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2 Corinthians

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 2 Corinthians 12:15

Paul just noted that the parents should save up for their children. As he considered the church at Corinth as his children in the faith, he explains what this then means. To him, it wasn't just saving up a bit and considering the job done. Instead, he says that he "...will very gladly spend and be spent." The Greek word for "spend," *dapanaó*, is used to indicate the incurring of an expense or even to waste one's money entirely. It is used that way in Luke 15 in the parable of the lost son. He wasted all of his money in a foreign land and became needy.

Adding onto that thought, he next uses the Greek word *ekdapanaó*. It is the same word with the prefix *ek*, or "out" attached to it. Thus it is to be completely exhausted or to spend out completely. It is used just this one time in Scripture, and is given to show the great length Paul was willing to go to in order to minister to the Corinthians. In this expenditure, he notes that it is "for your souls."

He wasn't worried about their physical needs, their desires, or any such thing. Instead, he was concerned about their spiritual relationship with the Lord. To him, this is where his efforts were to be focused. And it is evident from his letters that this is exactly where his heart and attention were directed.

He finishes this thought with, "... though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." This is certainly a rebuke towards them. The more attention he doted on them, and the harder he worked in order to not be any burden to them, it

appeared that they came to love him less. There seemed to be an increasing ingratitude in them that welled up with his continued attention towards them.

Life application: Paul's words in this verse show us that there should not be a set of scales in front of us as we minister to others. If there were, when the balances tipped to one side or another, we would change our level of attention and devotion each time we encountered them. If you, for example, do mission work in the downtown slums or projects, you can never expect any sort of reciprocity in your care of the downtrodden you are ministering to. As a Bible teacher, you may be teaching the spiritually downtrodden. In the same manner, why would you expect them to respond with a great return on the spiritual lessons you impart? Be willing to expend everything for those you minister to. The Lord does see and He will reward.

But be that *as it may*, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! 2 Corinthians 12:16

Paul's words, "But be that *as it may*" are based on his previous words which said, "...though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." Despite the attitude towards his loving demonstrations, it was his continued stance to not be a burden on them. This is contrary to nature as most people would simply give up after a while, but Paul knew that changing his tact and accepting assistance from them could only make things worse. And so he determined to continue to be no burden on them at all. The "I" in this clause is emphatic - "I did not burden you." This leads us to understand the words of the next clause.

As he emphatically asserts that he didn't burden the Corinthians, then there is another option which he must refute. He does so with the words, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" These words would be as if he were quoting them. "Yes, you were no burden on us, but you deceived us in another way. You have announced that you want to take a collection to the saints in Jerusalem and you have sent others to collect it. However, we are sure that you will profit, at least in part, from the collection."

This is a possible charge of the false apostles which then infected the minds of the Corinthians. Paul, showing them the silliness of such a charge will defend against it in the verses to come. He has been careful to handle everything in the most professional and open manner possible in order to avoid the very conflict that he is now addressing.

As a way of shining light on the words of this verse, the ISV and God's Word translations both change it into a question rather than stating it as a fact. Instead of "I caught you by cunning," they translate it this way -

"Granting that I have not been a burden to you, was I a clever schemer who trapped you by some trick?" ISV

This clears up any misunderstandings by the reader who may assume that Paul actually acted in a deceitful manner. The reason why this is important is that if Paul acted in deceit, then it would imply that this was an acceptable means of acting to achieve one's goals. In essence, "The ends justify the means." Such is not the case with Paul's words.

Life application: One needs to understand when irony is stated or when someone is writing words as if they are spoken by another. This isn't always easy to do and even learned scholars who understand the original languages will often disagree on what the actual intent of a verse is. This is a good reason for us to refer to many translations and to diligently study the writings of many scholars. In so doing, we can get a better sense of what is probably the correct interpretation of some very difficult verses.

Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you?

2 Corinthians 12:17

Concerning this verse, Charles Ellicott notes, "The English expresses the meaning of the Greek, but does not show, as that does, the vehement agitation which led

the writer, as he dictated the letter, to begin the sentence with one construction and finish it with another - 'Did any of those I sent . . . did I by this means get more out of you than I ought?'"

Paul is truly upset at the implied accusation which appears to have been leveled at him from the previous verse. That said, "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" Concerning those people he sent, it could be referring to Timothy who was sent before the writing of the first letter (see 1 Corinthians 4:17), or it could be referring to Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus who carried his first epistle to them (see 1 Corinthians 16:17), or it could even be speaking of Titus who was sent to determine the state of those at Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 7:6).

He is, in essence, asking them to tell him how they were swindled. Which of them did something improper on Paul's behalf and under his instruction? The word he uses for "take advantage of" is *pleonekteó*. It gives the idea of fraud. Paul is asking them to lay out on the table all their cards and to show how he was involved in such a thing. He knew that he was not, and he is trying to get them to consider the matter.

Life application: Far too often, those who teach spiritual matters faithfully are attacked by those who disagree with their doctrine, even (and maybe especially) because their doctrine is sound. People attempt to find wiggle room in what they believe because the Bible forces us to live in a manner which we may not like. The devil wants nothing more than to distract and disarm those who carry the word of God faithfully to others. Unless there is a true mark of exceptionally bad doctrine, it is better to not accept any charges of false conduct by others who may have a set agenda, like the false apostles who came to Corinth to malign Paul.

I urged Titus, and sent our brother with *him*. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did *we* not *walk* in the same steps?

2 Corinthians 12:18

This is probably not referring to the upcoming visit recorded in 2 Corinthians 8 (although some scholars claim that it is, saying that he is writing in an "already-done" manner). Instead, this is probably referring to Titus' earlier visit to them.

Concerning that visit, Paul asks them to reflect on his behavior while there. He had come with "our brother," meaning someone well known to them who could then substantiate to the character and demeanor of Titus. The KJV incorrectly says "a brother," not acknowledging the article which precedes "brother." Even the "our" of the NKJV is vague. The article (lit. "the brother") conveys the meaning "our mutual brother." The definite nature of the person is highlighted to show that he could be checked with for a confirmation of the conduct of Titus at any time.

To draw out a defense of how Titus actually conducted himself, he asks, "Did Titus take advantage of you?" The question is rhetorical. Paul knows very well he didn't and they will have no other response to it than, "No." Titus certainly never did a thing while among them that could be considered in this light.

Continuing on and still in defense of Titus, he asks two more rhetorical questions, "Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did *we* not *walk* in the same steps?" The answer to both will be in the affirmative. Just as Paul had conducted himself before those at Corinth, so did Titus when he was there with them. Both Paul and Titus had maintained the highest level of integrity before them. Therefore, Paul is asking them to consider the false apostles' accusations from that light.

Where had they done wrong? Where had they offended? Where was their manipulation of the Corinthians? None could be found!

Life application: Paul wisely chose a brother who was known to both parties when he sent Titus to Corinth. In so doing, he could act as an impartial witness to what occurred if there was ever a need to do so. Such forethought can, at any later time, prove that all was done in an above-board manner. Let us remember this

type of action in case we ever find ourselves dealing with a similar sensitive matter.

Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But *we do* all things, beloved, for your edification. 2 Corinthians 12:19

Paul begins this verse with "Again..." He is probably referring back to 2 Corinthians 5:12 which said -

"For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart."

He is not making a defense for himself and those with him to the Corinthians as if he were trying to curry favor with them. Rather than such a thing, which would certainly be looked at as if done with improper motives, he affirms that "We speak before God in Christ." This phrase is an interesting clue as to the nature of the Trinity.

"Before God in Christ" means that he is acceptable to God and thus able to make his appeal before Him because he is "in Christ." He lives within Christ, having received His finished work. There is a nearness to God because of this position. So much so that when he speaks, God is a witness to his words, judging them as to their sincerity. As this is so, then the Corinthians should view the words in the same light.

And those words are not words of currying favor. Instead, they are sincere and without hidden motive. They are simply the way things are. Instead of trying to ingratiate themselves to the Corinthians through inappropriate means, he says that "*we do* all things, beloved, for your edification." The charges of the false apostles had attempted to show Paul as an opportunist and one who couldn't be

trusted. But instead of that, everything he did for those at Corinth was to build them up and to bring them to a state of sound doctrine and holy living.

There was no hint of impropriety in his actions, or in the actions of those whom he sent to minister to them. In all ways, their conduct was to be considered pure and with only the good of those at Corinth in mind.

Life application: Paul's affirmation that his words were "before God in Christ" should be a sobering reminder to us that if we are "in Christ" then we are being looked at from that standard. Our words are to be pure, our actions are to be noble, and our hearts are to be undefiled by impure intent. We are representatives of God and should always consider that in our interactions with others.

For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest *there be* contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; 2 Corinthians 12:20

Paul has already alluded to a visit with the Corinthians in several ways. In 2 Corinthians 1:23, he said that he specifically refrained from visiting in order to spare them. His words now bring in that same thought. If he comes, things might be in chaos and he would have to take apostolic action.

In 1 Corinthians 4:21, he asked if he should come to them "with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" It seems that any coming visit would be one of anxiety for him, not really knowing what he was to expect. And once he got there, he was anticipating the worst. He says, "I shall not find you such as I wish." He would hope for a pleasant visit with a group of people dedicated to Christ and hungry for sound doctrine.

And in like manner, he was afraid that the Corinthians would find Paul in a manner that they wouldn't wish for as well. He would come with a rod of correction as necessary, and he would come to redirect them from their many failings too. If this is what he found, then this is what he would come to do.

From there, he mentions the failings that he was fearful he would find, beginning with "contentions." This word gives the sense of quarreling or strife. It is those who are looking for a fight simply because it is their nature to engage in such a thing. They are the type to divide people into factions for the sake of disharmony rather than harmony.

Next he notes "jealousies." The Greek is *zēlos* and the root it comes from means "hot enough to boil over." Thus *zēlos* is an onomatopoeia "that mimics the sound of water bubbling over from heat." It would indicate those who were disposed towards defending their own views regardless of the cost.

Next he mentions "outbursts of wrath." Literally, it says "wraths." Paul was expecting people to be lashing out at one another as they defended their position. Instead of harmony, there would be chaos because of this negative attitude which would spill over into much anger.

He also notes "selfish ambitions." According to Helps Word Studies, this word properly means, "work done *merely for hire* (as a *mercenary*)." It would thus be "referring therefore to *carnal ambition (selfish rivalry)*." People would be willing to defend another side simply because of whatever gain they thought they could get out of it.

After this, "backbitings" are noted. The word is *katalalia* and one can almost hear the intent in the word. It is only used here and in 1 Peter 2:1. It gives the idea of "evil-speaking, backbiting, detraction, slander."

"Whisperings" are Paul's next area of concern. The word is *psithurismos* and this is its only use in the New Testament. The sound is adapted to the sense. It indicates secret slanders. It speaks "of the murmuring of a snake-charmer." These come from people with the devil's forked tongue.

Next "conceits" are named. Again, a word unique to the New Testament is given here. It is *phusiósis*, and it means "inflated, like an air-bellow." It thus gives the idea of being puffed up and it conveys the sense of arrogance and negative pride which then fosters an inflated ego.

Finally, Paul finishes with "tumults." This is the type of thing one would expect in a riot. It gives the idea of generating confusion, being out of control, and having everything up for grabs. In this, "*uncertainty and tumult inevitably generates more instability.*"

Paul certainly had a lot of worries concerning his visit as he pondered what he might find there at the dysfunctional church at Corinth. Charles Ellicott notes that the list "...forms a suggestive parallelism of contrast to that in 2 Corinthians 7:11." He also says that, "The ethical imagination of the Apostle, with its keen perception of the shades of human character, dwelling now on the manifold forms of opposition, as before it had dwelt on the manifold fruits of repentance."

Life application: How alike the church at Corinth are many churches today. People seem to revel in one sort of perverse conduct or another. Let us keep ourselves in check and not add to the grief that pastors already face as they are pulled in a thousand directions at once. Instead, let us listen to the words of Paul and take them to heart. Instead of strife, let us purpose to be filled with peace.

...lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.

2 Corinthians 12:21

Paul just spoke of his coming and the many possible difficulties he expects that he might face upon his arrival. In addition to those things, he repeats the notion of his coming and an expectation that he "will be humbled among" them. He is writing as if it is a pretty certain thing that this will be the case. He was a faithful pastor, presenting them with the gospel and they received it. However, being saved carries more than just walking through the doors of this new life. It also involves the purging away of the old life.

He will be humbled because they only grasped the salvation, but then failed to put their salvation into practice. Because of this, he says he "shall mourn for many who have sinned before." The word "before" is taken by scholars in a couple of ways. One is that it speaks of their lifestyle before being saved. The other is that they fell into sin since then, but before his coming to them. The first seems the more natural. They were saved by Christ and yet never put their salvation into practice. Either way, the idea of his words is that they were already-saved offenders.

After this he says, "...and have not repented." This shows us that repentance is necessary for right living within the church, but it is not necessary for salvation. The categories are far too often mixed by people in the church. In essence, their call is "Repent and then be saved." This is not proper doctrine. Salvation is one category, repentance is another.

It is illogical to say one must "repent in order to be saved" if salvation is by grace through faith. It is also illogical to say that one will "lose their salvation" if they don't repent. The reason for this is found in Paul's words. He never tells them this would occur. Instead, he shows in his writings that the consequences for failing to repent will result in difficulties in this life and a loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

Next Paul identifies three categories of sin which required correction: Uncleaness, fornication, and lewdness. The "uncleaness" indicates impurity of some sort. Their defilement is because of their lifestyle. "Fornication" is related to pornography or sexual impurity. HELPS Word Studies says that it indicates "'to sell

off') – properly, a *selling off* (surrendering) of sexual purity; *promiscuity* of any (every) type." And the word for "lewdness" indicates "wonton caprice."

Paul was afraid that these were still being practiced among the congregants. Vincent's Word Studies notes that the three categories of sin should be connected with Paul's mourning and not with the repentance. In other words, "I shall mourn for the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness of the many that have sinned before and have not repented. This then demonstrates with all certainty that "repentance" is an entirely different category than salvation itself. The two cannot be logically connected.

Life application: There is a logical structure to salvation and then walking with the Lord which is often twisted by those who are unwilling to research proper doctrine. Israel was redeemed from Egypt and then they were given the law. God did not "unredeem" them if they failed to adhere to the law by sending them back to Egypt. Rather, he gave penalties for disobedience. The same is true in the church today. We are saved unto holy living; we are not holy livers who are then saved. It is by grace that we are saved through faith. After that, we are to get our doctrine and our lives in order.