, trouble is not all Paul said about the ministry. He said that ministry troubles will be overwhelmed by God's comfort. Paul reminds us that He comforts us when times are tough in ministry so that we are better equipped to help others when times are tough in their ministry. Be encouraged, we will all suffer to different degrees and in different ways but in the end the comfort through Christ far outweighs the sufferings. It also gets us prepared for the next round because it teaches us not to depend upon ourselves but upon God who raises the dead. In ministry there is no other place to set our hope than upon God. He is the only firm foundation. And when we suffer we can call other believers to pray for us. This is how the body of Christ works! So don't forget that when you face difficulties there is the God of all comfort and there are other believers to come alongside and pray for you and that God is training you to trust Him and He is getting you ready for bigger and better things.

Yet that is not all that Paul said about ministry in this book. Paul said ministry is a labor of love. It takes love, love and more love to minister. Paul says he loved the Corinthians more than any other church he founded (2:4;

7:3). He knew this to be a fact because when he came to visit them someone in the crowd insulted him and they didn't even stand up for him (2:5ff; 7:12). Some refused to listen to his teaching because they had closed their hearts off to him and opened them to false teachers. Yet Paul says he would still not give up on them (7:2, 10-11; 11:11). Remember that Paul was their spiritual father in the sense that they came to Christ through his ministry. They should have loved him as a child loves a father. But they didn't. Something is wrong with the entire picture. But Paul loved them anyway (12:14-15). This is what the ministry is all about. If you are going to minister effectively you better be ready to love the unlovely because that is what you are called to do. I hope you don't think that the ministry is worth it only when people love you. Many times you love them far more than they love you. Remember what you have to do? Tell them the word of God, even if it contradicts what they believe or what they are doing. Sometimes people don't love you for doing this. Sometimes it takes time to sink in. Sometimes they think you are wrong and they are right. Sometimes they are right! Welcome to the ministry! Nevertheless, when they don't love you you are called to love them. I think that is what Jesus Christ has done for all of us. While we were yet enemies Christ loved us! Is it too much for Christ to ask us to love our enemies? I think not. Paul did. And we should. So if someone you are ministering doesn't love you, what should you do? Love them anyway. That's what ministry is about. It's a labor of love. But that's not all there is to ministry, there's much more I assure you.

Ministry is ultimately a triumph. There are going to be tough times. Expect it. There are going to be times when you think, nothing is happening. Don't quit. Too many people try to minister and they give up because they don't get the results they were looking for! Welcome to the ministry. There would be no need for ministry if perfect results were right around the corner. You will go through hard times. You will get sick and tired of people playing games. You will get sick and tired of people talking behind your back. You will get sick and tired of not being looked at as just another normal person. You will get sick and tired of being judged. They get sick and tired of all sorts of things. What will you do? Quit? Then you will never see the triumph God was at work to accomplish. Paul says in 2:14, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." Always means always last time I checked. So don't quit because it's hard. So many pastors quit and move somewhere else thinking it's going to be better. Don't follow their example. It's not going to

get better. In fact it's going to get worse before it gets better. But in the end God says there is victory (2:14ff). Paul knew this. That's why Paul didn't give up. Instead he allowed it to make him tough and persevere. Think of all the wreckage Paul went through with the Corinthians and yet he would never give up. Many had turned against Paul (1 Cor 1:11ff), they accused him of walking according to the flesh (10:2), having a weak presence (10:10), failing to have the proper speaking ability (10:10), peddling a cheap imitation of the truth (2:17) and being in it for the money (11:12). Now how would you like it if you poured your whole life into a group of people and that was their analysis of you? Tell me you wouldn't hold a grudge and quit. I hope you would say, "I'm never giving up on these people!" That's what you're supposed to do. Paul said, "You may think I'm leaving, you may want me to leave you alone, but I'm not going anywhere until you people get in shape" (10:15). Think about how Paul persevered with them. He visited them three times, wrote 29 chapters and that's just the two letters we have access to, he wrote two other letters we don't have. So Paul didn't quit when the going got tough. Paul got tough and worked with these people. Ultimately the ministry was a triumph. Why? Because of the nature of what he was ministering to them, the new covenant gospel of reconciliation which they had believed. They had the Spirit indwelling them. He had given them life. He was inscribing His word on their hearts. And that ministry on God's part never stops! So there can never be ultimate failure, there must be ultimate triumph. Still there's more...

Ministry involves the humility of the minister. Paul asks in 2:16, "Who is adequate to lead in triumph?" The answer is given in 3:5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." You aren't anything without God. Let that sink in. Didn't Paul say in this letter, "I am a nobody?" He sure did in 2 Cor 12:11 and he meant it. He was nobody and you are nobody apart from God. The only one that makes us anything is God. That ought to humble you. If you are going to minister to others you have to depend upon God. I don't want to hear of you going around being arrogant. Now I understand that some Christians think people in our church are arrogant because we claim to know what the Bible teaches on a subject. And they think that not knowing or not being sure is humility. But that is not genuine humility. The kind of humility he is talking about is quite arrogant. He is saying that God was unclear on a subject. That my friend is one of the deepest kinds of arrogance. That is, in effect, saying

that God mumbles. Friend, you may mumble and I may mumble, but God does not mumble. He speaks with clarity and perfection. If you or I don't understand it the problem is not with God the problem is with you or I. But let's not put on the false humility of saying that we can't know when the very reason God placed it in His word is that we might know. Instead let us put on a true humility which is to say that we may not know now what the God teaches about a subject but with the right attitude we can learn what He has taught and we will teach it to others. That is true humility and that is how we must minister. Yet Paul has said much more.

Ministry always centers on the truth. In 2 Cor 7:14 "we spoke all things to you in truth" and in 13:8 "we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth." As a minister you must always speak the truth. You must refuse to say something out of line with the truth because you think it might upset someone. That is irrelevant. What you have done then is testified against God. You have made yourself God. Paul said in 2 Cor 4:2 "we have renounced the things hidden in shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." If you are going to minister you must renounce the temptation to adulterate the word of God in order to get across your point. Lots of people in ministry give in to this temptation because they want to see a certain result. It's not about seeing your result. It's about God's truth and His results. Everything else is just a gimmick. The truth must be at the center of all genuine ministry. And to know the truth you have to know the word of God. So the word is central. But there's more to ministry.

Ministry requires you to stand against false teachers and doctrines. In 2 Cor 11:4 Paul referred to them ironically as putting up with those who preached another Jesus of the same kind, a different Spirit which they had not received and a different gospel which they had not originally accepted. He was afraid that their minds would be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ by such false doctrines. He referred to false teachers in 2 Cor 11:13 as "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." Paul called a spade a spade. He didn't refuse to point out dangerous false teachers. He exposed them and their teachings. Even Satan he says, "disguises himself as an angel of light." Therefore we should not be surprised "if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of

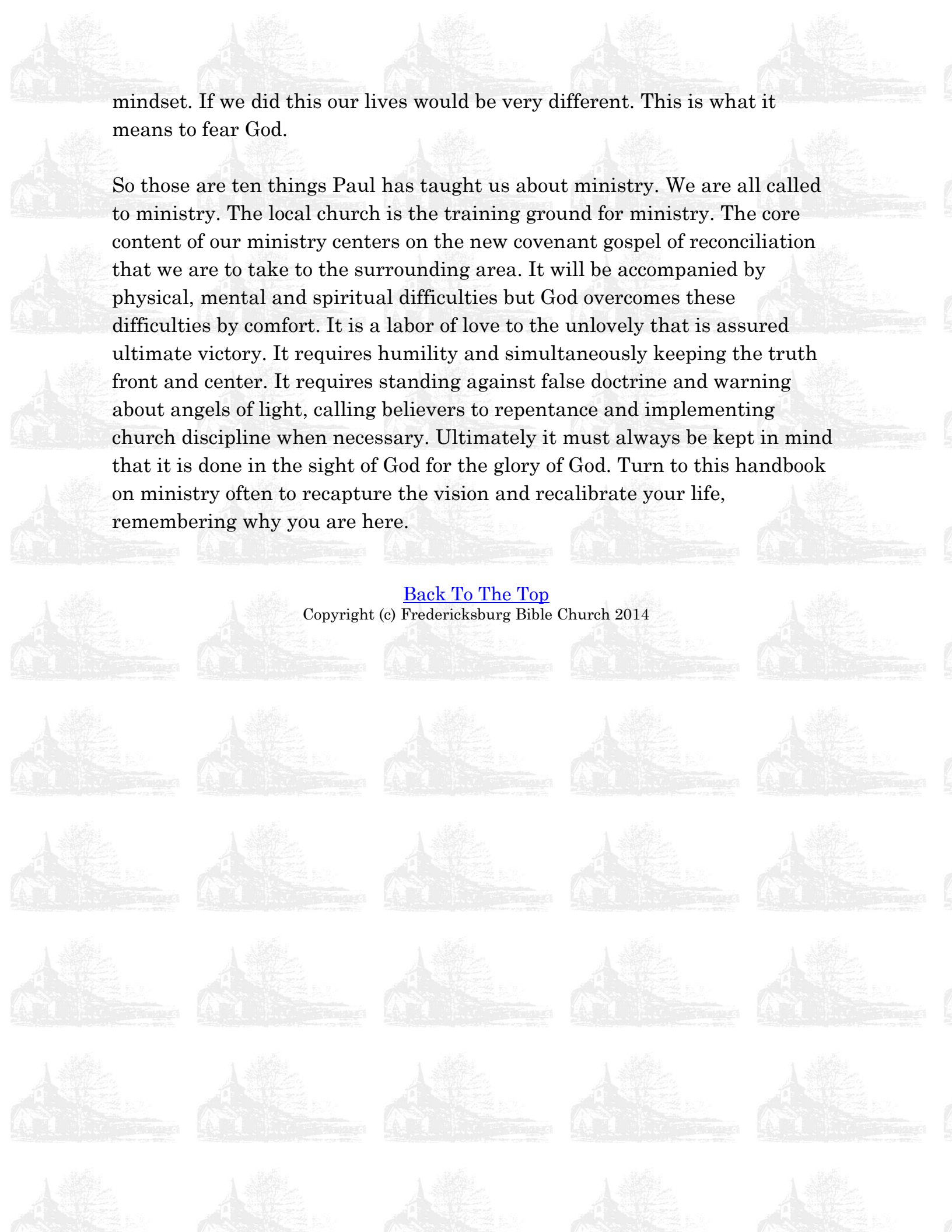
righteousness.” Paul taught that false doctrine is satanically originated and that those who espouse it appear righteous and good and holy. Therefore we have to know the word of God very thoroughly and acutely. We have to be able to detect right from almost right because satanic doctrines are counterfeits; they appear like the truth but are lies. In order to expose them Paul says in 2 Cor 10:4-5 that our weapons of warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses and we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We use the word of God to smash deceptions. The word of God is the superior weaponry for exposing lies. We have to train well in knowing our weapon so we are able to wield it in the angelic conflict that rages. So to minister means you have to be able to stand up against false teachers and doctrines and this requires a thorough ability to wield the word of God.

Ministry also requires calling for repentance if necessary. Repentance for the believer is a “change of mind” regarding some course of action. In 2 Cor 7:8ff Paul wrote a letter that we know was severe in its content. He was not happy with the course of action the Corinthians were taking. They had not stood up for him when it was clear that he loved them. The letter caused the Corinthians much sorrow and for this Paul almost wished he had not written the letter. But because it was a godly sorrow that resulted in repentance Paul was happy that he had written it. The letter had met its goal of convicting them of their sin and bringing repentance. Further, in 2 Cor 12:21 Paul threatened to come and be very bold in exercising discipline if they did not repent of their habitual fornications that were destroying the ministry. If he came he would confirm every fact with two or three witnesses and discipline if necessary. So ministry requires that the minister be upfront about the importance of believer’s repentance. He cannot just be a get along guy, a person who just wants to brush everything under the carpet. So many times you find Christians playing the hush, hush game instead of graciously and humbly approaching the problem. All this does is perpetuate sin, build barriers and cause division. It does not bring conflict resolution. Repentance is the only way. Therefore ministry requires us to call for repentance if necessary.

Ministry requires implementing church discipline. Some Christians reject all church discipline. They say we are in no place to judge. God says differently.

He says, judge those within the church and leave outsiders to Him. If He said it it's good enough for me. If you disagree and want to write your own Bible, go for it. What God has done is given us a responsibility to judge in order to prepare for the judgment of angels, another judgment we will enact in the future. So church discipline is a training ground for judging the much weightier issues of the angels. The procedures for church discipline are laid down in Matt 18:15ff. Essentially it starts off with one believer confronting another believer about his sin. If that's not successful then two or three for the purpose of affirming every fact. If there is sin and the believer fails to repent then it's to be told to the whole church. If that does not bring them to repentance then they are to be considered an outsider, meaning no close fellowship. You keep a lane open for them to repent but beyond that no close fellowship. All that does is give your approval to their sin. There are two reasons for church discipline. The first reason is the one everyone talks about and that is the restoration of the sinner. They are walking in darkness and they need to confess and be restored to the light. The second reason is for church purity and this is the more important reason. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Once you let sin go unchecked in the church then it spreads and the church becomes no different than the world. This is the much greater problem and I'm sure you see that in our culture. The church has completely lost its reputation with the surrounding culture; the church has become a den of thieves, child molesters, division, arrogance and every other carnal lust under the sun. And Christians wonder why people don't want to believe the gospel. Wake up Church! Maybe, just maybe if some church followed God's program for church discipline people would realize there is a true church and a false!

Finally, ministry is ultimately for the glory of God. 2 Cor 4:15, "For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God." Even though we minister the new covenant gospel of reconciliation by which men taste of the grace of God, yet this ultimately goes beyond the men and rebounds to the glory of God. In 2 Cor 8:19 Paul says of his ministry that it was "being administered...for the glory of the Lord Himself." It was not for Paul's sake, it was not for man's sake, it was for the Lord's sake. In order to accomplish this Paul says repeatedly that he ministered in the sight of God (2 Cor 2:17; 12:19). This meant that he was conscious that his words, actions and thoughts were in plain view of God. He lived continually with this

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mindset. If we did this our lives would be very different. This is what it means to fear God.

So those are ten things Paul has taught us about ministry. We are all called to ministry. The local church is the training ground for ministry. The core content of our ministry centers on the new covenant gospel of reconciliation that we are to take to the surrounding area. It will be accompanied by physical, mental and spiritual difficulties but God overcomes these difficulties by comfort. It is a labor of love to the unlovely that is assured ultimate victory. It requires humility and simultaneously keeping the truth front and center. It requires standing against false doctrine and warning about angels of light, calling believers to repentance and implementing church discipline when necessary. Ultimately it must always be kept in mind that it is done in the sight of God for the glory of God. Turn to this handbook on ministry often to recapture the vision and recalibrate your life, remembering why you are here.

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