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A Humble Means to a Worthy End

2 Corinthians 11: 7-12

And the title of our sermon this morning is A Humble Means to a Worthy End...A Humble Means to a Worthy End. Our text is 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 7-12. As we've been working through 2 Corinthians, Paul's second canonical letter to this church in Corinth. We're often, many times brought back to considering once again Paul's example of faithful service to the Lord's church. Paul was a faithful and beloved servant of the Lord's church. We see Paul's heart for the church in these text...right? Paul wears his heart on his sleeve, he loves the Lord, loves the Lord's people. The priority we see that Paul gives to the church, the extent to which Paul will go to serve the eternal good of God's people. Paul understands that he is a man on a mandate...man with a mandate. He's a man on a mission. More than that, Paul's love for the Lord and Paul's love for the Lord's people is unmistakably evident it's obvious in how diligently and faithfully Paul serves the church. Paul is a great example for each one of us as we consider our own ministry...our own mandate to serve this church. We've been given a ministry, we've been given a mission, we've been given a mandate. We're to preach the gospel to the lost and we're to serve the Lord by serving the Lord's church. Certainly, the greatest example that we have in His love for the church is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The One who voluntarily laid down His life for her. The Chief Shepherd, the Head of the church, the Savior of the body, the One who gave Himself for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, the One who ever lives to make intercession for her, the One who is coming back for her that He might present her to Himself in splendor. Jesus Christ loves the church far more than you and I can. Jesus Christ loves the church and He has given everything for her, continues to labor for her, and He commands us to love one another as He has loved us. He gives us this command also.

So then, following the Lord's perfect example, heeding the Lord's word, we see the Apostle Paul in these texts in 2 Corinthians, acting in love for the benefit of the Lord's church...right?...laboring in love for the benefit of the Lord's church. Let me give you an example of that...following the Lord's example, right? Chapter 8, look at chapter 8, verse 9. We see here the Lord's example referenced in chapter 8, verse 9, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* Praise God. Now consider with me in our text what Paul is then doing,. He's following the Lord's example. Verse 7, he has impoverish himself, made himself poor so that the Corinthians might be spiritually rich. Whose example is he following? He's following the Lord's example...right? Look at verse 9. When Paul was in need, we don't know what that need was, but he came to be in need. When Paul was in need he refused to put his own need ahead of their spiritual good. Why? Because Paul is following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in loving the Lord's church, in loving the Lord's people.

Look at verse 11. All this is motivated by his love for them. Whose example is he following? He's following the Lord's example. This is what the Lord did. Paul, having already apprehended the love of God in Christ toward him personally, Paul, takes it upon himself then to follow the Lord's example to pour himself out in love for the Corinthians, for the Lord's church just as the Lord loved him. That's what Paul is doing. Right? That love that the Lord showed Paul now becomes Paul's mandate to pour out on

this beloved church in Corinth...these beloved people in Corinth. That's the way it's supposed to be isn't it? Everything we know of what the Lord has taught us in the New Testament...what the Lord has taught us by His own example...by His very words...everything that we know, this is the way that it's supposed to be. That's the way that it's supposed to be. We love Him because He first loved us. Having apprehended His love for us we now turn and love one another. God commands us as much, doesn't He? How easy it is for us to forget? We are prone to want to be served and not so prone to want to serve.

In the upper room on the night before His death, the Lord with His disciples...He rises from the table, not unlike laying aside the vestments of eternal glory, the Lord lays aside His humble garment, He girds Himself with a towel, and He takes upon Himself the task of slave and He washes the disciples' feet. Then the Lord says to them...so that that object lesson is not missed on them or on us, the Lord says to them, *I have given you an example...I've given you an example, so that you should do as I have done to you. A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he greater, (the one sent who is greater, than the one who sent him) and if you know these things blessed are you if you do them.*

You and I have to consider then, in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ toward us, we have to consider what it is we are called to. We have to consider what it is that is our mission in the Lord's church. What are called to do? Well, we see an example again in 2 Corinthians, chapter 11 of the Apostle Paul, following the Lord's example here, Paul in our text is taking up the task of the Lord's slave and he's loving the Lord's church. Now Paul is an apostle and someone might say well, that's Paul's job, he's an apostle. And we would certainly say that it's his duty to do this. Paul certainly has a duty. But then again a duty is also laid upon us, isn't it to do the same? But when we read these texts...when we come to a text like this today, do you get any impression at all that it's mere duty that motivates the apostle Paul? No! It's not mere duty that motivates him, not at all. Right? Paul had apprehended the love that he personally had been shown in Christ and then he says for example in chapter 5, verse 14, *Christ's love compels us...Christ's love compels us, to make this judgement: that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, so that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, Paul says, we regard no one according to the flesh.* Those are the Lord's people. Those are God's sons and daughters. That's the Lord's church. Blood bought. Right? That is a precious soul who stands on the precipice of hell and needs the gospel. Right? We regard no one according to the flesh.

Calvin said this of Paul, "The man was so inflamed with so great a desire, and so great an anxiety for their salvation that he made any regard to himself a secondary consideration. He had of his own accord made a surrender of his own greatness that they might become great through his abasement." They come first. They came first to the Apostle Paul. So when I read a text like this, when we come to a text like this, I want to love the church like that, don't you? I want to love like this. We understand, don't we, that we've been loved with a matchless, infinite love. We have been loved by the Lord Jesus Christ...poured out His love upon us such that we could be saved...such that rotten, wretched, destitute sinners could be washed, cleansed from their former sins, forgiven of their sins, adopted into the household of God, to be called sons and daughters of the kingdom! I've been loved that way. I want to love more like Him. I want to follow the Lord's example. I want to follow Paul's example. Paul says, doesn't he?... imitate me as I imitate Christ? It's good, isn't it?...that's right...It's right to do that!

If I consider that, if I consider the Lord's example...if I consider Paul's example...honestly with a clear conscience before God...the way that it's revealed to me in the text of Scripture, then it's gonna change my perspective. It's gonna change my perspective about the way we quote, unquote "do church." In other words, I don't come here...I can't conceive of coming here merely to be served. Am I served by coming here? Absolutely. My soul is served by being around this church. But if I'm going to follow the Lord's example...if I'm going to follow Paul's example...if I'm going to imitate him as he imitates Christ, then that is going to transform the way that I think about my responsibilities, my service, my duty if you will, in the church. And I confess that my love is often weak. It's no mystery that you and I are going to love imperfectly but does that bar us from striving to love more like He loved us? It's no mystery that we're going to serve imperfectly.

Spurgeon once said, "If I had never joined a church until I found one that is perfect, I should have never joined one at all. And the moment that I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is," Spurgeon says, "it is the dearest place on earth to us." This is the dearest place on earth to us. The Lord's people, right? What causes it to be so dear? What causes it to be so dear? What drives a man to abase himself to love her and to care for her? What drives someone to sacrifice for her, to put her needs above his own?...her own? Christ's love drives us to that. Christ's love causes it to be so dear. The Spirit of God at work in you causes it to be so dear. Christ love for us compels us. Having apprehended that love...right?...we love the Lord and then we turn in love to the Lord's church. And it must be so...*must* be so. And the Lord says, Blessed are you if you do that.

So how then does Paul demonstrate his love for the church? How should we, following Paul's good example, show our love for the church? Let's learn from the Apostle Paul's example in 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 7-12. As our sermon title suggests, the Lord's servants are to be a humble means to a worthy end. Let's take a closer look at our text.

1. Paul's Explanation

Point 1 on your notes, we have Paul's explanation given in verses 7-9...Paul's explanation. Hear the word of God with me. In verse 7, Paul says, *Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. 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.*

Now immediately as we consider verses 7-9, the context is gonna help us to understand better what's going on here. Remember there are false teachers in Corinth who have infiltrated the church. They are attacking Paul, they're attempting to undermine his ministry at every turn. And so in chapter 11 we understand that they've been positioning themselves now in Corinth against the Apostle Paul and they've been positioning themselves as imminent apostles themselves. "We're apostles. We're sent ones." And in order to do that, they've been slandering Paul as the dejected and unworthy outcast. Right? "Paul is untrained in speech. He doesn't know what he's doing. He's not worth listening to." Now with respect to the supposed lack of training that they continue to reference, there were several accusations against Paul that had to do specifically with Paul's refusal to take financial support from the church at Corinth. Paul had refused to take support from them and the false teachers were attempting to use that against Paul. They would say Paul was an untrained amateur. Amateurs don't deserve to be

paid. Paul was an untrained orator, his speech was contemptible. Paul couldn't preach and so he doesn't deserve to take payment because his preaching is worthless. Paul didn't know enough to be paid for his services, which is absolutely absurd. All of these are absurd accusations. If they knew anything at all about the Apostle Paul...a real apostle...a professional apostle...could expect to make a living on his preaching, on his speaking. "Obviously Paul is not a real apostle. Obviously Paul is not a professional." What he was doing wasn't worth anything they said, so Paul couldn't expect anything. Paul was forced in his ministry to resort to manual labor. Barely one step up from begging. Barely one step up from slavery in the eyes of the cultural elite at the time.

Paul was laboring in Corinth without taking any support from them. Paul, laboring you could say, for free. Preaching the gospel of God, freely without charge. Now the false teachers in Corinth weren't about to do that. Their motives were different than Paul's motives. And because their motives were different than Paul's motives, they felt as though they didn't have any choice but to attempt to discredit Paul for the course of action that he had taken in this. They wanted to discredit him. Well Paul wasn't concerned one gnat's hair what the cultural elite were thinking at the time. Paul had one concern in mind, verse 7, He humbled himself so that they, the Corinthians, might be exalted.

Now what does it mean here...what does it mean that Paul humbled himself? Well certainly Paul humbled himself in enduring all the grief that he had endured in Corinth. Paul humbled himself in all the scorn that they had heaped upon him in his ministry to the church at Corinth. Paul humbled himself by subjecting himself to persecution on their behalf. He humbled himself by subjecting himself to scorn and mocking for them. But specifically here Paul refused to take financial support. That's how he humbled himself. He refused to take any payment from the Corinthians. And instead, went to work with his own hands, manual labor to support himself while he ministered to the Lord's church.

Turn with me to Acts, chapter 18, and let's see this in action. Acts, chapter 18. How did Paul humble himself? Paul, not taking support or payment from the Corinthians. Not wanting anything to come between them and the preaching of the gospel, Paul instead went to work with his own hands to support himself. Look at chapter 18...Acts, chapter 18, verse 1, *After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.* So here we are. Paul is moving to Corinth. He's gonna spend 18 months in Corinth getting the church planted. Now what did Paul do when he got there?...verse 2, *And he found a certain Jew named Aquilla, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome).* Priscilla and Aquilla essentially lost everything they had in Rome, had to leave it all behind for the cause of Christ to come to Corinth. And what were Aquilla and Priscilla going to do there? They were going to minister to the Lord's people. They were going to preach the gospel. They were going to get this church planted. They were serving gospel cause, kingdom causes. Right? They lost...they gave up everything in Rome for the sake of Christ. So, verse 3, *Because he was of the same trade...Paul was of the same trade with them...he stayed with them as worked, for by occupation they were tentmakers.* Paul worked with leather, making tents. That was his trade.

Verse 4, *And...at the same time that Paul was working, laboring to support himself...he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.* If you look down at verse 11, he continued there 18 months teaching the word of God among them...and no doubt 18 months working...Paul was working. That was Paul's example among them in Corinth. Paul worked, labored with his hands.

Turn over to Acts, chapter 20. Paul's example was the same in Ephesus. Look at Acts, chapter 20, and drop down to verse 32. Now this is going to be the last time that he sees these elders from Ephesus. They're meeting in Miletus. And Paul, about to depart from them says, in verse 32, *"So now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.* Paul says, I have coveted no one's silver, I've coveted no one's gold or apparel. *Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who are with me.* Paul's not only working to provide for himself, he's providing for those who are with him. And *I have shown you, verse 35, I have shown you in every way...in other words, I have become an example for you by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.* So one purpose...one intention of Paul in laboring like this, was to show the people, this is the way that you work. Why? Because you have responsibilities to support the weak...to support one another, to help your brothers and sisters. One of the reasons that we work is to support our brothers and sisters in need in the church. Right? Paul gave us this example for that very purpose. I've shown you, verse 35, in every way...I've become an example to you...*by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.* That example is there for us. Amen? Remember the words of the Lord Jesus. That He said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Incidentally, that's what your work is for. That's what work is for. Work is not 'thee' thing. Work is a good thing to help provide for 'thee' thing. Right? Your work provides for the need of your family, enables you to provide for the needs of the Lord's kingdom...the kingdom of God and His cause, His people. But your work is not 'thee' priority. You can't treat your work like it's 'thee' priority. We can't look at work like it's 'thee' priority. Much goes wrong when you start looking at work that way. Work is a good thing. God gives us work. But it's not 'thee'....What is 'thee' priority? It's the kingdom of God and His righteousness. *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*

Now Paul obviously here isn't a lazy man. Paul's not lazy. He says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 12, *...we labor, working with our own hands.* That word in 1 Corinthians 4 there for 'labor' is a word that literally means 'struggling to the point of extreme fatigue'. Paul labored to the point of exhaustion. Paul toiled in wearisome, exhausting, physically demanding labor. Makes me wonder sometimes if Paul absented himself from small group for work (laughing). I say that facetiously. We need to stop using our work as an excuse for why we're not laboring in the Lord's church. Work is not an excuse for why we aren't laboring in the Lord's church. Work is not 'thee' thing. Work helps us with 'thee' thing. Work supports 'thee' thing but it's not 'thee' thing. We have to stop treating work like it's 'thee' thing. Why did Paul work? For 'thee' thing. We need to start using work as a means by which we labor in the Lord's church...the Lord's church. We're to labor in the Lord's church. Give to the Lord's church...support our brothers and sisters in the Lord's church. The kingdom of God and His righteousness is 'thee' thing. Okay?

Now Paul saw his example in this as critical. His example in this is important to the people of God for the spiritual good of these churches. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians. And Paul references his example. 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3. 2 Thess' 3, and beginning in verse 7, where Paul says, *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us.* Now how is it that we are to know? Note what Paul says in verse 7, *we were not disorderly among you.* How is it that we're to know? Paul says by his example. Right? *You yourselves...* That example is given to us on the pages of the New Testament, *...you yourselves know how you ought to follow us. For we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of*

charge but we worked with labor and toil night and day, so that we might not be a burden to any of you. Worked...labored...toiled night and day. I'm sure Paul was exhausted. It's a lot of work.

Paul says in verse 9, *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.* How are we to follow Paul? We're to follow Paul, working, laboring, toiling in whatever we set our hand to, we're to work, and to labor, and to toil, with all our might...to what end? For the kingdom of God and His righteousness. For the good of God's people, for the good of God's church. Right? To labor for kingdom causes, Paul gives us an example. Now Paul certainly had the authority to demand support for his ministry. 1 Corinthians 9, verse 14, the Lord has commanded that *those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.* But what does Paul do here? He humbles himself and he goes to work. Paul has authority. He has the right. God has commanded it. But in love, Paul humbles himself and he goes to work. Manual...exhausting...labor. He tells them we've not used this right *but we endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.* That's the main thing. Right? That's the main thing. Lest we do anything to stand in the way of the ministry of the word, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ...Lest we do anything that stands in the way of kingdom work and kingdom causes, we endure all things. Paul humbled himself as a means to an end. Do you see? Paul sees himself as a means to an end.

And notice with me back in our text...back in our text, Paul brings this up to the Corinthians in a way that's dripping with sarcasms here. Verse 7, Paul asks them, *Did I commit sin in humbling myself to you that you might be exalted, because I preach the gospel...this invaluable treasure...it's the gospel of God.* It's not the gospel of the false teachers. It's not the false gospel...the different gospel...the different Jesus...right?...that they're credited with teaching in Corinth...This is the gospel of God. This invaluable treasure, I preach to you this invaluable treasure...*free of charge.* God gives it freely. Paul says in verse 8, *I robbed other churches...now not literally, this is sarcasm...right? Paul is being sarcastic.* The word there 'robbed'...means he...it's a word that referenced 'taking the spoils of war'. So it's as if...we know that these are the dear churches in Macedonia that supplied Paul's need time and again. Specifically the church in Philippi. But these churches were impoverished. Why were they impoverished? They were impoverished for the cause of Christ. Persecution had resulted in their poverty. And Paul says I'm taking from them as if the spoils of their own battle for Christ and their supporting me so that I can minister to you. I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.

Now what's the reason here for Paul's sarcasm? For all of Paul's hard work on their behalf, the people in Corinth are responding with what appears to be ingratitude...thanklessness. In the way that they're treating Paul...in the way that they're interacting with Paul...in the way that they're entertaining these false teachers, it's as if the people of Corinth are ungrateful. They didn't appear to be thankful for Paul at all. In fact they appear to be more siding with the false teachers in Corinth than they are siding with the Apostle Paul. And Paul essentially ask them, How is it that you're offended with me over this?...that I took nothing from you to preach the gospel to you and you and these false teachers are somehow offended with me because of that? It's ironic isn't it? It's ironic that you would be offended with me over this. Did I do wrong to you, Paul asks? And he asks that sarcastically. Did I do you wrong?

With the language here and the tone that Paul's using in verses 7 and 8, He's showing how shameful their ingratitude really is. Right? They should be ashamed of themselves. To be thankless is shameful. To show ingratitude is shameful. We should be grateful for the blessings that have been shown us...poured out on us in Christ. They don't come from a dropper mind you. Right? They come out of a fire hydrant.

The grace of God to us in Christ. So for God's people to respond with ingratitude is shameful...it's shameful. He's laboring for them. He's humbling himself for them. You can imagine, right?...Paul, all day cutting and tanning and whatever else it is that you do with leather to make tents. He's doing this hard work...manual labor...cutting and probably cutting himself along the way. He's laboring day in, day out. What does he say in 2 Thess?...toiling day and night...and then he comes to church. And what is Paul there...he's going to sit back the chair, he's gonna put his feet up and say "Okay, I just...you're lucky I showed up. So now please feed me. Serve me. Who's gonna wash my feet?" (laughing) No! What does Paul do? Paul goes...(stops)...this is convicting!....God.....he shows up and he labors and he works. He's there for them...has their heart...their soul as his priority. I'm in the church, I'm here to serve. Right? And he's going to go to that brother that need the conversation. He's going to go to that sister and he's going to encourage her because she's in a time of difficulty. He's gonna show up and he's gonna pray with his brothers. He's gonna sing praises to God's name. He's gonna love the brothers that he's there with. He shows up and he labors...toils. It should be humbling to us. It's humbling. He's humbling himself for them. He sees himself as a means to an end. Now listen, Paul...Paul was a smart guy...exceedingly smart. Paul could have easily managed a Fortune 50 company. In our day and age, Paul would have been...could have been one of the 'up and comers' so to speak...the 'movers and the shakers'...the 'go getter.' But Paul, what does Paul do? Paul humbles himself. And he humbles himself for their good because that's the thing. Paul humbles himself for their good. He's a means to an end.

Paul suffers humiliation in this...and listen, suffers humiliation on both fronts. Paul subjects himself to this. Why? Because he loves them. Paul suffers humiliation at their hands and Paul suffers humiliation at the hands of the false teachers. Suffers humiliation at the hands of those who are were supposed to love him. That should be...that should have his back so to speak. And he suffers humiliation at the hands of these false teachers...these upstarts who at every opportunity are undermining him, discrediting him. Paul becomes the object of their scorn and derision. And why does he do it? He does it so that they can be exalted. He does it for them. He does it for...Paul humbles himself. He made himself low so that they might be exalted. He put himself in the fray so to speak. Right? He put himself there. He could have avoided it. He could have gone back to Jerusalem and made a fine living out of being a Pharisee. There's no way that's going to happen. Paul's going to stay in Corinth and he's going to show love to those people. He's going to labor. He's going to stay in the Lord's church. That's what love does. Ultimately, love does that regardless of whether or not it's going to be reciprocated. Love does that regardless. Paul says, *I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; even though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.* He loves them more and they respond by loving him less. He loves them more and they respond with ingratitude...shameful thanklessness.

Verse 9, he continues, *And when I was present with you, and (when I was) in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied.* It was those poor, impoverished and yet lavishly and abundantly generous Macedonians, that we met in chapter 8 that are here again in chapter 11, providing for Paul's need yet again. The inconsistency of it, do you see? Like the inconsistency of it...the inconsistency of their ingratitude. Corinth was a wealthy city. There were people there with wealth. And who was it?...how shameful is that?...who was it that was supplying for Paul's need...time and again? It's those churches in Macedonia who don't have anything. Their poor! And they're giving of everything they have to supply the needs of that church, to supply the needs of the Apostle Paul. When the people in that church have wealth. And Paul humbles himself. Why? Because he

loves them. Listen, if the Lord takes hold of their heart...if grace takes hold of their heart...they're gonna give like those Macedonians. That's what we saw in chapter 8 and chapter 9.

Showing their love, showing their gratitude for Paul...showing their love, showing their gratitude for that church at Corinth...showing their hope and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the work of God, the work of the gospel going on in Corinth; those Macedonian churches, those poor brothers and sisters in Philippi, gave time and time again to Paul's needs. They were financing the preaching of the gospel. They're fueling Paul's work in Corinth so that souls could be saved. You see the direct connection there too. When we give in our own church, when we give to the work in Guatemala, when we give to the work in Haiti, when we give to the work in New York. When we're giving to the Lord's work here, we're fueling the preaching of the gospel so that souls can be saved. It's not a mundane thing. It's not quote, unquote "just to keep the lights on." It facilitates gospel ministry. It facilitates 'the main thing.' What is my money good for?...What is your money good for, if it's not for 'the main thing?' It's for the sake of the gospel.

Now Calvin remarks at this that "To find a Macedonian in our day is rare, but Corinthians are everywhere." Amen.

Paul concludes his explanation in verse 9 by saying this, *And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.* You can imagine that in the heart and the mind of the Apostle Paul, for him with these Corinthians it would have seemed to him as though; I take one misstep here and someone is going to seize upon it for someone else's detriment. I take one misstep here, I do one thing that someone else could seize upon and you use it to accuse me, use it to discredit my ministry or use it to discredit the preaching of the gospel and someone's soul could be impacted. So Paul in love and in care takes precautions, takes care not to do anything to stand in the way or to hinder the gospel. In everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you and so I will keep myself. Even if it means I have to toil, labor, sweat, bleed, day and night; in this manual labor job, so that I can meet my own need and the needs of those guys who are with me, so that we can preach the gospel to you... That's exactly what I'm going to do. Why? Because, listen, that exactly how the Lord Jesus Christ loved me. And I have not striven against sin to the point of bloodshed. I've not had to strive to the point of bloodshed. Lest I become weary in my soul, I'm going to consider the Lord Jesus Christ and what He gave for me. Lest I become discouraged in laboring that way...lest I become exhausted and weary I my labor, I'm gonna consider the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Paul's mindset. It's beautifully laid out here in the text the way that Paul loves this church.

So why did Paul suffer this humiliation, why did Paul go through it all? Why did Paul subject himself to this kind of treatment, this kind of menial labor? This menial existence. The tears, the sorrow, the scorn, the exhaustion, the persecution, the stripes. Why did Paul suffer this? Verse 7, their exaltation...their exaltation. Which came, verse 8, through Paul and the preaching of the gospel of God to them. Not the other gospel preached by the false teachers. Not the different spirit or the different Jesus that they were preaching. Verse 8, he was ministering the gospel of God to them.

Now considering the grammar here, Paul's not speaking of a future exaltation. He's not speaking of glory, as it were. The Corinthians were already exalted through Paul's preaching of the gospel. Those there were genuinely saved. They've put their faith and trust in Christ. They were raised in union with Him. Right? Raised to new life. They were exalted you could say through the preaching of the gospel. And the ongoing benefits of that exaltation are with them to this very day. Right? They enjoy the

ongoing benefits of their exaltation. Those benefits are continuing in the present. Under the preaching of the word of God, the people of God enjoy the ongoing blessings of their exaltation in Christ. If you've been saved, you stand today in grace. You stand today in your exaltation and you will be glorified in Him one day. At the visitation...at the day of the Lord. Under the preaching of the word of God, that's our position.

So what does Paul do? Paul puts himself in the dirt. Paul risks his own health. He risks his own reputation. He risks his own survival. Let's be clear about that. Persecution here was severe. He risks offending them. So that they might enjoy the privileges of their own exaltation. So that others who are lost might be exalted in Christ...they might enjoy the privilege of being seated in the heavenlies so that they could enjoy the privileges, their exaltation, standing in grace. That's what happens at the preaching of the gospel. That's what happens at the preaching of God's word. We enjoy these blessings, these privileges at the preaching of God's word.

At the preaching of the gospel, the hell deserving sinner...worthy only of wrath, worthy only of torment, worthy only of despair, is brought to a sense of their unworthiness before God. A conviction of their sin. An apprehension, if you will....that word apprehension...it's like picking up a hammer...it's not just understanding...it's not just knowing...not just knowing...apprehending. It's like picking up a hammer and driving a nail with it. You pick up a hammer for a purpose. I'm gonna hammer that nail. When you pick up the hammer...when you apprehend a conviction of sin, you apply that to your own heart. I...am...a sinner!...separated from God by my wicked works. I have offended the one who made me! I've sinned against Him and He is perfect, holy, just, and righteous! And I am ungodly! They come to apprehend. To pick up the hammer of God's mercy and grace in the Lord Jesus Christ and they hammer upon their own heart to say "God be merciful to me a sinner!!"

And that unworthy one. That one deserving of hell and judgement is then raised in Christ, through faith by God's gracious work toward them. Raised! Exalted!...to a new life in Him. The Lord has taken upon Himself the guilt, the shame of their sin. And the Lord Jesus Christ has suffered in their place. He pays the penalty that they justly deserve. God the Son humbles Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross and He dies in their place...dies for them. They in that are exalted. Do you see? So that through the preaching of the gospel they might turn from their sin, they might entrust themselves to Him and be saved. From the gutter most to the uttermost.

Though He was rich...what did the Lord Jesus Christ do for your sake?...He became poor. There couldn't be any greater disparity could there? Can you conceive of one? *Though He was rich...unimaginably so...infinitely so....yet for your sake, He became poor.* So that you, the undeserving one, through His poverty, might become rich...and unimaginably so...wondrously so. Amazing...right?

That glorious work of love. Love shown us at the cross. Love shown by the Lord Jesus Christ calls us then to consider, point 2 on your notes, Paul's motivation.

2. Paul's Motivation

Paul's motivation, we see it in verse 10. *As the truth of Christ is in me,* Paul says, *no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!* Paul begins verse 10 with what amounts to an oath. *As the truth of Christ is in me.* Paul said, if that's true, then God knows this is true. *As the truth of Christ is in me.* Considering that Corinth was in Achaia, Paul is saying

not only will continue this boast with reference to you Corinthians, and not take a dime from you for all my labor among you, I'm going to continue this boast among all the churches of Achaia; is essentially what Paul was saying. Unlike those money grubbing false teachers who peddle the word of God for profit...entirely unlike them, wanting to distinguish and separate myself completely from them...unlike those that accuse me of being a second rate apostle because I won't take payment...no one, not even those slanderous false accusations are gonna stop me from boasting on your behalf. Notice it's on their behalf that Paul boast this way. Why? Why Paul asks rhetorically? *Because I do not love you?* Paul asks that question rhetorically because the exact opposite is true. God knows I love you. Paul here is using sarcasm. He sarcastically points to his motivation. His motivation is a deep concerned... abiding, caring, protecting, prospering love. And just like Paul appealed to the truth of Christ in his former boast, he now appeals to the omniscience of Almighty God for the genuineness of his love. God...knows...I...do!

The intensity of Paul's love, emphasized through the use of these two oaths. Oaths weren't taken lightly. Paul uses essentially here what amounts to two oaths to emphasize the truth of his love. And as much as Paul's love for the Corinthians motivates his preaching for them, motivates his labor for them, his sacrifice for them. His love also has a protective motivation. Point 3. Notice Paul's intention in verse 12.

3. Paul's Intention

Paul's intention. *But what I do...*this preaching to you the gospel without charge...*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.* Now that's a mouth full. We want to understand what Paul is saying here. Okay? What I do, I'm gonna continue to do, for the purpose that I might cut off the opportunity from those who want the opportunity. I want to cut off that opportunity that they have to be regarded just as we are regarded in the things of which they boast. They boast, those false teachers boast that they work on the same level with the Apostle Paul. They boast that they are apostles like he is an apostle. In fact they're superior to him because they are true apostles and Paul is a false unworthy apostle. They boast that they're the ones that should be heard in Corinth. The people should be giving them an ear and discounting what this upstart apostle Paul is saying. The boast they're worthy of payment, "What I say has value and so, show me the money." They're worthy of services rendered. In addition to *comparing themselves against themselves and measuring themselves by themselves*, something we saw back in chapter 10, verse 12, these false teachers were certainly laboring to compare and contrast themselves to Paul. Now why did they spend so much time trying to discredit Paul? Think about it with me. They wanted to paint themselves as superior to Paul in the eyes of the people but...that's what they wanted...but this pesky policy that Paul has of not taking payment or not taking financial support was denying them the opportunity to be regarded as he was. You see? Paul's got this pesky policy, he's working for free...and that is somehow embarrassing to them and shameful to them that they won't. They're being put to shame by Paul's selflessness. Paul's sacrifice for the Corinthians is embarrassing them who aren't sacrificing for the Corinthians. His policy of not working for payment is putting them to shame. His evident love that he's showing to them through that is putting them to shame. And they want to discredit that. They want to do away with it. That's all they can do. They're not gonna give up working for money. They're not going to work for free. Why? They don't love them. They don't love those people. They're going to continue to do what they're doing, and while they're doing that, they're going to try to discredit Paul.

There were enough genuine Christians in Corinth who could see through their deceit. "I know what that guy's all about." They were in it for the money. And they couldn't give that up so what did they do? They disparaged Paul for preaching for free. Paul had a two-fold intention. 1. I'm not going to give any indication that I am in any way driven by the same motivation as these snake oil salesmen. I'm not going to connect myself at all with them. I'm going to separate myself as far as possible from them. Right? 2. I'm not gonna give these snake oil salesmen any opportunity to be regarded on level ground with those that actually do labor on the Lord's behalf for the good of the Lord's people. Let this matter of mammon be a line in the sand between us and them. That's essentially what Paul is saying.

And that is all over the bible. Right? The line in the sand between false and true is often this matter of mammon...this matter of money. Let it be clear to you Corinthians, Paul says, let it be clear to us here. That's just as clear today, isn't it? That line in the sand, that distinguishing mark...just as clear today, if people care to look. They often don't care to look. They don't want to. They like the taste of the fake. Right? They like to push the button and get the cotton candy. Can you get cotton candy out of one of those things? This like you go 'umph' and candy bars and...(motioning like at a vending machine). You know...they like that, what they believe is a source of sustenance. They like the candy. And so they don't care to look. They want their ears tickled. Right? They want their entertainments. They want their fancies. False teachers should be ashamed. And they're...if you have some discernment from the word of God, by the grace of God, they're easy to see...easy to see through that kind of motivation. Easy to see it. And it's happening all over the place. I don't need to even dignify them with examples. You can go on line and see them by the scads! It is disgustingly true of the church today.

I want you to consider with me another critical contrast between Paul and the false apostles. Paul wants to draw distinction, wants to draw a contrast between himself and these fakes. And here's the critical contrast between Paul and these false apostles. Paul in his service to the Lord's church, in his service of the Lord's people, made himself or considered himself a means to an end so that the Corinthians might be exalted. That's what he's there for. We've often said...I've often heard brothers here say...I've said it before...when you're in a conversation with a guy, right?...maybe it's a Matthew 18 conversation and you're going to confront a brother about some sin or some issue. And we'll say to them...listen, you're my brother. I have no other motivation for saying this to you but love for your soul, but love for you. I'm not saying this because I want your money. I'm not saying this so our church can have this number of people more than that number of people; or that our church can continue to grow in this way. I have no other motivation but love for your soul. Paul, makes himself...considers himself, a means to an end, so that the Corinthians might be exalted. He doesn't have another motivation. The motivations that encircle that, that bound to that are all good and glorious motivations. The glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That the Lord Jesus Christ might receive the full reward of His suffering. The good of the gospel. The spread of the gospel. The good of the kingdom. The growth of the kingdom. But I have no personal dog in this hunt! I have no personal agenda here! Paul makes himself a means. Paul considers himself a means. And what does he do with that? He loves them. Why? So that they might be exalted in Christ. That's Paul's intention. That's clear, inarguable.

The false teachers do the exact opposite. And that's what false teachers do. The one who is false does exactly the opposite. They made the Corinthians the means to the end. And what is the end? Not their exaltation but their own exaltation. That's the difference right? That's the contrast in our text. Paul made himself a means to an end so that the Corinthians might be exalted. The false teachers made the Corinthians the means to the end; to their ungodly end, that they themselves would be exalted. The

Corinthians then become exploited for their own exaltation. Do you see? That's what a false teacher does. What other motive do they have? The false teacher's not there for their good. That one that comes along to you as a wolf in sheep's clothing, transforming himself into a quote, unquote "angel of...minister of light." If he's not out for your spiritual, eternal good, he is one of these. He is exploiting you for his own exaltation. If he's not laboring for yours. Do you see? It's a distinguishing mark of the false teacher.

How do you know? How do you know? Well...frankly...because in a lot of cases, he's giving you what you want and not what you need. "I'm gonna give you what you like to hear." "Listen, you want a country western service? I want to give you a country western service. And we're gonna sing hoe-down songs here every Sunday for you to ..." (laughter). "You don't like it when we preach hard, then we won't preach hard. That's unbiblical anyway. Look, Jesus Christ in the New Testament is full of grace. The ogre God was in the Old Testament" Listen...right? It's packaged in a myriad of ways. The enemy is masterful in his deceptions. They give you what you want. They give you what goes down easy...let it go down easy. Right? It just won't be real...and true...and sincere...and direct. And listen, if you ever are real, and sincere, and earnest, and direct, often they don't want to hear that. And their first response out of the flesh is "That's harsh!" No, it's not harsh, it's loving. It is sincere, it's true, it's earnest, it's direct. So it's easy to spot if you have discernment from the Holy Spirit to spot it. And if you want to, if you have the will to spot it.

Even if Paul then has the right to accept support from them; and he does, Paul is not going to do it. He's not going to do it. He doesn't want to give any impression that he is motivated in any way as they are. He wants to keep those two camps as far apart as possible so there's no mistaking...there's no mistaking. Paul says, I am here because I love you. I'm here because the Lord loves this church. Right? I'm here because I want to see you prosper. We labor and preach the gospel to you because we want to see you exalted. We want to see you live in the blessings and privileges of your exaltation. Right? The people here, the brothers, the sisters, labor in this church because they want you to live in the grace in which you stand. They want you to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as you battle sin...as you labor in your marriage...as you labor with your children, right?

For the sake of the Lord's church, Paul says, that I love this way. I have no mercenary motive. And so Paul says, I will humble myself. Why? Because the church is worth it. The Lord Jesus Christ is worth it. Does that sound familiar? Yeah...because that's what the Lord Jesus Christ did. Paul is following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul says to you...Paul says to me, imitate me now as I imitate Christ. Consider Paul's example.

Are we willing to love the Lord's church, to love the Lord's people as Paul has? If you consider...if I consider, this example of Paul given to us in the New Testament, and we think of ourselves as...we consider ourselves as a means...a humble means to a worthy end; that should change, should transform how we think about...how we quote, unquote "do church." What is your responsibility here? What are you doing here? What priority does this...should this take? How important, how valuable is the Lord's church? How does that relate to your work? How does that relate to the other things that go on in your life? What is it that we are to do? How is it that we are to serve? Paul made himself a humble means to a worthy end. To serve the Lord by serving them. Right?

And, it's clear, the lengths to which Paul will go to prioritize the Lord's church. Kingdom first and His righteousness. Right? Persecution he endured. Mocking, scorn and derision he endured. Manual labor,

physical labor, toil and exhaustion he endured. Taking nothing in return. All of that really starts with Paul taking responsibility. I want to exhort you brother, I want to exhort you sister to take responsibility. Take responsibility for your place here. Take responsibility for what the Lord has called...the Lord has given you a ministry. He's given you the ministry of reconciliation. And if the Lord's given you a ministry, what are you doing in it? How are you laboring in it? Are you preaching the gospel to lost people? If not...you're not working in the ministry to which you've been called. You're not laboring in it. You're doing something else. You're on an extended break. You need to come back from the water cooler and get to work in the Lord's kingdom with the ministry that the Lord has given you. Why? Because it's a begrudging duty? No. Because the Lord has shown that love to me. Preach the gospel to lost people. What are you doing? Are you serving in the Lord's church? And when I mean serving in the Lord's church, yes there are all kinds of ways to serve around here. Get involved and serve. But are you loving the brothers? Are you loving the sisters? Are you ministering the gospel to one another? Are you having people (break in audio)...a ministry responsibility. Is this place...these people, is it taking priority over other things...over work?...is it taking priority? Are you keeping the main thing the main thing? Or are you making mountains out of what should be mole hills? I want to love the Lord's church like that. Don't you? And Lord's knows how far short we fall in it. But that shouldn't preclude us from desiring to strive after that to honor and glorify Him for the love that He's shown us in the gospel.

All praise, honor, and glory to the One who humbled Himself to the point of death that we might be exalted in Him.

Let's pray together. You want to pray silently and go before the Lord and consider the ministry that you've been given. Consider the state of that ministry. Consider the Lord's goodness to you. And then how you might apply the word of God to your own heart and mind in your own service to Him in the Lord's church today as you pray. And when you are done praying, you are dismissed. Let's pray.