

I. Introduction: Paul as a Model Minister

If you have your Bibles this morning, we want to turn back to 2 Corinthians 7, and we are going to pick it up in verse 3 today. We had a couple of good weeks in this chapter looking at some different aspects of things, and now it is time to move on. We are going to look at a completely different subject today as it begins to unfold itself in this great chapter. We are going to start here when we finally read it. We are going to start reading in verse 3.

What we have today, and I really enjoy studies like this, is really a study on the Apostle Paul. As a pastor, I can glean, and I have over the years gleaned so much from his experiences. As a Christian or someone who ministers the Word of God, you can too.

Paul was not a pastor. Paul was what they call in the Bible an evangelist. A biblical evangelist in the Bible is much different than the evangelist that we have today. An evangelist in the Bible is someone who went around starting churches. He stayed in those churches maybe for a couple of years until he built up a leadership, and then he turned it over to a young man that would pastor it after he left. Many of the people that Paul has relationships with in the Bible that we read about who have churches were just like that.

As an evangelist, he is doing the same thing that we try to do, and that is building people. That is what he does. He builds churches. He ministers to the people through the aspect of his being an evangelist. Then he moves on, and he starts another church someplace else.

We are all – if you are saved this morning, you may not be a pastor, but you are a minister. We are all ministers of the gospel. It is always good to know, especially if you are dealing with people. You get to deal with the dark side of human nature many times and all of the issues that go along with that. It is good to see someone else like Paul that has to deal with the issues that can be very frustrating. I guess if anybody ever got frustrated in the ministry, Paul did.

In his dealing with people, the people at Corinth in this particular study here, we see that he goes through the exact same things that you are going to go through, and I am going to go through. Paul may have lived 2,000 years ago, but human nature never changes, and the problems are always the same. Paul, in dealing with people, he goes through the exact same issues and problems that you are going to deal with in the lives of people. In this particular case with the church at Corinth, there are many problems that you have to go through with people. But Paul's issue here is the one of indifference. There was an element of indifference in the church of Corinth.

For me, it is good to see his frustration level. At the same time, it is good to see that through that frustration, I get to see his burden at the same time. Then on top of that, if we study it out, we get to see how he handled it biblically. Many of you are turning in your applications and you want to be part of a people ministry that is going to learn the upper levels of being able to open up the Word of God and help people solve their problems. That is very commendable, and that is what

we all, at some point in our lives, should endeavor to do. But I am telling you right now that these are lessons that you need to learn, because he and how he handles it biblically really sets the model for us to follow in trying to work with people.

I was thinking about this this week. Another great example of that in the Old Testament this time is Moses. Boy, you talk about a guy who got frustrated with people. Moses did. In an Old Testament sense, Moses really is the pastor of the nation of Israel. The word pastor comes from someone who watches sheep in a pasture type situation, watches over them. How many times is Israel called the flock of God? He is certainly pastoring them, shepherding them in every sense of the Word. Anytime I get down in the ministry or get frustrated with things, I just spend a little time with Moses. Boy, he is a perfect cure for it.

I cannot imagine what it was like. I know what it is like with a church of about 300. I cannot imagine what it is like with 2.5 million people. Half of them like you, the other half do not like you. Half agree with what your decisions are, the other half does not. It must have been incredible. I totally understand why there are times that Moses went into God in the privacy of his tent and just said, "God, just kill them all. Let us just wipe them out and start over again." I understand it. God did not do it, but I understand it.

As far as a practical aspect is concerned, Paul is closer to me in the ministry than Moses is. I can better relate to him. Moses, as I said, is dealing with a nation and he is dealing with 2.5 million people, maybe more. On top of that, he is some 3,800 plus years removed from where I am at. But when you look at Paul and study the church at Corinth, where we are at, now we are the same in at least one respect. He is building New Testament Bible-based churches. So are we. He is in the church age. So am I. He is dealing with born again, spiritually circumcised people who are saved and in the body of Christ found in a New Testament church scenario just like you and me. The things that he goes through are great for us. If we learn the lessons, if we see the things that he goes through, these things become invaluable. Honestly, they are both invaluable. Moses and what he goes through, I am not short-cutting that at all. But I am talking about from a practical standpoint of where we are at today in the church age. Paul was where we were at. He is more where we are at and we can learn much from his circumstances that he goes through.

Let us begin reading here where we left off. We are going to pick it up in 2 Corinthians 7:2. We are going to look at another aspect of the ministry of people. Remember, the ministry is people. We do not minister to inanimate objects. We minister to people.

2 Corinthians 7:2-7

Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.

Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

Father, help us today to understand and look at what we have here. Help us to apply all these things to our life and learn from these great lessons. I know that in this room today there are men and women that are on different levels. Some of them just got saved. Some of them are still trying to find their way out. Some of them have been saved and they are moving up. Some of them are growing. Some of them are at that level where they are ready to really do something. But Lord, we always want to keep moving in that direction. So help us, no matter where we are at today, no matter what level we are on, help us to learn from what we talk about today that we might see these great truths. We will thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen.

II. Paul's Frustration: Wasted Potential

In all of this we begin to see something here that I think that we all need to grasp, especially if you are ever going to get into the aspect of ministry where you work with people. I know maybe some of you are not doing that now, but my hope for you is that someday you get to that point. I am going to tell you this. When I see it in Paul's life, I think the single most frustrating thing in the ministry, and I see it in Paul, and I know it is true from my aspect of it all my life. I have been in the ministry some 40-some years now, and it has always been a frustrating issue. For me and for Paul here, I think the single most frustrating thing is to see God's people who simply refuse to live up to their potential of what they can do for the Lord. I mean, I think it is a shame so many times. In this chapter, it is very easy to see Paul's frustration with his church. Yet, I am just telling you, there is always going to be that element, and I do not care what church you go to.

A number of years ago, there was an ad on television for a college fund. I cannot remember all the details of it, but at the end of it, it wanted you to give to this college fund, and a statement at the end was, "Because a mind is a terrible thing to waste." That is so true. It is true. I think for the Christian, worse than that is the wasted life of never coming to the point where you ever give God all that He wants to have in your life and all that He wants to do.

We have several teachers in our church here, and I have all the respect in the world for teachers. Outside of our church, I know several teachers that are good teachers, that taught in the school system for many, many years, and I have talked with them time to time. Without them all getting together, they all basically, at some point or the other, say the same thing, and I am sure you probably have felt this way. You have a student, and he is a bright kid. He has a very imaginative, great personality. He is not stupid by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, he is very intelligent.

You look at that student, and he has, from you as a teacher now, all the potential to achieve in his life all that he or she wants. They have an incredible personality. They have incredible potential.

I look back in my own life, and I have to tell you, I was a goofball in school. I was. I took it a little more serious when I got into high school, but my grade school years up to 7th or 8th grade, that was the thing that they always told my parents. My parents, they always told her the same thing: "He has great potential. He has got a great personality. He looks like Brad Pitt, and he has got all these things going for him, but he just will not apply himself." I was a daydreamer. Do not set me by the window, because I will watch out there, and I was looking at everything in life except what the teacher was saying. I am sure that teachers, all teachers have students like that. They are bright. They are intelligent. They have great potential, but they never reach their potential. They never even come close, because they just never try. They play all the time. They take nothing seriously. They are indifferent to the academia that is in front of them to learn the classes, and it reflects their attitude about life. Many of them get so frustrated with learning, bored with school, tired of wasting eight or nine hours of their day because they do not apply themselves. When they get a first chance to be a dropout and get out of school, that is exactly what they do.

But in ministry, and in dealing with people, there is nothing more frustrating than seeing a person that throws their life away. I am not talking about just teenagers. We expect it from teenagers. Teenagers go through those terrible teens, where if you do not get a handle on them, they can cause some issues. But I am talking about moms and dads. I am talking about people in their 20s and their 30s. I am talking about even in some cases, grandmas and grandpas. Some people just never grow up.

It is the thing where for me, it is good to see Paul in this situation because it helps sort it all out. He is frustrated with the church of Corinth because he knows what they could do. He knows and sees, as I do, the potential that is in that church. When you want the best for people, when you want people to achieve everything, that is what teachers do. If you have not figured this out yet, teachers do not teach because they make a lot of money. They do not. They teach because they love to teach. They teach because they want to help people develop inside themselves all the potential that they have. There is nothing more frustrating. Matt, am I telling the truth here? There is nothing more frustrating than you having a student in your class who you see what he has. You see his ability or her ability, but they just never reach their full potential. It just never does. It is the same thing in the ministry.

For me, it is good to see Paul in this situation because it helps sort it all out. It helps for me anyhow, put it into some kind of perspective and the ability to learn something. In ministry, it is very easy to lose your perspective. That old proverbial, "you cannot see the forest for the trees." But this is a great passage. Paul is a very driven guy. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12, he is caught up to heaven. He saw the glory of God up there. He got up there. It was not like he had some picture in a book or some movie he saw. No, God actually lifted him off this planet, took him up to the third heaven, flopped him down in front of the throne and showed him everything that God was doing. Then took him by the scruff of the neck and threw him back down on that dusty old road

out there and said, "Now what you have seen up here, you go tell everybody." He was a driven man. He had seen the glory of God.

I know that God is not going to pull you up to heaven. He is not going to reach down and take you up there and show you all those things, but He does not have to because He has all those things in His book. You can see everything in His book that Paul saw up there. Just as what he saw up there was the driving force behind him, when you get a hold of what is in here, it will be the driving force that is behind you.

I will tell you, this is true. Some of you people own businesses and you have people that work for you that are clowns and nothing is more frustrating. Rebecca, I am sure you see it as a teacher. I am sure all you teachers see it as teachers. I see it as a teacher and I am not even a public school teacher. I am not even sure I am a teacher, but I see it. Nothing is more frustrating than seeing somebody that has the potential to be something great and do nothing with it. That is Paul's frustration.

Nothing drives a driven person crazy. Nothing drives a person who is always on time crazy. People who are never on time. I am waiting for my kids to show up. I will call Jamie. "Where are you at?" "Be there in five minutes." "I know, but I will be there in five minutes." "I have 35 minutes to do whatever I have to do." I know that. She is as predictable as they can be. I understand. I am not fighting it. I love it. It is part of her charm, but that is the way it is. But I am just telling you, if you are a driven person and you are punctual and you are there, you are a driven person. I am just making the point. I talked about Thursday night about being old school. I talked about Woody Hayes, the old football coach from Ohio State. That is part of my problem. I am as old school as you can get. I am not into this newfangled stuff.

There is a story in the Bible that fits right into where we are at today. That is when they took the Ark of the Covenant and they put it on an ox cart. Remember that? They were getting around by the ox cart and one of the guys, Uzzah, the ox stumbled and it began to fall. Uzzah went up to put his hand on it and God killed him. Now a lot of people read that story and said, "Well, what is God's problem? Did not he try to help? Would it have been better for the Ark to fall on the ground? Has God just got a bad attitude that day and looking for somebody to whack and He saw Uzzah down there and said, 'I will kill him'?" No, no. It is never right to do wrong to try to get the chance to do right. Uzzah was not the problem that he was reaching up and touching it. The problem was the Ark should have never been on an ox cart to begin with. It is to be carried on your shoulders. It is to be carried through staves.

What is that a picture of? It is a picture of the old way the Bible is to be taught and churches that are run versus the new ox cart way they are all run today. It is the difference between standing up and preaching the Word of God, believing the Word of God and holding people accountable to the Word of God and doing what is right in the book and standing on it versus this new morality religion we have today where the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ark, is on an ox cart. No, the ministry is never to be put on an ox cart that an ox pulls. The ministry is to be borne on the shoulders of God's people. That is why the staves. That is why they had to carry it on their shoulders. That will drive you crazy. 20th century, 21st century Christianity drives me nuts. I cannot watch it on

television. I would have a bill every month of \$9,000 in broken televisions because I throw something through them. It drives me nuts and Paul is that way too. Driven people are driven crazy by people who are right in front of you. In verse 3, he says, "Receive us."

III. Principles of a Biblical Ministry

In verse 3, Paul point blank commands them to receive him and what he is saying. You look at that and you read that down there and you say, "Well, to somebody outside of Christianity or somebody that really understands the Bible or how it all works, that kind of seems harsh." There are some things that you have to do in the Bible that people outside the Bible view and say, "Boy, that is really a harsh stand," but that is because they are outside and they do not see that sometimes the harsh thing to do is the right thing to do. It is really not a matter, is it harsh or not? It really matters, is it right or not? That is where you have to get to.

Paul had built this church. He won the people in this church to Christ. He had put his own life on the line. We have read it many times in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. He had put his life on the line numerous times for this church. He suffered much affliction from it because of it. He has earned the right to call them out on the carpet, so to speak, when they are not doing what is right.

He says in 2 Corinthians 7:2, and boy, is this a great concept. This is what a biblical based ministry as Paul had has to be built on. He says in 2 Corinthians 7:2, "We have wronged no man. We have corrupted no man. We have defrauded no man." What is he saying? He is saying, "Hey guys, what are you upset about? All I have done is bring you God in His Word. All I have done in this ministry is to tell you what the Word of God says. I have not wronged any man. I have not corrupted any man, and I have not defrauded any man. By what right do you have to get upset and reject what I have got to say to you from God in the church that I built, in the church that you decided to come to? All I have done is give you what God has told me to give you." I will tell you, he says, "We have wronged no man. We have corrupted no man, and we have defrauded no man." In that statement, in that situation, here you have a model of how to run a Bible-based ministry.

In ministry, people are always going to get upset. It just happens. You are never going to get anybody to get it. Like Bob Jones Sr. said one time, "Wherever you have got movement, you have got friction." Boy, that is true. Nobody is ever always going to be happy. People are going to get upset, and they are going to get mad, and even in some cases, they are going to leave. But what you have got to do, and what Paul is talking about here is simply this: You have got to always make sure that it is on them, and they are not dealing with whatever the issue is biblically, and not on you not dealing with it biblically.

You want to always make sure that whatever you do in the ministry and dealing with people, this is why you have got to cross all the T's and dot all the I's. You want to make sure that you wrong no man, you corrupt no man, and you defraud no man. You always do right by people. Paul always did right by people. You never do people wrong. You let people do you all the wrong in the world, but you never retaliate back and do them wrong. You just do not. You treat everybody equal.

Too many people try to define other people. People look at somebody, and they do not like this, and they do not like that, and so they try to get in their mind who they are. I am telling you, that is not a good thing to do, especially in the ministry, because the thing you want to do is treat everybody equal. Do you know how you get to the point in ministry where you treat everybody equal? You quit defining people and learn one great truth. If you ever learn this truth, it will be one of the... I was going to say the greatest truth you are going to ever learn, but there are going to be about 40 of them today, so that does not work. But here it is: People define themselves. You do not have to define anybody. People will define who they are. You build a relationship with somebody, and in six months in that relationship, you begin to see who they really are.

That is the problem in marriages, why they do not last, because people do not give time for the other person to define who each other is. They get married, and they do not give it the time, and they wind up six months later, two years later, they wind up looking at it and saying to themselves, "This is not the person I thought they were." No, no, no, no, no, you are wrong. They never were the person you thought they were. You just did not let them define themselves. In the ministry, I do not define people. I love you all. I love every one of you, and I do not define you. No, no, no, but you will define yourself, because that is the way it has to work, and that is why you have to treat everybody equal. You give everybody the same opportunities. I tell you all the time, I do not care where you have been, I do not care what you have done. I do not care in your life in the past, I simply care. I do not need to know about it, I do not care about it. All I care about is where you are at right now and what you want to do from this point on.

In ministry, and Paul does this all the time, there are never any hidden agendas. It was Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2 that when he says, in ministry, you have to be open and honest and commending yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. That is Paul. That is what the ministry has to be. There can never be anybody wronged, nobody can be corrupted, and nobody can be defrauded. When people get mad and they get upset about whatever, you make sure that you can go back to the book and you get it by the book. You take no sides in the dispute. That will get you killed faster than anything. You follow the Solomon principle. Why? Because principles in the Bible will always define who is right and who is wrong. It is just people never want to apply them. They would rather deal with their anger, deal with their emotions, deal with their feelings, instead of just opening up the book and letting the book define what it does. Let the Bible do its job in your life.

You always follow the biblical principles in dealing with people. It is fair for everybody. It is like the tithe, 10%. How much fairer can it get? If you make \$200,000 a year, it is adjusted on your 10% of that. If you make \$200 a year, it is adjusted to that. It is fair for everybody. That is why you have to use biblical principles. You deal with issues always. I do not care what issues they are. I do not care how bad they are. I do not care how bad it looks. Church of Corinth, Paul is dealing with all kinds of problems here. But you always notice. He deals with the issues in a way that all can grow through it if you desire to. You do not do things to hurt people. You do not wrong any man. You do not corrupt any man. You do not defraud any man. You do it by the book, based on the principles, and you do it in a way that all can grow through it.

Now, does that mean everybody is going to grow through it? Absolutely not. Does that mean everybody is going to respond and appreciate your way you do it? Absolutely not. It just means that is what you do. That is what you do. You do not have any behind the scenes deals. It is what it is. You always have to let people know where you are at. You always have to let people know where you are at. Then you hold yourself and everybody else accountable by the same standard, the Word of God. I said it Thursday night. You are accountable to me. I am accountable to you. We are both accountable to the Word of God. That is how it works or how it is supposed to work.

I said all that and I will tell you this, putting all those things into your life is a good thing. Putting all those things in your life are an important thing if you are going to work with people, but know this at the end of the day, all this will change absolutely nothing. When people get out of fellowship with God, the issues they say they have with other people are never really the issue because if it was the issue and they were right with God, then they would follow the protocol in the Bible to fix the issue. Follow what I am saying? It is never about them and somebody else. At the end of the day, pulling back all the levers, there is something between them and God. Why they will not do in any given situation what the Bible says we as Christians are to do. That is the bottom line. It is the bottom line.

I tell you all the time. You and I, we are absolutely not responsible. We are not responsible many times. Sometimes we are. Maybe most of the times we are, but in anybody's life, there will be times when things happen to you or you find yourself into a scenario where you, through no choice of your own, are in that situation. You can look at it and say, "I am in this thing. This is not my deal. This is not my responsibility." You may be in situations sometimes where it is not your responsibility, but at the same time, it is your responsibility how you deal with it. That is what you have to do. We do what is right and do what the book says no matter what anybody else does.

I have had situations in my life where, and I have had situations in my own life over the years where people have said something and I said something that I did not say. When I find out about it and I know I did not say it, I will go right to that person and say, "Hey, I want you to know I heard that you said I said this. I did not say that." I am just telling you. If somebody tells me it is five minutes after seven, I will be on the phone to you at seven minutes after seven. Why? That is how you deal with it. You do not get mad about it. Nothing to get mad about. But you always want to man up and set the record straight. If everybody would do that, we would not have any problems. We would not have any problems. But that is what you do. That is what you do.

But you have to remember, fixing issues that people really do not want to fix is impossible to do. Somebody said, "What do you do in situations like that?" You do what is right anyhow. I do not care who does right or who does wrong. For Christians, we need to do what is right. That is what Paul is saying all through his life. You always go the extra mile to fix an issue even though you know it cannot be fixed.

If you are going to get into ministry, this falls back on 1 Timothy 3:2 where it says, "A bishop must be blameless." I have told you many, many times, that verse was always a puzzlement to me. How can a bishop be blameless when he gets blamed for everything? In most cases, in most

churches, that is true. But the way he stays blameless is because he deals with the issues biblically. He follows his protocol. He has no hidden agendas. Somebody says something. Somebody says he did this. Somebody says that. He finds out about it. He sits down with him and says, "Hey, look, that is not true. Now, I want to help you with this."

I have been in a situation before. This goes back to my previous point. I have been in situations over the years before where somebody was upset about something they thought I did. When I found out what it was and I found out that it was not what they said and it was something else, I went back to that person. I was the happiest guy in the world. I thought, "Happy days are here again. We got it made. They thought something that was wrong. I understand that. I did not do it. I am going to go back and correct it. We are all going to be bosom buddies." When you go back and tell that person, "Look, that is not what happened. I did not say this. I did not do this," they still were upset with you. Why? Because when he wants to be upset about something, he will find something to be upset about no matter what the truth is. You have to learn to deal with that.

You always want to make sure. If somebody gets their nose bent at a joint, somebody gets mad or somebody leaves because they did not want to follow the biblical protocol, make sure you do. Make sure you do. You will still get blamed, but it comes back to that great concept of a good conscience toward God. You look back and you know that in that particular situation, you did everything you could have done to fix it. You were open and honest and wanted to lay it on the table, but that is where you are at. Many, many times. That is where Paul is at. That is Paul's whole case here. That is his whole concept that Paul is talking about. That is why he says, "I have not defrauded you. I have given you every chance. I have not wronged you. I have certainly not corrupted you in any stretch. I came to you simply telling you what the Word of God said, but not everybody is happy about it."

The Bible has a process. It has a format to deal with fixing any problem that comes up. I want to tell you, and I will never understand this totally and completely until I get home to heaven, but I will never understand it. There should never be any issues that two Christians cannot settle. But you know how many issues there are that they cannot settle? We are both saved. We are both in the body of Christ. We are both under the blood of Christ. We both operate by the same principles. We both love the same God. We both love each other. What could come into our world that we could not solve together with that book unless one or both parties do not want to? You see how simple it becomes? Everybody makes every life in Christianity so complicated. It is not complicated. It is not complicated at all.

IV. The Pastor's Right to Bold Speech

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:4, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you." Every pastor, every minister will have to face these same issues that Paul had to deal with. In this case, in Paul's case, it is an attitude of indifference. To Paul, nothing, and I mean nothing was more frustrating than to watch people in the church at Corinth waste the opportunities that God had given them, waste their life, and never develop the full potential that God had for them and watch them waste it all and waste it on the stupid things of life that mean nothing.

Paul here in this chapter, he exercises the right that every pastor has if he is biblical in his approach. That is, he used boldness of speech toward the people of God, the ones that God had given him. What is he doing? He is doing the same thing that every pastor does if he is worth his salt. He is demanding that his church do what is right. Now does that mean everybody will? No. But you demand that you live right. You demand from the pulpit, maybe not in those same words all the time, but that is what preaching is. Preaching is a call to holiness to do what God wants you to do.

When I preach at another church, I do not preach like I do when I preach to you because you are my people. I have built my life with many of you for some of you 30, 40 years, some of you 10 years since we started our church. We went through some deep times together in your life and my life. We have seen your children get saved. Many of you I married. Many of you I baptized your kid. Many of you I baptized you. I built my life with you and many of you minister in this work here with me side by side. I have a right as your pastor to speak boldly to you just as you have a right as my people in this church to speak boldly to me.

You saw a great example of this when Jim Lake was here. I do not know if you even caught it. I sat back there and saw what I heard. I just put a smile on my face because I know Jim. Remember what he said when he started preaching? I am going to paraphrase it now. I did not have time to go back and exactly listen to it, but he said this. He said something to the effect that, "I am not going to really preach to you today because I am not your pastor. But rather I am going to show you some things in the Word of God that I think will help you." See, now that is a pastor who gets it. Jim is smart enough to know that he had not earned a right to say some things to you that probably he should have said.

You see guys at the mission make that mistake all the time, young guys, and some of the older guys too. They go down there and they see me clobber everybody up here and preach hard and get to this and all that or they see somebody out there. So that is all they ever know. That is all they ever see. So they go down there and they try to do the same thing and then they wonder why everybody gets mad at them. The answer is simple. You have not earned a right to say that to them. I have earned a right to say some things to you as you have earned a right to say some things to me. It is a two-way street. Where do we get the idea that you just have to listen to me and I do not ever have to listen to you? We are both held accountable by the same book. Jim is smart enough to know that he had not earned a right to say some things to you even though probably we needed to hear him, but he understood it. He had wisdom. As a pastor, any pastor, and I just speak of myself to you that have been with me for many, many years, hey, I have earned a right to drop the hammer when it needs to be dropped. That is the difference. That is what Paul is doing. He has earned that right.

When it comes to right or wrong or it comes to things that have to be dealt with, the buck has to stop somewhere. God's people always like to pass the buck to somebody else. There are very few Christians that will stand up in a situation and deal with it the way it needs to be dealt with. Everybody wants to pass the buck. I understand that. Anybody here want to raise your hand and confess, "I want to be a bad guy"? No. We all want to be liked. We all want to be nice. We all want to be this. But I am telling you, the buck has to stop somewhere. Where do we keep passing

it? Well, in most cases, it gets passed back to the pastor. That is okay. That is okay. That is the job. That is what Harry Truman was famous for. He had a little thing on his desk that said, "The buck stops here." It is someplace in anything. The buck has got to stop. That is what leadership is. That is what leadership is. That is the way it has to work.

V. The Heart Behind Boldness

I want you to look at this. Look at 2 Corinthians 7:3 again. I know he dropped the hammer and he said, "I want to speak to you boldly." I know he is taking his church to task. But you have to see the whole thing. This is a great study. Look at 2 Corinthians 7:3. Paul's purpose in saying what he was saying to them was not to hurt them. Look what he says in 2 Corinthians 7:3: "I speak not to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you." See that thing? He was committed to this church. He said, "I am not telling you this to hurt you. And I am certainly not doing it to condemn you." He says, "You are in my heart to live or die." What does that mean? He says, "We are going to live together and we are going to die together. I am committed to you."

He was not saying what he was saying because he wanted to be mean. He was not saying it to be nasty. He is not saying it to hurt their feelings. He is saying it because it is the truth and they need to hear it. He is saying it because it is what they need to hear. He loved this church. He loved the people of this church. He loved them enough to give his whole life to bring them God's Word. They do not see that. They focus only on what is before them. They do not see a man here who gave up everything in his life, left his family, left everything and gave everything he had to this group of people saying, "I am going to build what God has put into me into you. I love you." They lost that. They lost that. How easy it is to lose that when you get your eyes off the principles. He loved them enough to die for them. He loved them enough to suffer all the things that they said to him that was terrible. He loved them enough to suffer all the things that they did to him all because he loved them.

I think most of all when he makes that statement, "I speak not to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you," I think he loved them. He loved them enough to tell them the truth when they did not want to hear it. Friends are important and we all have friends. But the truth is, in our lives today, there is probably not more than one, maybe two people who will honestly tell you the truth about yourself. People will tell you what you want to hear. People will always tell you what they think you want to hear. But your greatest friend on this planet will be the one who always will tell you the truth not to hurt you but because they love you. Paul dealt with this same aspect. You see it in everything. That is why it is such a great study. I tell you right now, two thousand years of church history has not changed much of it.

When you go over to the church in the book of Galatians, which is the church at Galatia, here is a church that again Paul started. Here is the church where he invested his life. He taught them and gave them exactly what God wanted them to have. In Paul's day, it is different today in one respect. There was not a lot of variance. Paul was the only guy who had the truth because God gave it to him. This is the infant stages of the church and he is the only one that has got the truth and he imparts it to other churches. Then here we are two thousand years later with the mess we

have today. But back then it was just him. He had started the church here in Galatia and it started out as a good church. But then many times in churches, a group came in and said, "Oh, you are believing this. Well, yeah, well, that is good. But there is some other stuff." They were trying to get this church to believe in Jesus Christ as Paul taught. But they also were trying to say, "But you have got to keep the Old Testament law." Best of both worlds, you see.

Paul hears about it. He comes back and he says, "What is going on with you guys? You guys know better than this. You guys know what I taught you." There were some people after how much he invested his life and their life in that church who were upset with Paul and he gives his famous line. Oh, I love it. It is so true.

Galatians 4:16

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

The answer to that today and all down through history is yes, you will. But so what? So what? What the Corinthians did not realize or would not recognize was the fact that he was not condemning them. He was not condemning them. He was not angry at them. He was not mad at them. He was not out to hurt them. He told you, "I have defrauded no man. I have corrupted no man." That is not what he was doing. But he is burdened and frustrated because of one thing. He knows they are better than this. He knows they are better than what they are. He is frustrated because this church is not reaching its full potential. He is looking at this church, the man who built churches, the man who was given the commission by God. He is looking at this church. He sees this great potential in this church. It is frustrating to him to see God's people in this church do nothing with what God has done for them and never realize their potential. For a guy like Paul, that will drive him crazy. So he comes and he says, "I am going to speak to you boldly." He has earned that right.

If I did not know that Christianity and the church was different from everything else in life, any other way, I know it just by the way people deal with it. Most of you guys played football. Most of you played baseball, some sports. If you were a football player out there in high school or even college, I do not think you can do it much in the pros. But if you were in high school or you were in a college and you were a football player and you were not out there doing your job and you were missing tackles or you were not blocking the quarterback and the coach came in, the coach got you by the face mask and he says, "What part of this game do not you understand? You have an assignment. Do your assignment. You are better than this." Would you get mad? Would you take your helmet off and say, "I am leaving the team"? Is that what you do? Would you say, "Oh no, I am going to go sit over here"? I would just say, "I will show him." And the next time you go out there and a quarterback snaps the ball, you just stand there and say, "Have at him. I will show him." Is that what you do? No, I will tell you exactly what you would do. You would go out there and you would fight harder with every ounce you have. You would remember what your assignment was because he motivated you and you knew that coach. You knew that coach was telling you that because it was true. You knew that coach had a hold of your face mask and was yelling in your face and spitting in your face because he knew he watched you in practice. You were better than that.

You do that in church. The Corinthian church was better than this. He had been bragging about all that they had done, but he knows they are not reaching their full potential. He knows they are not doing all that they could do. That was frustrating for Paul, just as it was frustrating for a coach. This was frustrating for a pastor. He sees what they could do if they would just get their priorities straight, get the real purpose in life. Paul sees what this church, and he built this church because he knew that he could not reach everything. He could not do everything as one man. He needed this church as all the other churches to go out and continue on what he did. He is frustrated because he sees the potential in his church, and he sees what this church could do that he could be someplace else doing what he does, but he is frustrated because they will not realize their potential.

I will be honest with you. I feel the same way many times. I look at what we could be doing. I said Thursday night, we had a great Bible study Thursday night. I told you, I said, and I know that some people probably thought it was stupid. But that is what it is. But it is one of those things where, I think I said Thursday night, last Sunday or the Sunday before last or Tuesday. I do not remember what it was. On a regular day out when we were at restarts, so it had to be a couple of weeks ago, we had three or four guys out preaching that afternoon. I sit back and I look at that, and I think to myself, "That is great. That is what I want." But at the same time, then I say, "Why are not there six?" You tell me the potential is not here? I want to tell you something. I think this is probably the most frustrating thing. The potential in this church is overwhelming. This is one of the greatest collections of bodies of people that you are ever going to find on planet earth, in my own humble opinion, based on 40 years of looking at them. What gets frustrating is, I believe that in these last days, God racked us all up like cue balls on a pool table and wants to scatter us throughout this city, Him being the cue ball.

Let me put it where you can maybe even get it a little better. How would you feel as a parent? I know as parents, you are all parents. If you do not want to be a parent, do not drink the water. That is all I can tell you around here. There are some churches you drink the water and you turn out from a good person to a bad person who want to stay away from those water fountains. We do not have that kind. We have one that you drink and you are pregnant tomorrow. So there we are. See, which one is it? It is the one the guys do not drink from.

But how would you feel as a parent? Because you are all parents and I know you want the best for your kids. You do. I know you do. You want the best for your child. Which parents do. You look at your kid and you see them and they had tremendous potential. Great little shining personalities, little bubbly little spirits. But how would you feel if in spite of that as you raised them, you saw them on a course of wasting their life?

I have to tell you, many children do. As they grow up, they go through teenagers and they have problems and you cannot talk to them. You cannot get anywhere with them and they get a little older and you cannot do it. They get into drugs, they get into alcohol and they get into this and they get into that or they shack up with every guy or girl that they find. It becomes, I mean, and you look at that as a parent, you stand back and you grow up and that child grows up with an absolute, they have great potential. Hey, I have seen kids that were absolutely terrible kids. I have talked to those kids and masking all of the problems they have got. I look down inside and I

think to myself, "Man, there is absolutely incredible potential in this kid." I know how the parents must feel. They go from one bad relationship to another, up one dead end street after another, make one more mess after another, never happy, always wanting to be happy.

Now let me ask you a question. If that was true in your life and you were a parent, would you stand by and let it happen? I say a lot of parents do. But honestly, from a biblical standpoint, knowing your responsibility as a parent, would you stand by and let it happen and waste their life in mess after mess? Or would you enable them in this worthless lifestyle that they have? Many parents do. I have seen parents that had an opportunity to do something for their child and all they do is make excuses for them. When you make excuses for your child, you are enabling your child. That is the way it works. I have seen them blame their situations on somebody else's kid or this person or that. Would you actually consciously enable them to be worthless in their life? Or would you with great boldness of speech, demand that they do what is right? That is what you have to do.

You say, "Well, my kids are 20, 30, 40, 50 years old. They do not listen to anybody." I am going to tell you something. There should never be a time in your child's life if you are 500 and he is 300 or she is 300 and your influence ceases to be in their life. A rule in parenting, I have told you this a thousand times, never allow anybody to have more influence in your child's life than you. If you do, that is when you lose your power. Next to God, that kid ought to just be absolutely heartbroken to break fellowship with mom and dad and some of them cannot wait to get away from them. But how do you deal with it? You deal with it. You deal with it with great boldness of speech. It is the same deal. You want the best for them, your son and your daughter. Paul wanted the best for this church. It is the same thing. As your pastor, I want the best for you. The only way you can hold the line is to use great boldness of speech and demand that they do what is right. Now, does that mean they are going to? Absolutely not. But they know where the brick wall is. That is what this church knew. I love you to death, but that is where you know too. I mean, I love you. I will do anything for you and I will be your best friend in the whole wide world and I will go through anything with you. But there is a place where the buck stops.

VI. Dealing with Frustration: Focus on What You Have

In dealing with people, God's people, it is far from a perfect world. I know. It is a shame it is, but it is. I know that some people will never get it, never change. So how do you deal with all of that? If you really love people, as Paul did, and you really want this church, the church of Corinth, to do everything, and he is frustrated by their not realizing the potential. At the same time, he is smart enough to know that not everybody is going to do it. That will drive you nuts. How do you deal with that?

Last Thursday night, there was a great question that Mike asked, and it was a, I looked at it as a prelude to where we are at today and I told you so. But this is the real source of Paul's frustration. The answer is right here in our text, and it is probably one of the greatest things you will ever learn if you learn it. I told you last Thursday night that I am a very simple guy. I am not very complicated. I live my life by three or four very basic, simple rules. Rule one, I told you Thursday night, and I told you I was going to talk about it today, so it is no surprise that I told

you that one of the rules that keeps me from going over the edge is the fact that I never dwell on what I do not have, but always focus on what I do have. That is true of people. That is true of churches. It is true of anything. I look at the things that God has directly given me, that I am aware of in my life that God has given me. When I recognize what God has given me in my life, and I am God-conscious toward that, you tell me in life what can take that away.

What a lot of God's people's problem is, why their noses are out of joint so much about things? It is because at the end of the day, God has not given them anything. They have nothing to focus on, except their own misery. They have nothing to focus on, except the undone problems that just string on through the end of their life. I never focus and dwell on what I do not have. I always focus on what I do have, and I do that with people. Somebody said, "Well, so-and-so left the church." I am sorry about that, but I am not going to focus on that because I have people here that stay and want to do the work of God. That is where my focus is. If I focus on everybody that did not like me, I would be over in a corner like this. I am not going to be in that corner. You never focus on what you do not have. You focus on the people God gives you who line up with you, who get your heart to get the work done for God because at the end of the day, is not that why we are all here?

In the rest of these verses, 5, 6, and 7, we see in Paul's life and ministry what always got him through, the indifference, the frustration that we face in the ministry.

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

When he goes to Macedonia, if you want to put this note in your Bible, this is Acts 16 and Acts 20. He was treated pretty rough there. It was not a fun time. He is being treated rough by the church at Corinth. In all of this he shows you, and it is just four little words, what comforted him and got him through when people, circumstances got so frustrating and he got frustrated because people who were saved by God did not want to do what God called him to do. Four little words: "the coming of Titus."

I talked the last couple of weeks about people in your life that you need to avoid, that will hurt you. That is always true. But there is a great balance in our lives that needs to be there and certainly a great balance in ministry because God will put some people in your life that will get you through when nobody else does. God will put some people in your life that you need at that particular point in time. The people God puts in your life that love God and love the book as much as you do, that was Titus. In Paul's ministry God had put some people there in his life that when all the rest did not want to follow God, he looked and he focused on the ones who did. What a blessing that was to him. In all that he went through, you can read it in his voice, when

all that he went through and he says, "the coming of Titus." When Paul was in prison, when he wanted to die, he said to Timothy, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." You are going to find that there were some great people in Paul's life that God put there. God will give you people in your life that will minister, that you minister to, that will be an encouragement to you when things get tough.

Titus, Paul won him to Christ. He invested his life with him. He is a pastor. He makes up what we call the pastoral epistles, one of the books. In the book he writes, the theme could not be a better theme to have your life built around because the theme of Titus is stewardship for God. God will give you those people. Paul built the people and we build people. In building with people and in Paul's life, some of them were really good with Paul and carried it the distance. Some did not do what was right and turned against Paul. But at the end of the day, Paul never focused on that. He focused on the Tituses. He focused on the Timothys. He focused on the Philemons. He focused on the Priscilla and Aquila. He focused on those that were of a faithful spirit.

God will give you people who will love that book and love God and love the work of God as much as you do and love you too. They will comfort you and encourage you by what they do because they are of a faithful spirit. They grasp the book. They understand people. They understand the ministry. They decide through a conscious choice in your church to be your co-laborer. They labor up with you. They yoke up with you. They become part of your ministry. God sends them to you. God looks down. If you are God conscious, God looks down. He sees you are trying to do something. Then he says, "I am going to give you some people that are going to help you. Because son, I know it is going to be lonely down there. I know it is going to be hard down there. And you need to have some help." So he gives you some people. It starts with your family and then it works out from there. He puts some people in your life. People that will understand what the ministry is, what you are trying to do. That is what Paul did.

But Paul, because he was a people person. He never, never, never totally got past the fact that he looked at all the other ones and said, "Man, what a waste of potential." But you cannot focus on that. You cannot focus on that. Like your children. You want the best for them. But at the end of the day, they have to make their own choice. Paul carried that same burden for the people at Corinth. But there comes a point that you have to just say, "Hey, look, it is your choice, man. I have a ministry I have to do. I have to do what God has called me to do." When you do that, you look around and you see what God has given you, what He has provided for you. You look at the Tituses, as I said, the Timothys, the Philemons, the Aquila and Priscilla that God gave you to get the job done. That is where if you are smart, you learn to put your focus. You do not focus on what you do not have. You focus on what God has given you to get the job done. Then you get the job. If you focused on what you did not have, what would happen? You would never get the job done. There comes a point where you have to let it go and you have to focus on the ones that God has given you. They are the ones that are going to get it done.

You want everybody to have the best with God. You look and see what you can do more and better, what you can teach, what you can preach. You try to do everything you can to try to get them where they need to be. You say to yourself, "If all of God's people would just see and

answer the call of God, look what we could get done." But in reality, that is not going to happen because all through history and all through the Bible, God has got it done with a faithful few. Through boldness of speech, you preach the truth, you make people better to help them reach their real potential for God. But at the end of the day, it has to be their choice.

VII. Qualities of a Faithful Co-Laborer

There is a great verse that I use in my rejoicing with the people that God has given me. Let us face it. I told you before, I told you many times, I exist for one purpose. I may do a lot of fun things. You may think I am a fabulous softball player. You may think that I am the king of the volleyball court. Those are all deceptions. I have one thing in my mind. I eat, sleep, and drink it. That is to do the work that God has saved me and called me to do. So many times in my heart, I have seen this verse. I have watched many of you over the years do little things that no one sees. I have really walked away thinking of this verse, putting your name in this verse.

In the book of Philippians, in every book that Paul wrote, he had issues. He wrote to the seven churches that we know of. In six of them, he had problems. But he never had a problem with the church at Philippi. Because he looks at this thing here and he gives a little verse here in Philippians 2:25, and it is a great verse. I have it in my Bible, "my model minister friend." I realize that no one man can do this work by himself. I know that. I am not such a fool to think that I have the ability, I have the endurance to do all that gets done. That is stupid. Any pastor who thinks that and tries to keep it all to himself is going to fail miserably. No, no, the job is to take this and to take every young man and every young woman, every little kid growing up, and from day one begin to infuse into them principles of leadership. Because in ministry you have to lead from the front, not from the back. You take men and women who want to, that have any inkling of leadership skills. Once they get their head squirting out of what they need to do with their own life, then you take them, you mold them, and you look at them in time. Just like Paul, when he was going through what he went through, he looked at Titus, Timothy, Philemon, Aquila, and Priscilla, and a hundred others, this guy too. He says something about this guy that is my five points that I look for in my friends in the ministry. I may never preach this, never even said this, but boy this is in my heart 24/7.

Philippians 2:25

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

Now this Epaphroditus, nothing more is said about him in the Bible to any great detail, but there are five things about him that made him special to Paul. I am telling you, when Paul went through his tough times, and he got discouraged, and he got frustrated, it was looking at guys like this, and women like he had in his life, that God had given him, that he focused on, that had his heart beat, and had his desire. He says about him, "He is my brother." The Bible says, we know that that means he is saved, but yet the Bible says in Proverbs 17:17 that a brother is born for adversity. A brother will stick with you through all the hard times. I have people all the time through my life, and I never say it, but I have people say, "Well, I am going to stand by you." I

always think to myself, "That is nice, I would rather have you stand with me." Anybody can stand by me, what I am looking for is somebody that will stand with me. A brother is born for adversity.

He says, "my companion in labor." God gave him Paul's heart. He saw what Paul was trying to do. I have people in my life that understand what God has called me to do. I watch some of you, and I watch, and I know you are all human, and you all make mistakes, and some of, we all can be goofballs in the whole nine yards, but I watch you. I watch you in situations where I need to take you from here and put you here to get you to do this and get you to that, and there is never a complaint. There is never, "Why I really want to do this, I want to do that." You just simply do because you have learned. You learn that the ministry is not always what we want, but the ministry is what we have to do, what the needs are. You just move wherever that is. I do not know what to say about that. I observe a lot more things than I speak about. I read a lot more than I talk about, and I see what Paul was talking about.

He says, "my fellow soldier." That is a great one, sharing the same foxhole, realizing that we are in this ministry together. A fellow soldier will never, will never, will never break ranks. He will hold the line. He will never steal your canteen when he is thirsty and he does not have any water. He will never file up your rifle so it will not work. He will never back off while you are advancing. He will never fail in any situation to cover your flank. He will never refuse, no matter how hungry he is, to share his last rations. He will never betray you to the enemy. Never go to sleep on his watch. He will never let you take all the fire. He is a fellow soldier.

He says, "my messenger." Romans 10:12, 15 says he brings glad tidings of great joy. We have the same message. This afternoon we are going to go share that message. You share it throughout the week wherever you go.

Romans 10:15

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

"Ministered to my wants." I know the Bible says, "My God shall supply all your needs." I know that. But those friends in ministry, they minister to each other's wants. Not in a worldly sense. But what we can do for each other. I watch some of you take care of each other. When you do not know, I watch. I watch some of you do little things for people. Nobody sees. It does not get talked about in the circles. I just watch what you do. I watch how you look out for each other. It is another principle that I live by. It is one of my simple little rules. It is simply you always take care of those who take care of you and your ministry. Do not ever take for granted. I will not. I will never take for granted the people that God has given me to do this work.

I understand and I do not want to give the illusion that some of you physically cannot go to restart. I understand that. Some of you physically cannot get out and play volleyball. I understand that. But that does not mean you are not invaluable in what you do. Some of the people that cannot go to restart bring in hot dog buns and bring in this and bring in that. You find a way to do whatever needs to be done because that is what the ministry is. The ministry is looking at the

issue, looking at the circumstance and then everybody bowing together finding a way to get it done for the Lord.

If I have learned anything in ministry, I have learned this over the last 40 some years. Everybody is a taker. Everybody is a taker. Everybody wants to take from the ministry. Very few people want to give to it. Everybody has got their hand out for something and it is always empty. But that is the ministry. But that just makes you appreciate the ones, the Tituses, all them four little words, "the coming of Titus." That was Paul's comfort and the stress that he went through of the men and the women that God gave him. That is what he focused on. He focused on what he did have, not what he did not have. He focused on the men and women that knew that when push came to shove, he could look to the left and right and he would be lined up on the flanks. He took comfort in that because sometimes that is all that is going to get you through.

VIII. Conclusion: Ministry Principles and Purpose

So these are great lessons to learn. As you develop yourself and God uses you, these little principles will become invaluable. They will help you always stay focused on the right thing and realize that while you want everybody to make it and you want everybody to be the best for the Lord and you actually want everybody to realize their full potential and there is nothing more frustrating than watching somebody who is saved waste their life and what they have. But the reality is not everybody will. But you preach the Word of God to them boldly. You wrong no man, you corrupt no man, you defraud no man. Bob Jones Sr. used to say, "You do right till the stars fall." You never forget that the people that are co-laborers with you, that is where your focus is because at the end that is what God has done.

I told you this Thursday night, I believe with all of my heart that in the day and age that we live and the last days that we live that God has put our church here. People come, they stay, they move through. Some stay, some go, some stay for a while and then go. It is all kinds of variations. But at the end of the day I really believe because of what this Bible based ministry is, not me, the Bible. I believe that it is a last chance for many people where God says, "You made some messes in life, you screwed some things up. I am going to give you a chance to fix every problem you have in a scenario that whatever you have been, whatever you have done can get fixed and you can get for Me what you need to get." The people come in, they look at that. God deals with them in their heart, they hear it and then some say, "Boy that is what I am looking for." Others say, "No thanks." I do not focus on that. I focus on what God has called us to do and the people God has given me to get it done. My Tituses, my Timothys, my Aquila, my Priscillas, my Epaphroditus', my Philemons. You always stay focused on what you have got from God that He has given you. Those are the most important things that you will ever have. You never forget, no matter how frustrating it gets, the Tituses of life, the coming of Titus.

In my life, and I am done, two verses that I build my ministry on. First, 2 Samuel 10:12. I am not even going to preach on, I am just going to read them to you.

2 Samuel 10:12

Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good.

This is my own personal verse for the ministry. "Be of good courage and let us play the man for our people and for the city of our God and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good." You see, leadership is taking a stand and playing the man. "Man for our people and the city of our God."

Then my second verse for ministry is for you. That one is for me. But this one is to you.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

The world talks about soulmates. "Oh, she is my soulmate. He is my soulmate. Oh, look at him." This in the Bible is the true term because your soul and my soul was made one with His soul and together true soulmates are a man and a woman, people in a church because of what God has done in their soul knit their souls together for the work of God, mated for the work that God has called us to do. That is what Paul was frustrated with, the potential that he saw in people that many times has never realized. These are principles that will get you through. These are principles that when you work with people, people can be the most frustrating, discouraging thing on the planet. They will be. But for every five that wind up as zeros, God will give you one Titus and it will make the rest of them worth it all. I leave you never focused on what you do not have, kids. Focus on what you do have. I am going to pray and we are going to be dismissed in 10 minutes. We will meet back down here for our...