

The Minister's Pastoral Care

2 Corinthians 13:5–10

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Introduction

Well we return again to our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, so turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 13. And we come, this morning, to the close of the body of Paul's letter to the Corinthians—the last words that he pens just before his final exhortations, greetings, and benediction. And as we come to the close of the body of this letter, we are confronted afresh with the pastoral heart of the Apostle Paul for this storm-tossed, conflict-laden flock that is the Corinthian church.

And really, this entire epistle has been laden with that reality. The heart of *Pastor* Paul for his sheep has been on display for all to see. I've mentioned several times throughout our exposition of the letter that 2 Corinthians is often called the fourth pastoral epistle. Usually, that's a designation given to 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, because those letters contain Paul's instruction to his proteges as they seek to pastor the young churches of Ephesus and Crete. But 2 Corinthians is often called the fourth pastoral epistle because of how extensively Paul describes New Covenant Gospel ministry, and because of how he lays his heart wide open in his effort to woo the Corinthians away from the clutches of false apostles and to woo them back to him—back to faithfulness to his Gospel.

In fact, he uses that very phrase in chapter 6 verses 11 to 13. He says, "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, *our heart is opened wide*. . . . Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also." And that open heart is on full display throughout the rest of the letter. In chapter 1 verse 6, he tells them, "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation." In verses 14, he says he hopes that they will understand that "we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." He glories in them, and he prays that they will come again to glory in him. In verse 23, he tells them that when he changed his travel plans, it was to spare *them* that he didn't make an immediate return visit to Corinth. He was thinking of *their* feelings. In verse 24, he says he is a co-laborer alongside them for their joy. In the opening verses of chapter 2, he says that he did not want to have sorrow from those who ought to make him rejoice. And that he wrote his severe letter—rebuking them for tolerating false teaching—"out of much affliction and anguish of heart. . . with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." In chapter 3 verse 2, he says he doesn't need letters of commendation from another church, because "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men." In chapter 7, verse 2, he says, "Make room for us in your hearts." And verse 3, "I have said before that you are in our

hearts to die together and to live together.” In 7:7, he rejoices when he hears of their longing, mourning and zeal for him expressed in their repentance. In verses 8 to 10 he speaks about how he regretted how severe he had to be in his letter, because he doesn’t delight in causing them sorrow, though he is glad their sorrow has led to repentance. And we see the same kind of thing throughout chapters 8 and 9 as he stirs them up by the grace of God to contribute to the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And then as we come to this final section of the letter—chapters 10 to 13—as he turns from addressing the repentant majority to addressing the unrepentant minority, as well as the false apostles themselves, we see Paul’s pastoral heart all the more—particularly in how dedicated he is to protecting the flock from wolves who would destroy them by damning doctrine. In chapter 11 verses 13 to 15, he unmasks these intruders as false apostles, deceitful workers, and servants of Satan who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. In chapter 11 verse 16 to chapter 12 verse 10, Paul does what he hates to do. Since the Corinthians had become so infatuated with the triumphalistic boasting of the false apostles, Paul decides to don the mask of a fool and do some boasting of his own, hoping to win over the Corinthians by any means necessary. And in chapter 11, verses 2 and 3, he speaks to his wayward spiritual children. He says that he’s jealous for their spiritual purity like a father is for his own daughter: “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” In verses 28 and 29 of chapter 11, he speaks about the daily pressure of concern on him for all the churches. He asks, “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” In chapter 12 verse 14, he explains that in all his labors, he’s not after their possessions, he’s after their souls. He says, “For I do not seek what is yours, but you.” “I want your heart, not your money!” And then in 12:15 he says, “I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.”

And so Paul’s pastoral heart has been on full display throughout this entire letter. And as we’ve gone through, we’ve made observations about how our own ministry to the body of Christ ought to be guided and driven by the principles modeled for us in Paul’s dealings with the Corinthians. We’ve spoken about the minister’s guide to self-defense, the minister’s love, battling discouragement in ministry, the minister’s motivation, the minister’s boldness, keys to the minister’s endurance, the minister’s resurrection hope, the minister under attack, the minister’s guide to conflict resolution, the minister’s posture, the minister’s warfare, the minister’s jealousy, and just last week, the minister in the midst of conflict.

Well, as he wraps up his letter, he’s preparing the Corinthians for his upcoming visit. And he tells this obstinate minority in the church that they need to repent and put things in order before he gets there, because if they don’t, he’s going to exercise the apostolic authority they’ve so longed to see by putting the unrepentant ones out of the church. He says in chapter 13 verse 2, “I

have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone.”

But as he comes to this closing paragraph, he makes his final appeal. And as he does, his pastoral heart comes out once again. Let’s read our text for this morning, 2 Corinthians 13, verses 5 to 10. “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. ⁷Now 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 may appear unapproved. ⁸For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. ¹⁰For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

Paul has shown himself to be a faithful pastor throughout this entire ordeal with the Corinthians. And here in this text—his final appeal to them before his third visit—we find **four features** of the faithful pastor’s care for his people. These **four characteristics** of faithful pastoral care are a model for us in the church, who have been called to into the ministry of serving the body of Christ.

I. Concern for Their Genuine Salvation (vv. 5–6)

Well, that **first feature** of the pastor’s care for his people is, number one, **concern for their genuine salvation**. And we see this in verses 5 and 6. Paul writes, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.”

At the instigation of the false apostles, the Corinthians had been examining Paul’s life and writings to see if he stood the test as a genuine apostle of Christ. He said in verse 3 that they were “seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in me.” And throughout the letter Paul has argued that his conduct toward them *has* proven his apostolic genuineness. And if that wasn’t enough, he promises them that when he returns on his upcoming visit they’ll have all the proof they can handle! since he’ll exercise apostolic authority to discipline. But here in verses 5 and 6, Paul turns the tables on them. He says, “You’ve been testing and examining *me*. Let me tell you something: you need to test *yourselves* to see if you’re in the faith! You need to examine *yourselves*!”

And that *is* the proper emphasis. Paul not only repeats the word “yourselves,” but in both instances he puts it in the emphatic position in the clause. “You’re looking for proof from me; you need to prove yourselves! You need to test the genuineness of your own salvation! You’re the ones who are dallying with false teachers. You’re the ones who are infatuated with foolish triumphalism. You’re the ones, chapter 12 verse 20, who are trafficking in strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, gossip, slander, and arrogance. You’re the ones, 12:21, who are refusing to repent of your impurity, immorality, and sensuality. Dear Corinthians, examine *yourselves!*”

But as bleak as that picture is, Paul isn’t calling on them to examine themselves because he thinks they’ll fail the test. He’s calling on them to examine themselves because, despite all this trouble, he is confident that they will pass the test. He asks them: “Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you...?” He appeals to their own spiritual self-awareness, and he does so with confidence that if they come to their senses and examine themselves carefully, they will recognize that Christ is indeed dwelling in their hearts through faith, as he says in Ephesians 3:17—that they have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer they who live, but Christ lives in them, Galatians 2:20—and that they will amend their ways, repent of their sins, repudiate the false apostles, embrace him, and thereby begin again to live consistently with the truth of the Gospel. Now, of course, he doesn’t know for certain that every individual in that obstinate minority is genuinely saved, and so he adds the caveat, “unless indeed you fail the test.” But he believes the best that he can about this struggling flock. He still regards them as his spiritual children, and he won’t give up hope until he has no other choice.

And one of the reasons we’re right to conclude that Paul is optimistic about the Corinthians passing the test, is that his entire argument is that his passing the test is linked to their passing the test. Look at verse 6. He says, “But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.” When they examine themselves to see whether they’re genuinely in the faith, and when they do recognize that Jesus Christ is in them—that they’re true believers indwelt by the Spirit of God—Paul says then, he trusts that they’ll realize that Christ is in him as well, that he is a genuine apostle. And why would the one lead to the other? Why would the Corinthians’ becoming assured of their salvation necessarily lead to their becoming assured of Paul’s apostleship? Because it was through Paul’s apostolic ministry among them that they heard the Gospel, believed in Christ, and received salvation.

We’ve heard this argument several times from Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9, verses 1 and 2, Paul asks, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” “The very means by which you were rescued from sin and converted to Christ is that I brought you the Gospel and labored among you night and day to establish this church! Other people can doubt my apostleship, fine. But your salvation is the very seal of my apostleship! The fact that you’re saved is a testimony to the power of God at work in my ministry!” He says the

same thing in 2 Corinthians 3:1–3. He says, “We don’t need letters of commendation to you. *You* are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” “I don’t need letters of paper and ink. You yourselves are *living* letters that commend the genuineness of my ministry. You’re saved because of the Gospel I preached to you.”

And so D. A. Carson explains, “If the Corinthians, as a result of their self-examination, decide that they are true believers, then there is an unavoidable entailment: the man who led them to their first steps of faith and their initial experiences of grace cannot be quite as useless as some of them have been suggesting” (178). Philip Hughes captures it simply when he writes, “If they know Jesus Christ to be in themselves, then they know, by simple logic, that [Christ] is in the one who proclaimed Jesus Christ to them” (481). The Corinthians’ genuine faith and Paul’s genuine apostleship stand and fall together. And so because Paul wants them to recognize *his* genuineness, he expects them to fare well in their spiritual self-examination.

And even though this call to self-examination is situated in the particular events of the Corinthian conflict, there is a genuine principle for us to benefit from here. And that is that the faithful pastor—or, in the case of the many of you who are not vocational pastors: the faithful minister; the faithful servant of Christ’s body—is characterized by **concern for the genuine salvation** of those to whom he ministers. And that must be the case, because if we care at all about the spiritual well-being of our brethren, we must be principally concerned with whether they are spiritually alive in the first place. There cannot be spiritual health and growth without spiritual life.

And what this call for self-examination confirms is that there is such a thing as fake Christians. There is such a thing as false converts. There is such a thing as those who profess to believe in Christ, but who are not genuinely in Christ. Paul calls them “false brethren” in 2 Corinthians 11:26. They are those who, upon engaging in honest self-examination, ought to conclude that they are not genuinely in the faith. Jesus speaks about such false brethren in Matthew 7:21, where he says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord is going to be saved. He says, in the next verse, “Many will say to Me on that day [of judgment], ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’” These people prophesied in the name of Christ! They cast out demons in the name of Christ! They performed miracles in the name of Christ! These folks looked like Christians! They would have blended in well at church and at fellowship group and at Bible study! And yet: not a few, but many of these people will hear that chilling declaration from Christ, verse 23: “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

Friends, there is such a thing as being self-deceived. There is such a thing as being assured of a salvation that you don't have. And that is the most miserable state to find yourself in, because you'll do nothing to lay hold of salvation, since you think you've already laid hold of it. Only to stand before Christ on the Day of Judgment, expecting to find the welcoming face of a familiar friend, but instead seeing Him look at you, perplexed at your expectations of eternal life, and declaring that He never knew you. I can't think of a more terrifying scenario than that.

So what does that mean? It means that one of the most important pursuits of the Christian life is the pursuit of genuine assurance of our salvation. We are called by this text to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith. We are called, in 2 Peter 1:10, to "be all the more diligent to make certain about [God's] calling and choosing [us]." The Apostle John writes the entire epistle of 1 John, outlining a series of tests that we may take, he says, "so that you may know that you have eternal life."

And what are those tests? By what means do we look to gain a genuine, well-founded assurance of salvation? Well, the answer to that question is worthy of an entire sermon *series*, but the short answer is that we are to look for evidences of God's saving and sanctifying grace at work in our lives. We aren't to look to some past experience for assurance; you know, "X number of years ago I raised my hand, I came forward, I prayed the sinner's prayer, I got baptized, I had an emotional experience, an 'encounter with God.'" No, we're to look for present evidences of God's grace at work in our lives. Let me work through five of them briefly.

First, what is our response to our own sinfulness? Do we deny it? Rationalize it away? Make excuses for it? Blame others for it? Or do we confess our sins, mourn over them, forsake them, and trust in Christ to forgive us based on His sufficient sacrifice? First John 1:8–9 says that if we say we have no sin we're deceived, but if we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do we go to Christ with our sins? Or do we excuse our sins and live in them?

Second, can we identify patterns of obedience in our lives? Not perfection, but direction. Are our lives increasingly characterized by holiness? However slowly we may be progressing, are we progressing? What is our attitude toward the authority of Scripture and the commandments of Christ? First John 2:3 says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I've come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Is obedience to Christ a delight, even though we may mourn over how we fall short? Or are His commandments a burden to us?

Third, what is the state of our heart toward the world? First John 2:15–16 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of

life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” Are we marked by a sinful infatuation with worldliness? With worldly speech, worldly thinking, worldly philosophies, worldly entertainment, worldly dress? First John 3:13 says, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.” Does the world hate us, like it hated our Master, because, like Him, we testify of it that its deeds are evil? Or are we at home in the world? Are we seeking a lasting city here on earth? Or are we living for a better country, the heavenly city prepared for us by God?

Fourth, what do we think of the local church? First John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” Chapter 4 verse 20 says, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.” Chapter 5 verse 1 says, “Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.” Are our lives marked by loving, devoted service to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ? Or are we happier to be isolated, unbothered by the needs of the saints which might bring inconvenience and hardship? Do we delight in fellowship with other believers, or do we look for excuses to avoid it?

And fifth, what do we think of Christ? Do we believe in the Jesus that Scripture reveals, and not as we might imagine Him? Do we know Him as the eternal Son, virgin-born, fully God and fully man, perfectly sinless, the only substitute for sinners, who died and rose again, is seated at the Father’s right hand, and coming again to reign? And do we love Him, in our heart of hearts? Have our affections been transformed not only to hate sin, but to love the glory of Christ? Do we delight to spend time with Him? to learn of Him? to speak of Him? to meditate on Him in prayer? John says in 1 John 1:3 that he writes “so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Do we delight in our fellowship and communion with Jesus? Do we trust in Him alone for our righteousness? Do we treasure Him as our pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field? Do we taste and see that the Lord is good?

Friends, these are just some tests we can administer, as, in pursuit of assurance of our salvation, we try to identify evidences of God’s grace in our lives. {Refer to audio for Gospel presentation.}

But this is not just for us. As we serve one another in the body of Christ, the faithful pastoral, shepherding care that we’ve been called to must be marked by **a concern for the genuine salvation** of our brethren. And so there must be times when we call upon our professing brothers and sisters to examine themselves—especially if there are patterns of sin and lack of repentance. And we need to be willing to work through these tests with them—to get into their lives and help them assess their own spiritual condition. Not just, “Hey take these two verses and call me in the morning!” But, “Hey, let’s work through this. Tell me about the state of your heart. How’s your soul? What are you being seduced by? What truth about Christ is sweet to you right now?”

There is so much more that can be said, but suffice it to say that the Apostle Paul was **concerned for the genuine salvation** of his flock, to the point that he called upon them to put their profession of faith to the test. And if we are going to faithfully care for the fellow-sheep that Christ has entrusted to us, we must be willing to do the same.

II. Prayer for Their Progressive Sanctification (vv. 7a, 9b)

There's a **second feature** of faithful pastoral care that we see in this text. Not only concern for their genuine salvation, but, number two: **prayer for their progressive sanctification**. And we see this both in verse 7 and verse 9. Verse 7 says, "Now we pray to God that you do no wrong." And verse 9, "This we also pray for, that you be made complete."

Twice in the span of three verses, Paul makes mention of his prayers for the Corinthians, especially as they undertake this self-examination and prepare for Paul's visit. He's not going to just bark out orders and exhortations and warnings and threats of discipline, and then forget about them till he gets there. No, he's going to warn them of impending discipline, but then devote himself to pray for their repentance. He's going to pray that between the time of writing and the time he gets there, that Spirit will work in their hearts and conform them to the image of Christ.

He prays that they would "do no wrong." Wrong, in this context, would be to persist in their attachment to the false teaching of the false apostles, and to refuse to repent of the sins Paul mentioned in verses 20 and 21 of chapter 12. To "be made complete," in verse 9, translates the word *katartizō*, which, when used in medical contexts, referred to the setting of a broken bone. Paul uses the term in Galatians 6:1 when he says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, *restore* such a one in a spirit of gentleness." And so it has this idea of restoration, of putting back into place, of repairing what was broken and restoring what was lost. And again, in this context, it has to do with the fact that they'd reach a level of spiritual maturity, manifested in their rejection of the false apostles with their false gospel, in their repentance from immorality and their pursuit of righteousness, and in their embrace of Paul and the Gospel he preaches.

Paul prays for their sanctification, just as he does for the rest of his churches. In Philippians 1:9–10, he writes "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." In Colossians 1:9–11, he says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious

might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.” In 1 Thessalonians 3:10 he says, “Night and day we keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith.”

And the application I draw from all this is: we who would faithfully minister to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ—especially those who are caught in a trespass and whom we are urging to forsake sin—we need to pray for their sanctification as much as we preach, teach, counsel, and exhort. “Prayer and the ministry of the word” was how the apostles summed up their own ministry in Acts 6:4. And if we would be faithful undershepherds of Christ’s flock, we must similarly understand prayer for our brethren to be at the top of our list of ministry priorities.

How often it is that we spend hours talking with a brother or sister trying to loosen their grip on their sin and equip them to fight the fight of holiness, give them passages to read and questions to answer, and then forget about their struggle until minutes before our next meeting! Friends, we might as well plant seeds and never water them, as to preach and counsel and instruct without prayer. As we seek to care for the flock, let us be devoted to **prayer for their progressive sanctification**. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to take the Word we’ve presented to our brethren and cause it to take root in their hearts and bear fruit in their lives.

III. Humility for the Sake of Their Spiritual Well-Being (vv. 7b–9a)

A **third feature** of faithful pastoral care comes in verses 7 to 9. And that is, number three: **humility for the sake of their spiritual well-being**. Starting in verse 7. Paul writes, “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 may 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; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.”

Now, after Paul had urged the Corinthians to examine themselves in verses 5 and 6, and specifically because he had linked his own vindication to theirs, the Corinthians may have gotten the idea that he was praying for their successful self-examination only because of how it would contribute to his vindication as a genuine apostle. So he corrects that misunderstanding here. His preeminent concern is for **their spiritual well-being**. His humiliation means nothing to him, except for how it might contribute to their spiritual health.

Now, his exact words are a bit difficult to follow, so let me try to unpack this, here. On the one hand, if the Corinthians heeded Paul’s warnings and repented ahead of his visit, that would mean that they would have once again judged him to be an authentic minister of the true Gospel of Christ. To put that in the language of verse 7, it would mean that he would “appear approved.” He would have passed the test. On the other hand, if they repented ahead of time as he’s exhorted

them to, that would mean that, when he came for his third visit, he would have no occasion to exercise his apostolic authority by severely disciplining those who were unrepentant. The very thing that would serve as evidence of his ministerial genuineness—the exercise of apostolic power—would be entirely unnecessary.

If he exercised church discipline on those who had repented, he would be acting “against the truth,” as verse 8 says. But he can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth—even if that makes him (end of verse 7) *appear* unapproved. But if that were the case—if he had no need to assert his authority—and the result was that the false teachers once again accused him of being weighty and strong in his letters but unimpressive and weak in person (cf. 10:10), he’s not bothered by it. In fact, he rejoices over it! Verse 9: “For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong.” “I’m ecstatic if you’re spiritually strong enough for me to be weak around you!”

And what’s remarkable to observe here is how disinterested Paul is in protecting his own reputation, and how committed he is to achieving the Corinthians’ greatest benefit, no matter the cost to himself. If he were a man driven by the flesh, he would have been chomping at the bit to show up in Corinth and roll some heads! After the false apostles had basically called him a coward and a weakling, it would have felt great to show up, display his apostolic power, blow the false apostles out of the water, and kick the Corinthian detractors out of the church. But he prayed that the Corinthians would be so obedient that he could show up and *be* a weakling. Carson comments, “Whatever the personal price, he is willing to pay it if only their own conduct is right before God and man. Here is the heart of a true apostle, a Christian so steeped in radical discipleship and firm self-discipline that his every care is for the people he serves, not for his own reputation. He is no hireling, but a true undershepherd, willing to be counted a failure, a sinner, even a counterfeit, if only the people he serves may be lifted up in their faith. Paul is the perfect antithesis to triumphalistic leadership” (180). Pastor John writes, “A true man of God is not concerned with building his reputation, padding the size of his congregation, or any other selfish pursuit. As it was with Paul, his consuming passion is the nurturing of his spiritual children to maturity ... Like a loving father, he was more concerned with his children’s obedience than his own reputation” (474, 476).

And that’s where the lesson is for us. The faithful pastor’s care for his people is marked by a willingness to suffer shame, humiliation, and disgrace if it serves to build up the people of God and nurture their spiritual well-being. We ought to be the kind of people who care nothing for personal consequences, so long as it means that the church looks more like Christ. What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 6:8? He commends himself “by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true.” If we are maligned in the course of our ministry to the body, but our humiliation builds up the body, we, like Paul in verse 9, ought to rejoice when we’re counted weak but the people of God are strong.

IV. Correction for the Sake of Their Edification (v. 10)

Well, we've seen so far that the faithful minister's pastoral care for his flock is marked by **three features**. First, by concern for their genuine salvation; second, by prayer for their progressive sanctification; and third, by humility for the sake of their spiritual well-being. The **fourth** and final **feature** comes in verse 10. And that is, number four: that the faithful minister is **correction for the sake of their edification**. Let's look at verse 10. Paul says, "For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down."

Now, this closing verse picks up the theme that was introduced in the opening verses of this section, chapter 10 verses 1 and 2. There, Paul gave voice to the accusation that was being made against him. He says, "Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh." So you hear the accusation: Paul is weak and timid in person, but is bold and mighty in his letters.

And what is presented there in chapter 10 as it were in the minor key—framed negatively as an accusation against Paul—here at the close of the letter is transposed into the major key, framed as an expression of Paul's love and compassion. "Dear Corinthians, the reason that I write so severely while absent is so that repentance might be worked in you now. This way, when I come to you and am present with you, there will be no thought of severity, but only the refreshing joy and peace and delight of the fellowship of righteousness. Dear friends, better a weighty letter than a weighty face-to-face confrontation! Let me *write* sharply from afar so that I will not have to *act* sharply when I'm with you."

And this just brilliantly strikes a balance that is so necessary as we navigate through our service to our fellow believers. Paul will not shrink from the diligent exercise of his apostolic authority—even if it means bringing severe correction the next time he sees the Corinthians. His tenderness and compassion will not cause him to abdicate the responsibility that Christ had given him. He recognizes that it is no true compassion—no genuine love—that refuses to confront sin with biblical correction, when such **correction** is given **for the sake of their edification**. The loving servant of Christ's flock is willing to endure all manner of conflict and discomfort for the sake of his brother's mortification of sin and joy in Jesus.

But, though Paul will not shrink from his duty to bring severe correction, he takes no perverse delight in doing so. He is eager to find another way. In no sense does Paul relish the controversy. He's not spoiling for a fight. The only reason he uses any severity at all in his letters is so that

that severity works grace and repentance in the hearts of the people, which results in his not needing to use severity when he's with them. He is a soldier ready for battle, but eager for peace. He will bring **correction**—even severe correction. But, verse 10, he will not do it to tear down and destroy, but only to **edify**, because the authority which the Lord gave him, He gave him “for building up and not for tearing down.”

And each one of us needs to strike this balance in our lives and ministries, because each of us tends to insist on the one and neglect the other. On the one hand, some of you are so eager for peace that you're tempted to be cowards. You're tempted to shy away from any kind of conflict whatsoever. “Oh, no! I can't say *that!* She may never speak to me again! Or, at the very least, if I do bring it up, it's going to be this long, drawn-out battle, and I know I'm going to be misunderstood. I don't want to come off as unloving or judgmental. Best to leave it alone and keep the peace.” The problem is: that's not true peace. While you cower in silence, your sister continues in unrepentant sin. Her communion with Christ is hindered, the strength of her soul is sapped, and her progress in maturity is stunted. Those of you tempted in this way need to recognize that the faithful servant of the flock is courageous enough to get over the fear of what people might say or do to you if you bring them biblical **correction**, because **their edification** is more important than your ego, because their progress in holiness is worth more than a false, pasted-smile, phony “peace.”

On the other hand, others of you are so ready for battle that you're tempted to be impatient and graceless. You're a hammer in search of a nail. You're just ready to crack that whip and overturn those tables. “Hey man! What's the matter with you?! Get your act together! Don't you know you're *sinning*? Are you sure you're even Christian?!” That's not edifying. That's tearing down. You see, we must be bold, but our boldness must not consist in relishing the opportunity to run someone over. It must be a brokenhearted boldness that would much rather come to terms of peace, but will endure conflict if necessary. And you who struggle more on this side need to be on guard, because your heart will deceive you into thinking you're just a stalwart for righteousness—a man or woman of conviction in the midst of a bunch of sissies—when really you're just a hard person, looking to beat up on others, which is more often than not so that you don't have to deal too intimately with the sin in your own life.

Let us not be cowards, and let us not be brutes. Let us be marked both by courage and by compassion. As we minister to one another in the body of Christ—as we get into each other's lives and labor alongside one another in our conflict against sin and our pursuit of holiness—let us strike the proper balance as modeled for us in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. By God's grace, let us be bold enough to bring **correction**, but let us bring it only **for the sake of the edification** of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

And so we come to the end of the body of 2 Corinthians. We're not done yet; there's still four verses to go. But as we faithfully carry out the ministry to which we've been called as we serve our brethren in the family of God, may Paul's ministry be the model for our ministry. May our pastoral care for one another be marked by **concern for one another's genuine salvation**, such that we are willing to ask the hard questions, helping one another examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith, helping them lay hold of genuine, biblical assurance of salvation. May it be marked by **prayer for one another's progressive sanctification**, faithfully calling for divine power to sweeten the words of our biblical counsel in the souls of our brothers and sisters, so that the truth finds a genuine home in their heart, and takes root, and bears fruit in their lives. May it be marked by **humility for the sake of one another's spiritual well-being**, a willingness for our name to perish—a willingness to be drug through the mud—if it serves the spiritual growth of our brethren. And may it be marked by **correction for the sake of one another's edification**, such that we're willing to have uncomfortable conversations, not because we delight in discomfort, but so that we might benefit one another in the truth.