

“Holding On To Holiness”
2 Corinthians 12:16-21

Introduction:

1. Let's Head Back In Our Bibles This Morning:
 - To 2 Corinthians 12:
 - Where - As We Come To The End Of This Chapter:
 - The Apostle Paul Has Been Forced:
 - To Defend Himself & Even His Calling:
 - As An Apostle!
 - In The Verses We Come To This Morning:
 - Paul Now Has To Defend Himself:
 - From Attacks On His Integrity:
 - Which We Find In:
 - 12:16 - “But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile!”
2. Verse `16 Is Closely Tied:
 - With The Verses We Looked At Last Week:
 - Where Paul Wanted To Remind The Corinthian Church:
 - That He Did Not Come:
 - To Be A “Burden” On Them!
 - In 12:13 - Paul Looked Back:
 - To His Former Visits - And Asserted:
 - “I myself was not burdensome to you!”
 - And Then:
 - In 12:14 - Paul Looked Forward:
 - To His Coming Visit - And Stated:
 - “I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you!”
 - And Now - In 12:16 - Paul Is Restating What The Corinthians Themselves Knew About Him:
 - “But be it so, I did not burden you!”
 - So - It Was An Undeniable Fact:
 - That Paul Never Personally Or Directly Insisted Upon Financial Support From The Corinthians:
 - For His Ministry To Them!
3. But There Were Still Some In The Church:
 - Who Questioned Paul's Integrity In This Matter!
 - And In The Second Part Of 12:16 - It Seems That Paul Is:
 - Repeating A Rumor:
 - That Was Being Spread About Him!
 - That - Even Though He Did Not “Burden” The Corinthians Directly:
 - “Nevertheless – Being Crafty, I Caught You With Guile!”
 - There Were Some In The Corinthian Church:
 - Who Accused Paul Of Using Sneaky & Underhanded Tactics:
 - To Exploit The Church For His Own Personal Gain!
 - **IE:** Perhaps They Thought That The Collection He Was Taking Up For The Jerusalem Church Was Just A Way For Paul To Fill His Own Pockets While Still Pretending He Was Above It All!
 - In Fact - The Word “Crafty” Here In 12:16:
 - Is Used To Describe Someone Else:
 - Back In 11:3 - “As the serpent beguiled Eve through his *subtilty*!”
 - So - Paul Was Being Accused Of:
 - Deceit & Exploitation & Even Embezzlement!
 - Which Was A Slander That Needed To Be Dealt With:
 - Because It Could Potentially Ruin The Ministry Of The Gospel In Corinth!
4. For Paul:
 - The Matter Of Personal Integrity & Personal Holiness:
 - Was Critical In His Life & Ministry:
 - For Christ!

- And So - He Took Great Pains:
 - To “Exercise [himself], to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men!” (Acts 24:16)
- And This Should Be Our Desire:
 - And Our Quest As Well!
 - Especially When We Remember Our Own Call:
 - To Holiness By The Lord!
 - 1 Peter 1:15-16 - “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; / Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy!”
- And I Believe That:
 - As We Look At These Verses This Morning:
 - We Can Learn From The Example Of The Apostle Paul:
 - Not Only How To Properly Defend Our Integrity As Christians - But How To Display That Integrity As Well!
 - Let’s Read Together 12:16-21:
 - “But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. / Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? / I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? / Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. / For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: / And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed!”

* And So - In Our Christian Quest For Holiness - There First Needs To Be:

1. A Godly Authenticity In Our Lives!

- A Godly Authenticity - Which We See Again In:
 - 12:16-17 - “But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. / Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?”
 - After Repeating The Accusation Against Him:
 - He Starts Asking The Corinthians:
 - Some Questions!
 - To Get Them To Think!
 - And Each Of These Questions:
 - Is Designed To Show That There Was:
 - Absolutely No Basis For These Accusations!
 - For Paul:
 - His Testimony Was Clear!
 - In Fact - If They Were Honest With Themselves:
 - They Already Knew Of His Integrity!
 - 12:16 - “I Did Not Burden You!”
 - This Testimony Was Crystal Clear!
 - At No Time Did He Require:
 - Any Financial Support For His Own Ministry!
 - This Is Something That He Repeats Over & Over Again In This Letter!
 - And It Is Significant Because The False Leaders & False Apostles **Were** Requiring Financial Support & Even Using That As A Barometer Of Their Authority & Success!
 - Paul Did Not Need To & Did Not Want To Do This! - Even Further:
 - His Testimony Was Consistent!
 - In 12:17 - He Adds That He Did Not Even Use Others:
 - To Do His “Dirty Work” And Get Financial Support In An Indirect Way!
 - “Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?”
 - And The Answer, Clearly, Is No!
- We Have Seen - All Throughout:
 - 2 Corinthians - A Godly Transparency:

- And Authenticity In The Life & Ministry Of Paul!
 - Who He Was On The Outside:
 - Was Who He Was On The Inside!
- And This Is What Christian Integrity:
 - And Christian Holiness Is To Be Like!
 - Now - This Does Not Mean That:
 - There Is 100% Perfection - But It Does Mean That Your Desire & Quest & Even Struggle For Holiness:
 - Is Apparent To All!
- Is There This Kind Of:
 - Transparency & Authenticity:
 - In Your Life?

* But There Also Needs To Be - In Our Christian Quest For Holiness:

2. ***A Godly Accountability In Our Lives!***

- A Godly Accountability:
 - That Will Help Us Maintain That Clear & Consistent:
 - Testimony - Even Before Those:
 - Who Might Want To Make Accusations Against Us!
 - As We Are Told In 1Thessalonians 5:22 - “Abstain from all appearance of evil!”
 - Paul Always Wanted To:
 - “Provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men!” (8:21)
 - And So - This Is Why Paul:
 - In 12:18-19 - Reminds The Corinthians:
 - Of The Steps Of Accountability He Took With Them!
 - “I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? / Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying!”
 - We See Here The Kind Of Accountability That Can Should Be Used In Our Lives & In Our Quest For Holiness!
 - First - There Ought To Be:
- A Practical Accountability!
 - Even As - In The First Part Of 12:18 - Paul:
 - Sent “A Brother” Along With “Titus” In Order To Secure The Love Offering:
 - That They Were Taking Up For The Poverty Stricken Christians In Jerusalem!
 - These Two Individuals Were Used To Ensure The Integrity Of The Collection!
 - And They Were Men Of Integrity As Well!
 - The Corinthians Clearly Knew & Loved Titus:
 - In A Special Way - And So - Paul Wants Them To Remember:
 - ***His*** Character & ***His*** Conduct As Well:
 - Because They Were A Mirror To ***His Own!***
 - They Walked:
 - In The Same Spirit!
 - That Is - Their Hearts & Motives:
 - Were In Complete Harmony! And:
 - They Walked:
 - In The Same Steps!
 - They Worked Together:
 - Carefully & Cautiously!
 - This Is The Kind Of Accountability We Need As Well!
 - Practical Accountability!
 - Sometimes We Need A Second Pair Of Eyes In Our Lives:
 - To Help Us In Our Walk With The Lord!
 - So That - Together:
 - We Walk In The Same Spirit & In The Same Steps:

- Of The Lord Himself!
 - There Also Ought To Be
- A Personal Accountability!
 - Before The Lord!
 - 12:19a - "Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ!"
 - Here - Paul Explains That He Is Not Defending Himself Before Them:
 - As If **They** Are His Judges!
 - Because - In His Life - As A Whole:
 - He Stands Before A Higher Judge:
 - And In A Higher Court!
 - Because His True Judge & His Only Judge:
 - Is The Lord!
 - And We Need To Remember This As Well!
 - We Are Personally Accountable:
 - Ultimately - To The Lord!
 - Who **Is** Judge! And:
 - Who **Will** Judge!
 - And That Is Why - We:
 - Like Paul - Ought To Always Strive To:
 - **"Speak Before God In Christ!"**
 - Because - The Truth Is - Every Thing We Say & Do & Even Think:
 - **IS** "Before God!"
 - Hebrews 4:13 - "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do!"
 - And So - We Need To Speak & Live & Think All Things "In Christ!"
 - That Is - In The Same Spirit As Christ & With The Same Steps As Christ -
 - Always Seeking To Conform Ourselves To The Mold Of Jesus Christ Himself!
 - And Then - There Also Ought To Be:
- A Public Accountability!
 - Just Because Paul Is Ultimately Accountable To God:
 - Doesn't Mean That He Isn't Interested In God's People! To The Contrary! As We See In:
 - 12:19b - "But we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying!"
 - Charles Hodge - "He Spoke Before God, Not Before Them; For Their Edification, Not For His Own Reputation!"
 - And So It Should Be For Us As Well!
 - There Is A Wider Accountability:
 - That We All Have!
 - The Church Of God As A Whole!
 - The Things That You Say & Do:
 - As A Christian - Can & Does Affect Your Church!
 - They Can Tear Down:
 - Or They Can Build Up!
 - And This Is Why:
 - We Should Be So Careful To - As Paul Tells Us In:
 - Colossians 4:6 - "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man!"
 - Is There This Kind Of Godly Accountability:
 - In Your Life - As You Seek To Be Holy:
 - Even As Your Lord Is Holy?
 - But There Also Needs To Be:

* In Our Christian Quest For Holiness:

3. ***A Godly Anxiety In Our Lives!***

- A Godly Anxiety / Apprehension:
 - That We See In Paul In 12:20-21 - "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: / And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the

- uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed!”
- “For I Fear” - Paul Says - A “Godly Anxiety” Over Things That Can Get In The Way Of Pursuing Holiness - In Our Lives! See 3 Concerns!
- A Concern For Disappointment!
 - Which Is Paul’s First Fear!
 - 12:20a - “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not!”
 - Paul Was Making Plans To Come To Them Again - But He Was “Afraid” That Instead Of Sweet Fellowship - There Would Be Disappointment!
 - Disappointment On His Part:
 - For What He Might Find - In Them!
 - That Instead Of Holiness & Harmony:
 - With God’s Will & God’s People:
 - There Would Still Be Sin & Disunity!
 - Also Afraid For:
 - Disappointment On Their Part:
 - For What They Might Find - In Him!
 - That Instead Of Coming To Them To Commune & Console:
 - He Would Have To Confront & Correct!
 - And It Would Become Another “Painful Visit!”
- And Isn’t This What:
 - Sin & Unholiness In Our Lives & In Our Church:
 - Will Bring?
 - Grave Disappointment!
 - For Everyone Involved!
 - May This Be A “Godly Anxiety” In Our Own Hearts!
 - To Avoid Sin Because Of:
 - The Disappointment It Brings, Not Just To The Ones We Love:
 - But To The One Who Loves Us & Gave Himself For Us!
 - In Fact - When You Are Tempted To Sin:
 - You Need To Remember The Gospel!
 - 1 Peter 3:15 - “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit!”
 - Also Should Be:
- A Concern For Disharmony!
 - Which Is Paul’s Second Fear!
 - 12:20b - “For I fear . . . lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults!”
 - Here - Paul Gives 8 Examples Of What James Denney Once Described As “Sins Of Self-Will!”
 - There Seems To Be 4 Pairs Of Problems Listed Here:
 - And They Also Seem To Get Progressively Worse!
 - From Hearts Of Contention, In Which Were:
 - Debates & Envyings!
 - And Wraths & Strifes!
 - And They Led To Outward Contention, Including:
 - Backbitings & Whisperings!
 - Swellings & Tumults!
 - There Should Be A “Fear” In Our Own Hearts:
 - For This Kind Of “Disharmony!”
 - Because It Will Destroy Any Relationship & Any Ministry We May Have!
 - Instead - We Need To Pursue:
 - What We Find In James 3:17-18:
 - “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. / And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace!”

- Also Should Be:
- A Concern For Disgrace!
 - Which Is Paul's Third Fear!
 - 12:21 - "For I fear . . . Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed!"
 - Paul Was Also Concerned That Instead Of Experiencing Joy - As John Describes In 3 John 1:4 - "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth!"
 - Instead - He Would Be "Humbled" Among Them With A Deep Sorrow & Despair For Their Unresolved & Unrepentant Sin!
 - With Great Emotion Paul Shares With The Corinthians:
 - How God Himself Will Allow His Heart:
 - To Sink As Deeply As The Church Itself:
 - Had Sunk!
 - Especially As He Thinks About The Sins That He Had Already Confronted, In His Letters & By His Last Visit With Them!
- He Describes:
 - The Dark Essence Of Their Sins!
 - Their "Uncleanness!"
 - Their "Lusts" And Inordinate Desires That Were Contrary To The Will Of God!
 - In Many Ways - The Corinthian Church:
 - Was Like The Pharisees - Who Were "Like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness!" (Matthew 23:27)
- He Describes:
 - The Dark Example Of Their Sins!
 - Their "Fornication!"
 - Which Is A General Term For Any Kind Of Sexual Sin!
 - This Was Still A Problem In The Corinthian Church!
 - Back In 1 Corinthians 5:1 - Paul Even Called It A "Fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles!"
 - We Need To Remember That:
 - "The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body!" & To "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body!"
- He Describes:
 - The Dark Excess Of Their Sins!
 - Their "Lasciviousness!"
 - Also - Sensuality & Debauchery!
 - There Is A Biblical Definition Of This:
 - In Epheians 4:19 - "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness!"
- Is It Any Wonder:
 - Why Paul Would "Bewail" & "Mourn" For The Corinthian Church:
 - With These Kinds Of Sin Still In Their Midst?
 - The Church Did Not Mourn For Their Sin – So Now – Paul Would!
- Is There This Kind Of:
 - Fear & Sorrow For Sin:
 - In Our Own Hearts & Lives & Church?
 - We Need To - "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness!" (James 4:9)
- In Our Quest For Holiness:
 - We Need To Have A Godly Anxiety & Fear:
 - For Our Own Sin:
 - But Also For The Sins Of Others!
 - Especially If They Are Unresolved & Unrepentant Of Within The Body Of Christ!

- John Calvin - "Every Christian [Should] Have His Church Inclosed Within His Heart, And Be Affected With Its Maladies, As If They Were His Own – Sympathize With Its Sorrows And Bewail Its Sins!"
 - Even Has Jeremiah - That Old Weeping Prophet:
 - Jeremiah 9:1 - "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"
- Where Is Our Grief & Sorrow:
 - For Sin?

Conclusion:

1. This Is What It Will Look Like:
 - For You - As A Christian:
 - When You Turn From Your Sin:
 - In Repentance - And Turn To Jesus Christ:
 - In Faith - For Salvation!
2. You Will Pursue After Holiness In Your Life:
 - And In Your Church! And:
 - There Will Be An Ongoing:
 - Authenticity:
 - As You Seek To Maintain A Clear & Consistent Testimony For The Lord!
 - Through The Power & Grace Of God!
 - There Will Be An Ongoing:
 - Accountability:
 - As You Strive To Maintain:
 - A Conscience "Void Of Offense Toward God, And Toward Men!"
 - And There Will Be An Ongoing:
 - Anxiety & Godly Fear:
 - For The Disappointment, The Disharmony, And The Disgrace:
 - Of Sin!
3. Does Your Life:
 - Bear These Marks:
 - Of Holiness Today?

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