

False teachers had come to Corinth and sown doubt about Paul's authority and apostleship. Paul was forced to defend his God-given role so that the message of the gospel would not be distorted. He began this section in verse three by explaining that his team endeavored to not put obstacles in others' way so that there would be nothing to keep people from hearing the good news of Jesus. Then He listed nine things that they willingly endured to bring the Corinthians the undiluted Word of God. The troubles they endured were evidence that their ministry was unselfish and sincere. That illustrated the difference between Paul's team and the false teachers, who most likely lived in relative comfort and expected financial support from the church.

In our passage for today Paul continues by listing nine contrasting perspectives of his ministry, heaven's reality versus the world's point of view. *⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;* 2 Corinthians 6:8 The first is through *honor and dishonor*. It reminds me of brother Singh's testimony of how he was greeted by villages in the mountains of India. He said, "Sometimes I was greeted garlands and praise, and sometimes I was greeted with sticks and stones." He experienced what the Apostle Paul did. Some cities would welcome him, and some wanted to kill him. Sometimes it was a welcome and praise followed by stones. Nevertheless, the gospel was preached. Those who are mightily used by God will find there will always be both honor and dishonor.

Our Lord also faced honor and dishonor, honor from those who were open to the truth and dishonor from those whose religious expectations were different. That is because some people have been waiting for the message of light and love and others have long before rejected the wooing of the Holy Spirit and see the gospel as a threat to what they want to attain. Pilate attested to this. He knew the Jewish leaders had delivered Jesus up out of envy (Matthew 27:18ⁱ).

Think of those whom God has used in our time. Billy Graham was honored by presidents, but at the same time he was dishonored by many who were opposed to the gospel. The same is true of politicians whose only goal is to serve the people. They are honored by some and dishonored by others. The main reason the gospel is so threatening is that it demands that we humble ourselves and recognize our sin and our need for a Savior. **The gospel confronts the ego of mankind.**

Honor and dishonor results in *slander and praise*. Those who honor them will praise them, and those who dishonor them will slander them. I have experienced that to a minor degree. One thing I noticed is that when they cannot say anything against one's teaching or behavior, unless they distort it, they will attack one's motives. To face those attacks, one must have a clear conscience, which is essential for fighting the good fight (1 Timothy 1:18,19ⁱⁱ). Attacking a person's motives is effective because even if there is no wrongdoing a person can point to, no one but God and the person really know the heart's motives. So, it may or may not be true. And you cannot defend your motives other than by your sacrifices that give credence to your sincerity. That is probably one reason why Paul listed the sacrifices his team endured (1 Corinthians 15:10ⁱⁱⁱ).

The third contrast was that they were treated as imposters, yet true. This gets back to accusations of motives. These first three remind us of Jesus teaching. ²² *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!”* ²³ *Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.* Luke 6:22,23 If that is how they treated the prophets, we should feel honored when we are treated in the same way and for the same reasons.

Because Paul did not receive financial support from Corinth, some people accused him of not being worthy of that support. “He was not one of the twelve,” they may have said, “and therefore he is making things up.” The accusation against Paul is still made today. There are numerous groups that hold to the Bible except for the writings of the Apostle Paul. But as I illustrated in a previous sermon, Paul’s theology was the same as Jesus’ theology, both of which were based on the Old Testament. Those who claim that Paul was an imposter in our day have not delved into Paul’s consistent quotation of Scriptures to support statements he makes, nor have they done an honest comparison between Jesus’ teaching and that of Paul.

Additionally, they also do not have faith that Almighty God could deliver to us the Scriptures without error. To hold to their position, one would have to believe God allowed the majority of the New Testament to be corrupted. Luke wrote his Gospel and Acts which focused on Paul and was often Paul’s travel companion. If anyone would have noticed a discrepancy it would have been Luke who collected eyewitness accounts of what Jesus said and did (Luke 1:1-3^{iv}). Take out the writings of Luke and Paul and you lose two-thirds of the New Testament!

What is most painful to the minister of the Word is not the accusations against them, but that those who make them reject the truth. Ministers of the Word live to convey the truth of Scripture. When the minister is rejected as a person, the grief they feel is that the truth they proclaim is rejected. That is what Paul is concerned about and the reason he is defending his message. It is not about him, but about the message he proclaims being received to the glory of God.

⁹ *as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;* 2 Corinthians 6:9 Paul was with the Corinthians for quite a while and they knew him well, and yet the false teachers seemed to have them doubting who they knew him to be. That is why chapter three started, *“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?”* It was like they forgot who he was. Luke records that Paul told the Ephesian church, ³¹ *Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.* Acts 20:31 Though Paul was only half that time in Corinth, he was assuredly the same with them, admonishing them with tears. It must have been difficult for Paul to accept that the false teachers had so readily caused the Corinthians to doubt his heart.

As dying and yet we live. Was Paul referring to being stoned in Lystra and rising from the dead (Acts 14:19^v), or is he speaking of dying daily to self and living in Jesus (Galatians 2:20^{vi})? Perhaps it is not made clear so that we can read it either way. They

were always one incident away from execution by the Romans or murder by Jews. Yet they lived! Most importantly they had abundant spiritual life in Christ (John 10:10^{vii}).

The next pair, *punished but not killed*, emphasizes physical punishment. Sometimes they were beaten with rods. Later he will be beaten by a mob in the outer court of the temple (Acts 21:30-32^{viii}). Time and time again they were physically assaulted for proclaiming Jesus as the way to God, and yet they knew they would not die until they had finished their race and completed the mission God had for them (Acts 20:24^{ix}). When we look at their example, how can we complain about a little verbal abuse or rejection by a family member? Paul declared in his letter to Timothy that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12^x).

Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List reports that 360 million Christians around the world suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. Since 1993 the number of nations in which there were extreme persecution has almost doubled, from 40 to 76 nations. In 2022, 5,621 Christians were martyred, 90% of whom were in Nigeria.

¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. 2 Corinthians 6:10 This is the last trio of contrasts. They were sorrowful. We can see another connection with the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who mourn. (Mathew 5:4^{xi}). When you see people not receiving the glorious truth of the gospel or people who you poured your life into turning and going back to the world, it brings great sorrow of heart (2 Timothy 4:10^{xii}). It is not just that they rejected our love, but they have rejected God and His gracious offer of salvation. We know the end of that decision will be worse than they ever imagined. We know the lie of self-indulgence only ends in suffering and that is the last thing we would want for them.

We also are sorrowful for those who suffer physically or emotionally because we share the heart of God who cares about our pain and suffering. Paul said he would have sorrow upon sorrow if Epaphroditis had not survived (Philippians 2:27^{xiii}) **A selfish person abhors the thought of entering into someone else's pain, but we go there because of God's heart in us (Hebrews 5:2^{xiv}).** We weep with those who weep (Romans 12;15^{xv}).

At the same time, we are always rejoicing because we cast our burdens on the Lord. We know He hears our prayers. We know He alone can take calamity and bring good from it (Genesis 50:20^{xvi}). Even when we cannot understand His hand, we can know His heart (1 John 4:9^{xvii}). We know how great His love is for us. Our sorrow is great, but our consolation is even greater.

As poor, but making many rich. Here we have one more connection with the Sermon on the Mount, blessed are the poor (Luke 6:20^{xviii}). Christians are not always poor, but it seems that many of them are. Most of the early church were slaves. Not many Christians can be trusted with wealth. Desperation can cause us to seek the Lord. Wealth can cause us to depend on our financial position rather than on God. It takes someone solid in their faith to be wealthy and yet to serve God. Jesus declared that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:24^{xix}). Most of us are very rich compared to the people Jesus was addressing. It is nearly impossible for us to be saved. When the disciples heard this, they asked Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus told them that with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Luke

19:25,26^{xx}). Our salvation is a miraculous work of God. All of us who are wealthy by the world's standards were saved by a miracle of God. Hallelujah! We should be extremely grateful that God would save even us! Yet, we should always be aware of how money can easily become an idol (Matthew 6:24^{xxi}). I think Paul started off rich by the standards of that day, and yet in service to His Lord he became poor.

Though they were poor, they made many rich. A person in poverty can be the richest person on earth spiritually. We do not have to be rich to share the true wealth. Our greatest treasure is our relationship with Jesus. It is worth more than all the world has to offer (Luke 12:21^{xxii}).

The last contrast is that we seem to have nothing the world has to offer, and yet we have everything. That is because we are in Christ who has all things (1 Corinthians 3:21-23^{xxiii}). Everything comes from Him. The meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5^{xxiv})! Our Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills! If we are in need, we go to our heavenly Father who will provide what we need when we need it (Philippians 4:19^{xxv}). What security we have in Jesus. In fact, we of all people are the most secure. That is because whether we live or die, we are the Lord's (Romans 14:8^{xxvi}).

¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. 2

Corinthians 6:11 Paul did not hold back sharing anything that was in his heart. He told them exactly how he felt. He had nothing to hide. His love for them was unselfish, and there was a personal cost to him (7:3^{xxvii}; 12:15^{xxviii}). He could only say this because he truly loved them, and his conscience was clear. He is an example for us all in dealing with the family of God. Your labor of love will sometimes be misunderstood. Your motives will be questioned. Not everyone will appreciate what you are trying to do for them. Nevertheless, we are commanded to love one another (John 13:34^{xxix}). Paul was practicing what he preached. The love he had for the church was from God, and though he addressed their lack of love, he did not love them any less. They grieved his heart, and he did not love them less. Let us be determined to let God do the same miraculous work in us.

We pray for miracles but one of the greatest miracles is when a human can overlook other humans' faults and be like Jesus is to us, genuinely concerned for others' welfare, giving freely of our time, and if necessary, finances as well. Many of you have been a great example of this caring for the elderly as they go through their last stages of life. I believe God is glorified in that as much as in some missionary in a dangerous field. We tend to look at those who are accomplishing great things and think they are more special, unique, God's favored ones. But I am sure God is just as glorified and blessed by the quiet acts of selfless giving and service that go on within a Christian community. For it is God who accomplishes the work through us. Everything He does is special. Even Jesus declared, "the Father who dwells in me does His work" (John 14:10b^{xxx}). Just think what a glorious thing it is for God to work through you, helping you be a selfless instrument in His hands! May the unconditional love of Christ flow through us to a world in need.

¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 2

Corinthians 6:12 Paul is saying that his team is not forcing them to do anything. They are

not demanding that the Corinthians do something about their lack of love. They are asking them to receive the immoral brother since he has repented (2:6-8^{xxxix}). He is asking them to consider the need to restore their attitude toward him and his team, but he is not going to withhold his love if they do not. His heart is wide open to them.

The issue being addressed is that the church had restricted their affection for Paul due to the influence of the false teachers. Some of the congregation in Corinth were the ones withholding the love that Jesus commanded us to have toward one another. They were not reciprocating the love that Paul had for them.

¹³ *In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.* 2 Corinthians 6:13 Paul concludes with a plea to the church to respond to the love and sacrifice that he has for them by widening their hearts (7:2^{xxxix}). He wrote to them as father to his beloved children (1 Corinthians 4:14^{xxxix}). This is the solution to most church problems. Love one another. Respond to love with love. Refuse to think you know others motives and think the best of others. As Paul told the Philippians, *“In humility count others as more significant than yourselves”* Philippians 2:3^{xxxix} ⁴ *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

What an example of love he has set for us in how to respond to those who have hardened their hearts towards us. We should never respond by hardening our own hearts. If Christ is in us, we must respond with His love. We must continue to have loving concern for them and always keep the door open to reconciliation. That is our ministry (5:18^{xxxv}). We must let the love and life of Christ be manifest in our mortal bodies if we are to glorify God (2 Corinthians 4:11^{xxxvi}).

I will close with a quote from Pastor Kent Hughes. He writes, *It is the same for us today. We commend the gospel to our families and the church and the world by our faithful endurance. The call to follow Christ is a call to endure in sufferings, by the graces of the Spirit, through righteousness, riding the triumphant, exultant paradoxes of Christ, thereby demonstrating that our faith in Christ is real and that he is worth our full allegiance.*^{xxxvii}

Questions:

- 1 Why was Paul telling the Corinthians what he endured?
- 2 Why does the world dishonor those who share the gospel?
- 3 Why does Satan accuse the minister's motives?
- 4 Why should we trust Paul's writings?
- 5 Review the three contrasts in verse 9.
- 6 Review the three contrasts in verse 10.
7. Which ones come out of the Beatitudes?
- 8 Is your heart wide open to the family of God?

ⁱ **Matthew 27:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

ⁱⁱ **1 Timothy 1:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

^{iv} **Luke 1:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

^v **Acts 14:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

^{vi} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{vii} **John 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

^{viii} **Acts 21:30-32 (ESV)**

³⁰ Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

^{ix} **Acts 20:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

^x **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

^{xi} **Matthew 5:4 (ESV)**

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

^{xii} **2 Timothy 4:10 (KJV)**

¹⁰ For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

^{xiii} **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{xiv} **Hebrews 5:2 (ESV)**

² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

^{xv} **Romans 12:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

^{xvi} **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

^{xvii} **1 John 4:9 (ESV)**

⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

^{xviii} **Luke 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

^{xix} **Matthew 19:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

^{xx} **Matthew 19:25-26 (ESV)**

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

^{xxi} **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xxii} **Luke 12:21 (ESV)**

²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

^{xxiii} **1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV)**

²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

^{xxiv} **Matthew 5:5 (ESV)**

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

^{xxv} **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

^{xxvi} **Romans 14:8 (ESV)**

⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.

^{xxvii} **2 Corinthians 7:3 (ESV)**

³ I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

^{xxviii} **2 Corinthians 12:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

^{xxix} **John 13:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

^{xxx} **John 14:10b (ESV)**

^{10b} ... the Father who dwells in me does his works.

^{xxxi} **2 Corinthians 2:6-8 (ESV)**

⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

^{xxxii} **2 Corinthians 7:2 (ESV)**

² Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.

^{xxxiii} **1 Corinthians 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

^{xxxiv} **Philippians 2:3 (ESV)**

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

^{xxxv} **2 Corinthians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

^{xxxvi} **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{xxxvii} R. Kent Hughes, [2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 137.