

Pastoral Issues

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[0 : 00] Suppose you've worked for decades, tirelessly, to build your career. You've sacrificed everything! to rise up the corporate ladder. You've got thousands of followers on LinkedIn. You're right! at the top of your game. But out of nowhere, a few middle managers, jealous of your reputation, begin a hate campaign against you. It takes a while before their lying gossip reaches your ears, but if believed, you know it will end your career. You face being dismissed from your position because of the jealousy of those who lack your ability and your work ethic.

Now, take the scenario in a spiritual setting, multiply it, and you're getting close to how Paul must have felt when he wrote 2 Corinthians 10. As their pastor, he loved the church in Corinth and was devoted to them. But in his absence, a group of jealous men had crept into the church, spreading malicious rumors about him. They're acting rather like a Casanova who, in the husband's absence, tries to seduce his wife. Well, how should the Apostle Paul, a faithful servant of Christ, respond? What would we do if we were him? When provoked and attacked by those you know are lying about you, when your whole life's work is on the line, and the spiritual health of those you love is at stake, what would we do? And what did Paul do? Well, as in every other situation, Paul, imitating his master,

Jesus, adopted the attitude of a pastor. The word pastor means shepherd, and never does Paul show himself more himself more a shepherd than here in 2 Corinthians 10. In this chapter, among many, many other things, Paul opens his heart to us and shows us four features of his pastoral ministry. Pastoral gentleness, first of all, from verse 1 through 6. Pastoral consistency, secondly, verses 7 through 12. Pastoral ambition, verses 13 through 17. And fourthly, pastoral approval in verse 18. So, first of all then, Paul opens his heart and shows us pastoral gentleness in verses 1 through 6. Pastoral gentleness.

Only rarely in the Gospels do we get an insight into Jesus' heart attitude, what Jesus was like on the inside. However, in Matthew chapter 11 verse 29. Jesus says of himself, I am gentle and lowly of heart.

I am gentle and lowly of heart. He shepherds us with gentleness and with lowliness. And now Paul wants to do the same, where in verse 1 he says, I myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

[3 : 30] Never is Paul more like his master when he pastors the Corinthians from the heart of Christ. It's a lesson to all who aspire to any form of leadership in the church. You aspire not to a place of power, but of lowliness. Not of authority, but gentleness. You're aspiring not upward, you're aspiring downward. But being a pastor doesn't mean you're not allowed a little sarcasm from time to time. And in the second half of verse 1, Paul parodies the accusations of his opponents.

They say of him that he's humble when he's with them in person, face to face. But when he's away from them, he lacks the courage to face them. In verse 2, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, he's telling them these things by letter so that when he comes to them, he doesn't have to confront them face to face. As for those false teachers in Corinth, those jealous men, he will be bold in rebuking them. They're so confident that Paul will back down when he reaches Corinth, but they're wrong. Even with this heart attitude of gentleness and meekness, he's going to show them just how wrong they are. John Calvin, the great reformer, writes on this passage, it is the duty of a good pastor to draw his sheep on calmly and kindly. Severity is the extremist of remedies. Severity is the extremist of remedies.

They're accusing him, these false teachers, of walking according to the flesh, the end of verse 2. Walking according to the flesh, or as the NIV translates it better, walking according to the standards of this world, the standards of this world. His enemies, his jealous enemies there in Corinth, these false teachers, are accusing him of being selfish, of caring only about himself, of caring less about

the Corinthians than he does for his own comforts. They're saying that, well, that Paul man, he's only in ministry for himself and what he can get out of it, whether it's status or position or money. By contrast, Paul wants to show what it means to pastor and shepherd from a place of meekness and gentleness. So, he talks about his ministry as waging war, but not with worldly weapons.

[6 : 12] These are weapons, remember this is coming from a man who talks about being, or pastoring with meekness and gentleness. He talks about these weapons having God's power to destroy strongholds and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. In the context of these false teachers in Corinth, their weapons, the weapons they used, were things like superior philosophical wisdom and superior Greek oratory. But they held back from the Corinthian Christians any doctrine which required self-sacrifice or self-costal obedience. By contrast, Paul's gospel weapons were the weapons of Christ.

They were divine weapons yielding God's power for effective ministry. My favorite commentator on 2 Corinthians says of them, they are weapons scorned by the world and yet most feared by the powers of darkness. Truth, righteousness, evangelism, faith, salvation, the Word of God, prayer. I love that quote.

These are the marks of a pastorate. Meekness and gentleness. The weapons scorned by the world, but feared by the devil. These weapons which have divine power to demolish strongholds.

So, imagine the folly of meek and gentle Christians holding a prayer meeting. How weak it seems to be to the world around us that we should consider a prayer meeting to be the means by which we engage in warfare against the darkness of Glasgow. Surely, if we want to win Glasgow for Christ, we need a better vehicle of change. Millions of pounds behind us, clear strategies, charismatic leaders.

However, when the powers of darkness hear us pray as a church, they are filled with fear. It is spiritual prayer, not worldly power, through which God subdues the powers of darkness. We might say, the church needs men of action, but Paul says, the church needs people of prayer.

[8 : 43] And how ridiculous it would seem that the preaching of the Word of God should be so powerful. That man with nothing else than a Bible in his hand, an old book, and he's expounding the story of the cross, but it fills the powers of darkness with fear. What an unworldly fantasy. And yet, Paul says, that's the very thing. The meekness and gentleness of preaching, that's the very thing that has divine power to destroy the strongholds of darkness in our city and in our land. You see, these are the great, these are the weapons of Paul's lowliness and meekness. Weapons of great spiritual power, which the world knows nothing about, and the devil fears.

Don't you know the devil is afraid when he sees us gathered here this Sunday evening? These are the small stones the boy David, the shepherd boy David gathered in his sling to do battle with Goliath. Not the sword and armor of Saul, but the weapons of God. This is the cross of Christ, the most foolish of all weapons, but wielding the power of God to transform our world and to send the devil to hell. We remember the timeless words of E.M. Bounds. I used to listen to Eric Alexander preaching, and only Eric Alexander could say these words so effectively. Maybe some of you remember his voice. The church is always looking for better methods, but God is always looking for better men.

The church is always looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men. Well, it should never be said of any pastor that he's a harsh man. Rather, he's gentle, and he's meek, and he's lowly. What he says from the pulpit may be deeply challenging, but it's backed up by a life of love. I'm going to provoke to he must not lose his calm, but mirror the meekness of Christ.

That gentle and meek pastor must not lower himself to using worldly weapons to achieve spiritual goals. Rather, although it seems crazy and foolish to the world, he recognizes the power of the weapons God has given him. Preaching, prayer, evangelism, love. Pastoral gentleness. Second, verses 7 through 12.

Pastoral consistency. Pastoral consistency. Well, here Paul's returning to his old chestnut. Verse 10, he repeats the accusations of his opponents. For they say his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account.

[11 : 33] Now, no doubt Paul's previous letter, 1 Corinthians, remember we went through that last year, was weighty, and it was strong. It's a powerful letter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and used to bring many of the Corinthians to repentance. But in person, perhaps Paul was not quite so impressive. His bodily presence was weak, he didn't keep good health, and according to tradition, he had trouble with his eyesight. He was not nearly as impressive a figure as these false teachers

in Corinth. He didn't wear Armani suits, he wasn't handsome, and his teeth weren't surgically whitened.

His speech wasn't carefully crafted according to the Greek philosophical method. Perhaps he wasn't such a compelling auditor. After all, we read an act that Eutychus fell asleep during one of his sermons and died. And he admits as much in 1 Corinthians 2, when he says to himself that he came to the Corinthians, in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom. He was not nearly as polished an auditor as these false teachers in Corinth.

A paper tiger is a thing which appears to be strong, powerful, and dangerous, but in reality is weak and harmless. Paper tiger. We say of some people that their bark is far worse than their bite. And that's what they were saying about Paul. His bark is far worse than his bite. However, Paul fights back, and in verse 11 he says, let such a person understand that what we say by letter when we're absent, we do when we're present.

Paul's telling them, I'm no paper tiger. I bite just as hard as I bark. In verse 7, he commands the Corinthians to use their eyes and to see what's obvious. Just as they're a Christian, so is he.

[13 : 33] For the false teachers somehow to suggest that Paul's not a true Christian flies in the face of everything the Corinthians know about Paul. According to Acts chapter 18 verse 11, he had spent 18 months among them in Corinth teaching them the Word of God. So, use your eyes.

Of course I'm a Christian, he said. And in verse 8, he tells them that he possesses the authority of Christ. He, not the false teachers, has been commissioned by Christ as an apostle. But as you can see from verse 8, Christ gave him that authority not to tear down the church in Corinth, but to build it up. Ultimately, apostolic authority is always given to edify, strengthen, and confirm Christians in their faith. The point is something which the Corinthians should have known but had forgotten. Whether Paul was with them in person, as he had been for 18 months, or absent from them as he was now, he was the same Christian, the same man, the same apostle as he'd always been. What we're talking about here is pastoral consistency, consistency. Now, those of you who are parents here know that there are few worse things than realizing that you're not being consistent with your children.

One day you tell them off for doing something, the next day you don't, and it sends them mixed messages. Or one day you compliment your children for doing great work in school, but the next day you ignore them. It confuses them and leaves them wondering what is right and what is wrong. It's important as a parent, you know that, to be consistent. And likewise, as parents, we must not set standards for our children which we ourselves don't keep.

We tell our children off for sulking. Catherine will tell you, I sulk all the time. We encourage our children to say thank you, but do we as thank you very much, Samuel? We thank you, we encourage our children to say thank you, but as parents do we say thank you? Whatever standards we set in our homes, we must be consistent. And on both counts, Paul says, I'm consistent.

[15 : 49] Consistent in the message he preaches, and consistent in obedience to the message he preaches. He never says, he never writes, do as I say but not as I do. His words and his life always match up, whether he's with the Corinthians or away from the Corinthians. Following in the footsteps of his master Jesus, Paul is the same Christian from whatever direction you look at him. He is just as honest in person as he is by letter. His message is the same, written or spoken, Christ and him crucified.

It is so important that New Testament pastors are consistent. There are few other, few uglier things than a pastor who preaches the forgiveness of Christ but refuses to forgive those who have sinned against him, or who preaches the gentleness and meekness of Christ but is himself harsh and proud.

He must be the same Christian from whatever direction you're looking. In the pulpit, in the meeting of elders, in his people's homes, in his own home, with his own wife, with his own family.

I know of a minister, I don't think anyone here knows of him, who though extremely gifted as a preacher and a pastor and a leader, not in our denomination, was barred from ministry because at home he tyrannized his wife and family. He treated them like his own little army. And he treated them so harshly that his wife and family went to the elders of the church and the minister himself was barred.

He preached the love of Christ but didn't practice the love of Christ with his family. No consistency. Challenge which requires much grace from us all, but the faithful pastor must aspire to whole life

gospel consistency. Well, thirdly, from verse 13 through 17, pastoral ambition, pastoral ambition. [17 : 49] Ambition is sometimes viewed as a bad thing in the Christian life. Of course, it depends what you're ambitious about or more precisely who you're being ambitious for. If it's purely a selfish ambition for status, power, money, then ambition is wrong. But if it's a selfless ambition for the glory of God and the good of other people, far from being wrong, it's our primary purpose as human beings.

Architechism tells us that our chief end in life is the glory of God. So it's proper for us as Christians to have this as our primary ambition. And in this section, Paul wants to show us just how ambitious he was for the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 16, he tells us that he wants to preach the gospel and lands beyond you.

But what seems clear in this passage is that he doesn't feel able to until he's sorted out these problems in Corinth. He doesn't want to overextend himself, to leave Corinth unsupported. Rather, he needs to deal with the issues in Corinth before he reaches out beyond them to new peoples in new lands where no one has preached the gospel before. And that's one of the reasons he is writing these letters. Not just because he loves the Christians in Corinth, not just because he's worried about them, but because he wants to have confidence that they are solid in their faith before he moves on to new mission fields. The A9 between Perth and Inverness is, of course, you know, being upgraded to dual carriageway. They say it will be finished by 2037, but given their rate of progress currently, I think I'll be dead by the time it's finished. But they're working in this way. They upgrade a five-mile stretch to dual carriageway, then they complete it, and then they move on to another five-mile stretch. So, they're working at the moment on the stretch from Tomatin just to the dual carriageway just north in

Inverness. They don't want to start a new section until they've completed the previous stretch, so as not to be working on too many sections at the same time. In the same way, Paul wants to complete what he has started in Corinth before he moves on to a new stage in his ministry.

In Romans 16.28, written about the same kind of time as this, Paul speaks of how, after he's delivered the offerings from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, which we spoke of last week, to Jerusalem, he is planning a new ambitious missionary journey. He wants to travel first to Rome, and then by way of Rome, to Spain. Now, we don't know if Paul ever reached Spain, but what we do know is he had an ambition to spread the good news of Jesus, not just in southern Europe, but to stretch it out all the way to the extremities of western Europe. But to do this, he had first to deal with the problem with Corinth. See the ambition of Paul, the apostolic pastor, not an ambition to further his own reputation, but to preach the gospel and bring more glory to God than ever before.

[21 : 16] John Angel James was a 19th century English minister, and he wrote a classic book which every minister really should have on his shelf. It's got the rather ornate title, An Earnest Ministry, The Want of Our Times, An Earnest Ministry, The Want of Our Times. As the title suggests, this whole book is devoted to laying upon pastors their need to be earnest and ambitious in their ministries. In Paul's case, we can replace the word earnest with ambitious, an ambitious ministry.

On page 71 of my Banner of Truth edition, James puts words into the mouth of the earnest and ambitious minister. These are the words. I see my objective. It stands out in bold relief, clearly defined before my eyes, and I've made up my mind to labor, self-denial, and fatigue. Listen to these words.

If I do not succeed, it shall not be for want of continuous undetermined effort. I have the object before my eyes, the glory of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the good of my fellow man's souls.

And if I do not succeed, it shall not be for want of continued undetermined effort. In our section of 2 Corinthians 10, Paul could have said the same thing. He is so ambitious for the gospel of Christ and the glory of God that there's nothing he won't sacrifice for it.

Good for a pastor to be ambitious. There are always more battles to be fought for the gospel. There are always more victories to be won. There are always new people to be reached with the good news of a crucified and risen Christ. There are always new mission fields to open up. There are always more churches to plant. There are always more young men to be trained up and sent into the ministry of the gospel. There are always more anxious souls to be comforted, and always more children to be raised in the faith. An unambitious, over-contented pastor is coasting and himself needs revitalization.

[23 : 32] So, ambition, in this passage, it is absolute key to an effective ministry in the line of the Apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, lastly, verse 18, pastoral approval, pastoral approval.

Let's go back to the beginning of our sermon with a hard-working and gifted person working his way up the corporate ladder. And those he works with are jealous of him and so stood up a rumor about him, and he's worried that his manager will hear this rumor and that his career will be destroyed.

The question for Paul is this, who is his manager such that he's accountable to him? Who is Paul's manager? For the person in business, his manager is a flesh-and-blood human being, but for the Apostle Paul, the only approval he seeks is that of his ultimate manager, God.

The false apostles in Corinth were interested in the approval of the people. Everything they said and did was said and done with a view to winning a popularity contest. In verse 18, he talks about them commending themselves. As long as the people like them, these false teachers feel approved.

But for Paul, it's not what he thinks of himself or whether he's won a popularity contest among the people, which is important, but whether God approves of him. Listen again to what Paul says in verse 18, it is not the one who commends himself who's approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

[25 : 28] Now, you and I know that, you know, the way that politicians operate is sometimes frankly pathetic. Sometimes those in power will change policy, and although the defender changed by saying, well, on moral grounds, it's the right thing to do, the real reason they've changed their policy is because they realize that their approval ratings have gone down and they risk losing power at the next election.

Political parties are dominated by the approval ratings of the people. Of course, unless the faithful pastor is a sociopath, he will always be careful to try and keep the people on side, but ultimately a faithful pastor is accountable to God and only to God.

He does not look for his approval to the people God has called him to serve because such approval can go up and down like the rising and falling tide. He looks for it from God.

Looking for God's approval, not that of his people, stops him from lowering himself to pursuing spiritual goals using worldly methods.

It stops him from being proud, harsh, and bullying, as opposed to gentle, meek, and lowly. It fosters a spirit of consistency and fills him with an ambition to see the glory of God and the gospel of Christ proclaimed in and among his people.

[27 : 00] Few of us would deny that the New York pastor, Tim Keller, had a massively effective ministry. He preached the gospel to thousands. And yet, when he entered the pulpit every Sunday, he would look out over the vast crowds of those who would gather to hear him preach, and he would whisper to himself, you are not my peace.

You are not my peace. And what he meant by that was, he wasn't seeking approval from God on the basis of his successful ministry from those thousands of people who gathered to hear him preaching.

Rather, his peace with God, his approval from God, came from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for him. The fear of man is one of the single biggest barriers to an effective ministry.

The fear of those we might offend by doing what we think is right or saying what we think is true. If Jesus had been plagued by the fear of man, he'd never have set out on his ministry, he would never have gone to the cross, and we would never have been saved.

It was God's approval which meant everything to Jesus. That's why he went to the cross to die for us. If Paul had been stopped from writing, but by the fear of man from writing 1 Corinthians, the Corinthian church would have ceased to exist.

[28 : 45] A pastor is a shepherd, and we are all shepherds of each other's souls. We're all each other's pastors. We're all leading each other to the one true source of life, Jesus Christ.

Tonight, as we leave this service, ask yourself this question. To whom am I?

It doesn't matter who you are, whether you're young or whether you're old, whether you're new or been here for decades. To whom am I, or can I be, a faithful pastor?

Look around you and ask yourself the question. To whom am I, or can I be, a faithful pastor?