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2 Corinthians

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? 2 Corinthians 11:7

The transition from the previous verse seems abrupt, but it isn't really. Paul is displaying irony in the contrast -

"Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. ⁷ Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?"

After showing that he is trained in knowledge, he asks, "Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted?" In essence, "Am I lacking knowledge in what denotes sin?" Obvious such is not the case, but his actions had been challenged in this way. He humbled himself by working with his own hands in the trade of tentmaker so that those in Corinth would be elevated above himself. His job was lowly, tedious, and not one which made a great deal of money.

If someone came to the church and saw him, they would say, "There is that lowly tent-maker." In this, the rest of the congregation would seem like much more honorable citizens in whatever job they had. This is evident because he finishes with, "...because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge."

If the same person came in and saw Paul, knowing that he was a paid preacher, then he would be elevated in the congregation. This is always the case. A person

who is paid by the crowd for his talents, be it an actor or a faith healer, is always universally perceived of as exalted and worthy of respect. Paul chose not to exercise his rights to pay and honor, but rather to allow those around him to be elevated above him.

It seems that his detractors found it inappropriate that he didn't charge for his services in sharing the gospel. This accusation could have been made in a couple of different ways -

- 1) They may have said that anyone who had a sound message was worth the wages of his labors. Because Paul failed to receive pay from the Corinthians, he proved his own lack of true value. Or,
- 2) It could be that because Paul accepted pay from other churches (such as the Macedonians noted in verse 9), but not from those in Corinth, it was demeaning to the Corinthians. It has already been noted that the Macedonians were impoverished (2 Corinthians 8:2) and so those at Corinth may infer that Paul is actually shaming toward them by taking from a poor group but refusing pay from them.

It seems that no matter what avenue Paul chose, his detractors would find fault in his actions.

Life application: It is not demeaning to take a lower position than one which a person is otherwise entitled to. In fact, it is a precept which Jesus taught and which He also lived out. Be cautious to not find fault in others when they are willing to show humility. It is a trait which God approves of throughout His word.

I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.

2 Corinthians 11:8

In his previous words, Paul noted that he preached the gospel "free of charge" to those at Corinth. However, he now tells them that he didn't preach without any type of earnings. Rather, he says that "I robbed other churches, taking wages from

them to minister to you." The word he uses for "robbed" is used only here in the New Testament. It means "to plunder" as if in exercising a "right of seizure," like spoils in war.

This is said then in an ironic rather than a literal fashion. Other churches had helped him out and he used what they had given him as he spread the gospel to live on. By so doing, he was able to preach at Corinth "free of charge." Whereas they received the message without paying him, others were despoiled at their expense.

This is the purpose of a mission budget. Those who give to a traveling minister do so knowing that they are being "robbed" in order for that minister to freely assist others. Hence, for "taking wages" Paul uses the term *opsónion*. It comes from *opson*, meaning "meat" and *onemoai*, meaning "purchase." It is that which allows one to buy meat (food). From that it came to be considered "ration-money paid to soldiers."

It is this idea that he had in mind. He was, as it were, a soldier who was in a spiritual battle and his wages were for that purpose. Although it is not sure which churches he is referring to, in his letter to the Philippians he notes that at least they had helped him in his spiritual conquest -

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities." Philippians 4:15, 16

Life application: The laborer is worthy of his wages. Be sure to openly and freely assist those who tirelessly work in their duties to bring the message of Christ, and the explanation of His word, to others. If your income is used to help bring this message to others, does it matter if it is in Kansas or Kuala Lumpur?

And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. 2 Corinthians 11:9

Paul continues on with his defense of not being less than the "eminent apostles" (meaning the false apostles) of verse 5. In his conduct, he noted that he has preached the gospel "free of charge." Further, in an ironic fashion, he noted that he "robbed other churches" in order to minister to the Corinthians.

Now he reminds them that when he was there with them and yet was in need, he "was a burden to no one." The term "in need" is an aorist present participle which shows that his need was temporary rather than long term. In other words, he had a temporary crisis in which he needed assistance. And yet, he never burdened the Corinthians.

The word for "I was a burden" is *katenarkesa*. It is only used by Paul and only three times in this epistle. It is a very rare word which gives the idea of numbness or deadness. It is connected to the torpedo fish which makes anything it touches numb. Jerome ranks the words as one of Paul's cilicisms (a word picked up by Paul in his hometown of Cilicia). Thus it is a provincial expression. The intent is that even though he was present with the Corinthians, he asked for nothing which would numb them to his ministry.

Rather than asking for a single thing from them which might turn them from listening to his words about the gospel, he says that "for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied." They had already been evangelized and, therefore, his asking for help from them would not affect their acceptance of the gospel. Rather than being a snub to the Corinthians, he is showing that there is a time and a place for receiving help. He felt it was not the time for it while he was ministering to them.

And so he says, "...in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you." Because of his desire to keep the situation with those in Corinth on a purely gospel-oriented level, he decided that he would in no way burden them. But he also adds in his final words of, "...and so I will keep *myself*." This may be a slight rebuke towards them. He has been addressing the issue of the false apostles and he will continue to do so.

In saying that he will continue to keep himself and not burden the Corinthians, it may be that he is telling them, "I am still teaching you. You have not yet learned to discern right from wrong. If I start receiving aid from you, then you might think that I am actually a false apostle, looking for a handout rather than being willing to assist you in receiving and growing in the gospel."

Life application: Love displays itself differently towards different people. We should not look at how a pastor or teacher treats one person and think that he loves another any less because he responds to them differently. Just as each child in a home has different needs and is treated in a different way, so it is in any setting. The same amount of love can be given to everyone, but how it is displayed must be individually directed.

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 2 Corinthians 11:10

Paul invokes the name of Christ in the adamancy of his words. "As the truth of Christ is in me..." He uses the same general formula in Romans 9:1 as well -

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit..."

The thought he is presenting is that because he must answer to Christ alone, his words are to be taken as truthful. "I could no more change my mind about this

matter than tell a lie to Christ." And the thought which he is adamant about is that "no one shall stop me from this boasting."

The "boasting" is what he has been referring to in the previous verses. It is that he has preached the message of Christ without charge to the Corinthians or otherwise been burdensome to them in any way. He would continue to conduct himself in this manner towards them. The word for "shall stop" means properly "to fence in" or "enclose." In turn, it then conveys the idea of "to stop, blocking something off so that it cannot spread or get out of hand."

Paul had determined that nothing would fence in his desire to work without any type of compensation for his labors from those in Corinth. However, instead of singling them out, he says, "in the regions of Achaia." Here he uses the word *klima*, which is a word uniquely used by him in the New Testament. It began as a scientific term which eventually became a colloquialism. It is where we get our word "climate" from. In this case, it identifies a larger area than just Corinth, meaning Achaia, probably because he was including the church in Cenchrea and any other churches connected to those at Corinth.

Life application: In Paul's words, he is not making an oath concerning his intent. Rather, he is saying that as he is a follower of Christ, and as Christ cannot be lied to, then his words should obviously remain truthful, lest he be perceived as even attempting to lie to Him. We can see that there is nothing wrong with such a statement. However, if we make one similar to it, we had better be telling the truth. If we are not, then we have disgraced the name of Christ to others and we have proven that the name of the very Lord who we have called on doesn't have any true value to us.

Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! 2 Corinthians 11:11

His last statement said, "As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia." In response to this, he asks the question, "Why?" He then rhetorically questions, "Because I do not love you?"

The exchange is given because those in Corinth may have felt this way. By rejecting any favors from them, at least a portion of them may have felt snubbed. But it is not necessarily true that turning down help or aid means that someone doesn't care about the giver. They had read into his heart a condition which did not exist.

Paul had evaluated the congregations in Achaia and had seen that the best interaction concerning receiving gifts from them was to restrain from doing so. They were spiritually weak and they were doctrinally confused. They also allowed outsiders who had ill intent for them to sway them away from the truth in Christ. Paul knew that if he were to receive assistance from them, even this would have turned into an unhappy issue at some point.

He doesn't say any of this to them, but it is evident from the content of both epistles to them. But does this mean that he didn't love them? In response to such a question, he says, "God knows!" They may not have been able to tell, but God could. Paul had a deep passion for the churches in Achaia and he struggled to bring them to maturity in their faith. It was a sure evidence of his great love for them.

Life application: We can learn from Paul's care of those in Corinth that it is acceptable to treat different individuals and different congregations differently. We need to evaluate the best approach to dealing with others in order to cause the least amount of conflict later down the line. However, even our best intents can be misunderstood and lead to conflicts and confusions. Life is messy; let us do our best to work through it by relying on the most excellent guidelines available. Let us know and apply the precepts in the Bible to our daily interactions with others.

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. 2 Corinthians 11:12

"But what I do" refers to Paul's conduct towards the Corinthians thus far. He has been preaching and teaching them for free and he has laid no burden on them of any sort. In this conduct, he says that "I will also continue to do." He would remain steadfast in his determination that he would preach and teach those in Corinth without receiving any remuneration at all.

To him, this was a most important aspect of his ministry to them because he desired to "cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast." It is a lot of words to convey his thoughts, but they are selected in order to be precise.

What is obvious is that these false apostles were coming to Corinth under the guise of preaching without receiving any payment in order to lull the Corinthians away from Paul and from the truth of the gospel. However, their guise was not sincere. They were actually interested in compensation even though they claimed they were not. Paul shows that their attitude was exactly the opposite of the truth of the matter. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 9:12, it is implied that others had been paid by the Corinthians for their ministry.

One can almost see the hypocritical way they came to preach. They would arrive and say that they were there to serve the church. Quickly but subtly they would introduce a little yeast to misdirect the faith that they had received through Paul. When offered money for their "enlightened" teaching, they would refuse it while saying that they were only there to help. However, when offered a second time, they would say, "Well, if you insist..."

In the end, they could claim that they came freely teaching the gospel, but at the same time, they could continue to receive pay because of their initial refusal. Paul on the other hand determined that he would continue to not receive anything from the Corinthians to prove that his intentions were pure and undefiled.

Life application: Smooth operators abound in Christian circles. Be wary of those who would put forward a foot of piety but who are actually stepping forward to rob the unsuspecting.

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:13

Paul enters into one of his most direct statements concerning the nature of those who would stealthily enter in and introduce a false gospel. He holds nothing back as he first calls them "false apostles." They had no commission from Jesus; they had no power of the Spirit granted to them; and their words did not confirm either previously given Scripture, nor did they conform to the gospel of Christ which had come. Instead of the all-sufficiency of Christ, they certainly claimed more was necessary to be saved.

He also called them "deceitful workers." A worker receives wages for his work. If he is honest, then the wages he receives will be commensurate with his output. However, these people cheated in their works. Rather than striving for Christ, they made stuff up out of their own heads. Rather than laboring in the gospel, they labored in the devil's work. And instead of promoting Christ, they promoted self while claiming they were promoting Christ.

They changed their outward appearance by "transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." Their inward selves remained however, and nothing of Christ indwelt them. Paul's strong language here is comparable to that of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 -

"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans,¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as

always to fill up *the measure* of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."

He also had similar strong words for such people when writing to those in Philippi

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"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..." Philippians 3:2

Jesus also speaks of such false apostles -

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars..." Revelation 2:2

From Paul's words later in verse 22, we can discern that these false apostles at Corinth were Jews. There he asks, "...are they Hebrews?" when comparing himself to them. It is apparent from these references that these people are the "most eminent apostles" he spoke of in verse 5, and that they were a cunningly devised, but false, representation of true workers for the Lord.

Life application: The truth is that these types of false workers haven't gone away. The world is filled with those who are false and whose message is tainted with deceit. But it takes knowledge of Scripture to be able to identify and then refute them. Unfortunately, most people don't want to spend the effort to get to know their Bible. It is so much easier to blindly trust a smooth sounding orator and be lulled into misdirection. Paul warns against this and we should pay heed to his words!