

Integrity in Ministry (Part 2)

2 Cor 1:12-2:4

Peter Drucker, the late leadership guru, said the four hardest leadership jobs in America were the following:

1. President of the United States
2. President of a university
3. CEO of a hospital
4. Pastor of a church

And not necessarily in that order. (ht: Matt Smethurst)

You may or may not agree with that list and want to add some others — and of course we'd want to throw in parenting! — but these are difficult vocations.

This year has been particularly challenging for pastors. I could tell story after story.

- On top of the usual challenges, 2020 brought a host of other problems.
- Many are exhausted from it all. Some have quit.

I bring this up because the apostle Paul is dealing with many challenges in ministry regarding the Corinthian church.

- But the text is not just relevant for those in vocational ministry; I noted all week that we all have a ministry - and all ministry is difficult.

This ministry in Corinth was particularly challenging for Paul.

- I recall taking a class on 1 Corinthians in seminary, and the opening line was something like: “The church in Corinth was the most problematic church in the NT.”
- It's hard to argue with that.
- 1 Corinthians: Factions, lawsuits, liberty, gender, Lord's Supper, pride....
- 2 Corinthians: a major rift. The relationship is delicate.

Summary of 2 Corinthians from one writer: “Oh how I love you, you darling scalawags. You dear sweet, block headed scoundrels. You infuriating puppies.” That gets at it.

- Paul felt joy and frustration with the Corinthians.
- He writes for their joy, but the problems are hindering joy.

In some ways, acknowledging that this church — and the other churches in the NT — had problems, is encouraging because we all need proper expectations.

- As great as Spurgeon's church was, his church had major problems.
- Calvin's church problems.
- Grimke dealt with all kinds of complaints during the Spanish flu and dealt with many other problems.
- Jonathan Edward kicked out.
- I recall Piper talking about wanting to quit at one point.

Why? People like you are in them; people like me pastor them.

- There will always be squabbles, hurt feelings, misunderstandings, conflicts, etc.
- Spiritual maturity doesn't happen overnight.

This doesn't excuse sin, but it is important for setting expectations in reality.

- It's amazing there aren't more issues!
- Think about this. We have roughly 600 here and another 600 or so online.
- Where else do you go every week with this many people?
- Besides showing up, you have to do things together; and discuss things together.
- **Think about extended family - meeting every week, picking songs and a preacher!?**
- How's that going to go?

Even churches planted and led by Paul had problems.

- They questioned his motives, his message, and his manner.
- Through it all, God used him, and this church, to proclaim the gospel.
- And as Paul will say this messy fellowship has been caught up in new covenant glory.

Last week we began looking at seven traits of a minister of integrity, and covered four of them:

1. **Grace-Enabled Godliness** (the "thesis" of the letter: **integrity**)
2. **An Eschatological Vision** (boasting in each other on that day)
3. **Truthful Speech** (let your yes be yes)
4. **Christ-Centered Proclamation** (God's faithfulness is displayed in how Christ fulfilled God's promises. All the promises of God find their **yes** in him. Jesus is the apex of the OT! Paul says our preaching was not wishy-washy, but clear: Jesus is the Father's "yes" for every promise, every need, every hope).

Do you think the message of Christianity is "no"?

- A bunch of things you aren't allowed to do?
- There are "nos" (Titus 2:11-14)
- But see the "yes!"
- What God provides you is infinitely better than the fleeting pleasures of sin!
- He offers you His beloved Son to save and satisfy you; to defend and care for you.

5. **Spiritual Authenticity**

6. **Joy-Focused Labor**

7. **Heartfelt Love**

#5: Spiritual Authenticity (1:21-22)

Paul turns from the past (the promises of God fulfilled) to the present (his spiritual life and the Corinthians) with implications for the future.

We see the Trinitarian nature of this passage: The father's promises, the Son's accomplishments, and the Spirit's application.

Here are **four blessings** for those who say "Yes" to Christ.

Each of them highlights our security in Christ.

1. God **establishes** believers in Christ at salvation.

- The word means to put the matter beyond doubt.
- The word group βεβαιόω means “confirm,” “establish,” “make secure/good”
- It was common juristic terminology in the pre-Christian and early Christian eras to express legally guaranteed security. (Harris)
- Our status is solidified.
- If God has established you; you don’t need someone else’s approval.
- Your most important identity is that you belong to God. Live in that. Walk in that.
 - “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (Col 2:6-7)

2. God **anoints** believers.

- This refers to the anointing received at salvation, as we receive the Spirit who guides and empowers us.
- We are set apart for service: all Christians.
- We are gifted for service.
- We are described as “anointed” because the Spirit consecrates us and qualifies for service (1 John 2:20, 27)
- We are saved from something for something.

3. God **seals** believers.

- The word sealed refers to stamping an identifying mark on something.
- “The *seal* in antiquity was an impression made on wax by a special instrument (also called a seal) to indicate the ownership of a document... The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is a seal of ownership. We should remember that we do not belong to ourselves but to God” (Barnett)
- We belong to God!
- **Remember whose you are!**
- The Holy Spirit identifies us as God’s people.
- He will be with us and protect us.

4. God gives believers a **guarantee**.

- The Spirit is a down payment or guarantee of our eternal inheritance in the future.
- The Spirit is the first installment of the glory that is to come. (2 Cor 5:5; Eph 1:13-14).
- In modern Greek this word is also used of an engagement ring: a guarantee or pledge of the marriage to come, something greater to come.
- The Spirit in us guarantees the glory to be revealed to us.
- So the Spirit is not only transformative; he also signifies something far greater and broader: the dawning of a new age.
- Spirit indwells believers forward to being gathered together with Christ in glory (4:14).

- The God who was faithful in keeping his promises in the sending of the Son, is faithful now in keeping me in that this relationship with him now, and the Spirit is the assurance of this faithfulness.

What security and blessing!

What unity we have in the Spirit!

And the Spirit's work in us, is where we derive the power to labor — and that's what we see next: joy focused labor.

#6: Joy-Focused Labor (1:23-2:3)

Paul eventually gets around to the change in plans, emphasizing his sensitivity to the situation.

23: He's not just puffing smoke "**God is my witness**" - he swears an oath.

- He says he didn't come because he wanted to **spare** the Corinthians from the rod of discipline. (1:23; cf., 1 Cor 4:21).
- Paul chose not to return because his only option was judgment and conflict.
- The super apostles spun a narrative about his motives and actions.
- He sets the record straight here!

- It was an expression of mercy.
 - "**Don't make me come up there**"
- It was an act of kindness in hopes of leading them to repentance.
- He wanted to give them time to repent after receiving his letter.
- And based on the report he received, the majority did repent.

He reflected the mercy of God, who "is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

- Hafemann: "**Just as God has extended one more opportunity for repentance and restoration to the world by separating the two comings of Christ, Paul too wanted to extend this same opportunity to the Corinthians**"
- If you're not a Christian, recognize that this time is a time of mercy; a time for turning to God in repentance and faith.

24: He then makes a remarkable statement about a primary goal of ministry: ministering for the joy of others.

- His goal? "**We are workers with you for your joy**" ("We" - Slivanus and Timothy)
- Everything he had done or not done for the Corinthians, was for their well-being and joy.

There are ten thousand things you could do for someone, but here is a crystal clear passage from Paul about what we're to be about in ministry: *we work with you for your joy.*

- Sam Storms, "The joy that Paul has in mind is a deep, durable delight in the splendor of God that utterly ruins you for anything else."

- The joy of delighting in God is the highest of all joys.
- We don't "have to worship" "we get to"
- We don't "have to serve" "we get to" — "Serve the Lord.... with gladness!"
- Caring for each other means caring for caring for each other's joy.
- Kilo: "Am I leaking" ask me that question.

He could labor for their ongoing joy because they were "**standing firm in the faith.**"

- That is, they were genuine Christians. (1 Cor 16:13)
- They could stand on their own two feet. They were persevering.
- Willow Creek study: "people needed to be self-feeders"
 - They know how to make their faith their own...

Paul knew the Spirit of God was at work in their lives, and he was trusting God to continue to nurture their faith.

- What do you want to see in others?
 - In your kids?
 - In your small group?
 - In our church?
 - *Here it is: that **they abound with joy in Christ.** To be satisfied in Christ. To glory in Christ.*
 - *Paul in Philippians 1:19ff: I labor for your progress and joy in the faith (Phil 1:23-25) Every sermon. Every growth group. Every student ministry function. Every zoom meeting. Every family devotion. Every conversation: All of it for their gladness in God.*

Everything he did was bound up with a sensitivity toward their well-being and joy.

- You will have a hard time laboring for joy if there is no joy in your life.
- A "cheerful disposition" rooted in the gospel is what we need.

And we must have a work ethic! This joy comes at the price of sacrifice.

- Paul's talking about pain here!

How did he go about this?
By cooperating not dominating.

"working with you"

- He wanted to work with them, not on them.
- He sees them as partners.
- He wasn't going to brow-beat them.
- He believed in persuasion, not coercion.

I tell my students at Grimke, you get out of your education what you put into it; you can have good books, good profs, and a good school, but you have to put in work!

- Leaders must work hard, and members must work hard for joy.
- You can lack joy and have great leaders if you aren't exerting energy!

• **Judas had Jesus! “I need someone better to mentor me.” Judas had Jesus!**

• **“Work out your salvation...”**

Not dominating, but cooperating.

He not “lording it over them.”

• **He’s not domineering; he’s not a tyrant. He’s not a spiritual dictator.**

• **“As the champion of freedom in Christ, Paul repudiated any hierarchical despotism or spiritual imperialism.” Harris**

• **Recall Jesus and then Peter (Mark 10; 1 Peter 5) talked about this kind of worldly leadership that must be avoided**

• **Calvin warned about leaders who took delight in intimidating people: bully pastors.**

Paul is no tyrant.

• **As a Christian leader, you have to avoid being too pushy.**

• **You have to give people freedom, space to make choices within the will of God.**

• **Notice the balance between Paul’s authority and the believer’s liberty.**

Becoming too authoritative is presenting ourselves as Lords.

• **We must not bind someone’s conscious on that which is not in Scripture.**

• **That’s Lording it over people —**

• **telling people during Lent what they must give up, or you can’t eat meat on Fridays or whatever.**

• **This doesn’t mean we don’t need leadership, or that we don’t hold people accountable; it means that we do it coming alongside of people, and not over them as their Lord.**

Paul plays a big role in their lives: he led them to faith! He planted the church!

• **But he’s saying, “I don’t determine your spiritual growth!”**

• **You stand on your own.**

• **We can teach, encourage, guide, counsel, and give a godly example, but each person stand before God on his/her own.**

• **1 Cor 16:12** - he gives Apollos freedom to not go visit even when he asked him to — he’s not his Lord. It wasn’t a moral issue.

This doesn’t mean people don’t need advice and counsel; they do!

• **And you should seek advice and counsel!**

• **And you should care about what your leaders are saying.**

• **But pastors and leaders are not to micromanage people’s lives.**

• **That’s a cult!**

• **Checking people’s check books, getting very invasive. That’s unbiblical.**

The same is true for kids.

• **You teach, counsel, guide, direct.**

• **But they have to make decisions!**

• **Wisdom is not lording it over people.**

• **Paul is warning against being meddlesome, overbearing, hyper-controlling leaders —**

- forgetting God has to do this work, and they have to take their faith seriously.
- They need to be taught, disciplined, guided, but they have to fly.

People don't ultimately need me to live a godly life, they need God to live a godly life!

2:1: He had made a commitment not to return in “**pain**” again.

- Recall, how he made an emergency visit and things didn't go well.
- Someone (probably a super-apostle) openly confronted Paul (**2 Cor 2:5-8, 10; 7:12**) and the church did not defend Paul.
- In light of that painful visit he wrote a painful letter (2:4).
- He didn't visit again in hopes of giving them time to reflect and repent.
- So ministering for joy doesn't mean you don't have hard conversations; Paul had these painful meetings and this painful letter, but it was out of love and for their joy.

Paul's Joy

2-3: We see that Paul's joy and the joy of the Corinthians is bound up together.

- This is the secret to finding real joy on a regular basis: in serving for the joy of others, we ourselves are blessed and filled with joy.
- Paul was confident that the issues addressed in the letters would eventually lead the church to respond rightly, and their response would fill him with joy. (2:2-3)
- You don't experience joy when you only think of self.
- Self-absorbed people are miserable people.

My greatest times of joy have to be after serving...

- I don't say to myself “I'm working hard in preparation and delivery so I can find joy” — no, I'm laboring for your joy; you're well being — but what happens is I'm blessed.
- There is joy in giving, serving, teaching; yes we need to rest, but there is great joy to be found in serving Christ's people.

#7: Heartfelt Love (2:4)

Writing the 1 Corinthians and the severe letter didn't come from a place of hostility, but a place of wounded love.

- It was painful for Paul to address these issues.
- But his goal was not to make them sorrowful, but their repentance and joy.
- So he conveys his “love” for them.
- He didn't like “rebuking.”
- his “tough love” for them is genuine love.

Paul could have been filled with anger toward this church that threw him under the bus, were calling him a liar, but he's not: he's filled with anguish, not anger.

The world is filled with anger, and there's not enough anguish that comes from a place of love.

There's too much lighting into people.

We have too many temper tantrums and not enough tears.

- **It would be easy to just cancel the Corinthians, but Paul doesn't do that.**
- **Love bears all things...**
 - **Paul wrote the famous love chapter to the Corinthians!**
- **He knows, as we need to realize, that sanctification is a slow process.**
- **And he loves these people.**
- **2 Cor 12:15:** "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?"

You can preach remarkable sermons but if you have not love, you are a clanging gong.

Tears preceded the hard words.

"God never blesses a tearless ministry."

"The great apostle's soaring example of integrity should compel both leaders and their congregations to go to their knees, asking God for mercy and the grace to live out the apostolic ethic."

1. Grace-Enabled Godliness
2. An Eschatological Vision
3. Truthful Speech
4. Christ-Centered Proclamation
5. Spiritual Authenticity
6. Joy-Focused Labor
7. Heartfelt Love

May God grant us grace, as we follow after Paul as he followed after Christ.