

2 Corinthians 12 (Part 2): 11-21 • Spend Yourself for God's Kingdom

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

2 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 11, beginning of verse 11, our second part in this chapter. Paul writes:

“I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. ¹³ For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

¹⁴ Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ (I will most likely, excuse me) I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the (iniquity, excuse me) impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Jesus, fill us with understanding, fill us with insight and truth. We ask it, Lord, in Your Name, amen.

This last part of 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, begins with Paul saying I'm a fool. I've been speaking like a fool. He had stooped to the level of boasting that the false apostles had engaged in. And he was very clear to say, this is a very foolish thing for me to do. But then he quickly said, “¹¹..but you forced me to it...”

Interesting, isn't it? And the reason he said that is because the Corinthians, they were well aware of his life. They were well aware of his ministry. They were well aware of all that he had done among them: all the ministry, all the miracles, all the stuff. And they should have seen through the false pride of those other super apostles that had showed up there in Corinth. And they should have remembered what Paul had done, and they should have understood everything that proved who he really was as an apostle.

In fact, he said in verse 12, look with me there again, he said, “*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*” Isn't that interesting? He calls them the signs of a true apostle. In other words, an apostolic ministry was attended by signs, signs. And you'll notice he even uses three words to describe those things or phrases in this, in the third one, they are signs, wonders, and mighty works.

You might say, well, what's the difference? Well, there actually are differences. A sign is just like you would expect to see on the highway. A sign is a pointer, it points to something. And in a sign, which is a miraculous something or other, is a pointer, if you will, to say, this is true. And that's why signs attended the ministry of an apostle because that sign said, this is true. This is a true ministry of an apostle, right?

And then he talked about wonders, and a wonder is just what you would imagine. It was something to evoke wonder or awe, to get one somebody to realize that, wow! This is amazing. And then finally, mighty works are literally a demonstration of divine power. In other words, it's power that goes beyond my power, your power. When you see it, you say, that's God! That can only be God. Right? And so mighty power or mighty works are something that communicates this is from God, and there's no possible getting around it.

You know how sometimes something will happen in our lives and we'll just say, wow, that was just so God. And usually, I found in my own experience, one of the best ways to determine what is God is what is so opposite me, right? In other words, if God says something to me that I don't want to hear, it's probably God, right? If God does something that I think is just like, it's like, well, I wouldn't have done that. That's probably God or here's another way, if it's

definitely the opposite of the way the world thinks, does, works, whatever, it's God. It's just one of those things that calls your attention. We've all had things happen in our lives, I'll bet. And we're just like, wow, that was so God. Maybe we got close to death in an accident or something like that, but we know that we know that we know that we were spared, that was God.

And there are obviously other things that mark a true apostle. But these are some of the things that Paul says, they mark a true apostle. Some of the other things that mark a true apostle are faithfulness to the message, right? If he veers off the message, problem. Also, his perseverance in the face of suffering. That's a mark of a true apostle. He sticks it out. He sticks it out.

Verse 13, Paul goes on to say, *“For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? ...”* And what he means by that is, I didn't take your money. That's what he means by : *“...I didn't burden you...”* In other words, when I was there living among you, I never asked for anything. I never sought your help financially. I worked during the day as a tent maker. I did the ministry of the gospel in my free hours. And I never asked you for anything, he says.

And he says, and that was the only place where you were maybe less favored than other churches. I didn't burden you. I didn't ask anything of you. And the reason he says that is because a true apostle, and Paul knows this, has a right to that support, and yet Paul never took it. He refused to accept that support, but somehow the people made it; they thought that made him less apostolic or something less of an apostle.

Paul goes on, he says, *“¹⁴ Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.”*

Paul tells them his next visit is imminent. But he also lets them know, hey, I haven't been saying all this stuff about support, so that when I come, you're going to start supporting me, because I want you guys to know something, my policy will not change among you. When I come for the third time, I will not allow you to help me. And the reason is because I want you to know, it's not your belongings I want, it's you, it's you.

Look at verse 15 to me, this is the sweet spot of this half of the chapter: *“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls...”* Boy, when he talks about spending and being spent, he's talking about spending his own money to take care of his needs. But when he talks about being spent now, he's talking about

giving of himself. He's talking about literally pouring himself out on their behalf.

And I got to tell you this statement; this verse convicts me a little bit. No, that's not true. It convicts me a lot of bit. And the reason it does is because Paul is writing to a bunch of ingrates, for the most part. He's writing to a bunch of people who have been believing the worst about him, and they seemed all too willing to do that. Do you know what I mean? To believe the worst? And they have been actively withholding their love from him. Think about that, you guys. You're a leader, you're ministering to people, and those people are actively withholding their love from you. Doesn't that just endear you to those folks? What would you say to those people? Wow!

What Paul says to them is, when I come, I'm going to be spent. I'm more than willing to be spent on your behalf. And this gives us a very important glimpse into the heart and the mind of the Apostle Paul, but more than that, the heart and mind of Christ, because it communicates something that exposes something in the rest of us.

You see, because we're human, we really like it when people appreciate us and love us. At least I do. I mean, I just like you. I like getting nice little notes that say, gee, Pastor Paul, you're the best. And I know it's not true, but I like hearing it anyway. And I don't like it when somebody goes, you stink! And I get a lot of that on YouTube, believe it or not. And they often don't use a word that's quite that nice.

I'm human. You're human. We like to be liked. We like to be appreciated. And there's nothing wrong with appreciating what others do for us. There's really nothing wrong, even totally, with being appreciated. But when it becomes the primary motive of why we do what we do, then it begins to dictate what we do. Did you hear me? When it becomes the primary motive of why we do and what we do, then it becomes why we do what we do.

In other words, somebody starts off in some ministry, and maybe even for a season they feel strongly about that ministry, but eventually they don't get appreciated the way they feel they should. And so it begins to erode their zeal and their desire to continue on in that area of ministry. And I've seen it many times. Somebody says, I used to serve in this one church I went to, and then I stopped. In fact, I even stopped attending because I served in that area for two years and never once did anyone come up to me and say, thank you, I appreciate what you're doing. So, I left.

I've heard that before. And some of you might be understanding or thinking to yourself, I can understand how they feel. I mean, I get it. Well, you know what? We all can. We can all understand how they feel. We all know what it's like to be underappreciated or not appreciated at all. But that doesn't change the fact that what that attitude shows or what it reveals is that appreciation was the primary motive for carrying on.

Maybe not for starting, because you know, you don't usually get appreciation when you just start a ministry. But as you've been doing it, maybe you've been plugging along for years. What's going to keep you plugging on for years to come? If it's appreciation, if that's going to be your goal, then, and you don't get that, then you're probably going to say, yeah, I think I'm done, I'm just not getting the appreciation.

All, and all I'm saying about this is that the apostle Paul wasn't motivated that way. Because he's writing to people who didn't really appreciate him. He's writing to people who actually were actively withholding their love from him. He's writing to people who were believing the worst about him. And he writes them and he says, I'm coming back. That's the first thing that's amazing to me. He was willing to go back. I would have just written these people off. Forget you guys. I'm going to go where I'm appreciated. I mean, that's the humanity that can very easily dictate my steps, right?

But instead Paul writes to them and says, I'm going to come back. And when I do, I'm going to spend myself on you. Wow. You know what? Paul was just practicing what he preached. Let me show you a passage where he said something very profound in his letter to the church of the Colossians.

Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, AS FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR MEN, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

He said, “*Whatever you do, work, HEARTILY AS FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR MEN* (I'm the one who capitalized that there for you.) *knowing that it is from the Lord that you're going to receive an inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*” You're not ultimately serving men. We serve men, but ultimately we don't serve for them. We serve for the Lord. That's what Paul's saying, do it as unto the Lord, not for men. Why? Because men will turn around and say nasty things, and they'll underappreciate you. They will decide, maybe even somebody else can do it better than you. And if your eyes are on men, and if it is on the appreciation of men, you're probably going to get

discouraged, you're going to possibly stop serving, and you might even break out of fellowship completely. Not uncommon.

And that's... so that, that passage from Colossians and what Paul is saying here is something that every single believer needs to be reminded about, because we are to take on service for the Lord. But here's the question we have to ask: Why am I doing it? That's critical. Why am I doing this?

Am I doing it so people can see? I love the people that come here and serve without anybody watching. People come in during the week; you never get to see them, and they scrub, and they clean, and they put things away, and they do this. And they didn't—you never—they could be sitting right next to you, and they're one of those people you don't even know because you're not here during the week, and you don't see them; nobody hardly does. But they're giving, and they're not doing it for appreciation.

But you know, this attitude of doing it as unto the Lord or doing it for the right reasons, it also reflects the heart of our Savior. I want to show you some interesting words, and these words were spoken on the very night that Jesus would be arrested, beaten, and ultimately taken to be crucified. I don't know what would be going through your mind if you knew that you were hours away from those things happening to you. Here's what Jesus said,

Luke 22:27 (ESV)

For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Luke chapter 22, he says, “*For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table?...*” Yeah, of course, he's the one who's being served. Look what Jesus says, “... *But I am among you as the one who serves.*” It's not just the statement that blows me away. It's the timing of the statement.

When I know that there's something big going on in my life that's probably going to be painful, scary/dreadful, I'm not thinking about serving other people. I'm thinking about myself pretty intimately. I've got every focal method that I can use to reach out, and it's all reaching in at that moment. I'm thinking about my anxiety level, and I'm just thinking about me. The only reason I can admit that to you is because I know you do the same. But here is Jesus, here is this incredible attitude; Jesus is talking.

You guys got to remember, at the Last Supper, right after Jesus got done saying that He was going to be crucified, the disciples started a conversation on which of them would be the greatest. And Jesus said things like, this very night one of you will betray me. And all they could think about was, is it me? (Matthew 26:20-22). They were so me-centered, and talk about a lack of appreciation! Oh! And yet, what was the attitude of Jesus while He was there with those men? I am among you as one who serves. I am here to serve. I'm here to serve you, not for what I can get out of it, but just to give. And that's where Paul was too, when I come back, he says, I will gladly spend it all on your behalf.

Can you see why I'm—I get convicted by that statement? It's the heart of the Savior. It's a real, true attitude of service. And I fall so short. And that's the example that I want to have. I want to have it. Even when you're saying nasty things or even when someone is saying nasty things about you or doing things that show their lack of appreciation or their lack of concern for you, we need to be the people who take up the same attitude. Lord, how can I serve that person? How can I spend myself, not save but spend?

Jesus talked about the one who would save his own life; he says, he'll actually lose it. But the one who would lose his life for my sake will actually find it (Matthew 16:25). And I think there's an element in that of losing and saving, related to giving of our lives or hoarding our lives. Is your life something for you to hang on to and to keep for yourself, or is it something to give away?

Paul ends the chapter, verse 16, “*But granting that I myself did not burden you (in other words, he said, when I was there, I didn't take your money.) I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit.*” And apparently, this is something Paul was accused of: being deceitful by perhaps refusing support outwardly but taking advantage of them in other ways. We don't know; we don't know the specifics of this accusation. All we know is that Paul is addressing some accusation.

He asks them to reason, he says, “¹⁷ *Did I take advantage of you...*” How about through any of the guys I sent to you? How about Titus? Did he take advantage of you? You remember, I sent him with somebody else for the accountability. Did those guys, did or did they do things just like I do? And that's what he says here, “*...Did we not act in the same spirit?...*” That's what he says there at the end of verse 18.

In other words, didn't they do just what I do? Didn't they work all day long and not take any of your money? How did they take advantage of you? And you see what Paul is doing here; in verses 17 and 18, he asks them four different

questions, and he's trying to reason with them to understand that this has no basis in reality.

Have you ever wondered why we're so eager to believe the worst in people? When somebody says something, well, I think the guy's deceitful, actually. I, yeah, I just, I'll just be honest with you; I think the guy is just flat out deceitful. Why are we so, why are we so anxious to just go, I never thought of it that way? I think you're right, rather than reasoning it out and saying, well, first of all, what do you mean by that, even? I don't get what you're saying because that doesn't match reality. That's what the Corinthians should have done.

That's why, Paul said at the beginning of this section, we're looking at you drove me to it. You should have been there defending me. When these false apostles were yang, yang, yang, saying this and saying that about me, you should have stood up because you know my ministry, you know my life, and you know that I didn't take advantage of you. And neither did any of the men who came that I sent take advantage of you.

Why is it though? Why is it that we are so eager to believe the worst? Well, there's a proverb that helps us to understand this. It's Proverbs chapter 18, and it goes like this:

Proverbs 18:8 (ESV)

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Now, I don't use the phrase "*choice morsels*." I never say to my wife, when she makes a nice dinner, oh, honey, those are choice morsels. Never once said that. Now, what I will say is, that really looks good, or that's delicious, right?

What is being said here in this proverb? It's making a statement about human nature. You see, "*choice morsels*" is a phrase that means something irresistible. What's he saying? He's saying gossip is irresistible. It's like, for me, it would be something akin to eating pizza or chocolate. I've got to tell you, I've got a major weakness for pizza and chocolate. I can't eat them like I used to, but I still love them. I do, and I hate that I can't eat them like I used to when I was younger. But that's why I eat those things, because I love them. You with me?

Do you know why we listen to gossip? We love it, just like my pizza and chocolate thing, right? That's why we— that's why we listen to gossip or backbiting, which they're first cousins. Okay, gossip and backbiting. We like it.

Here's, I asked you the question. Why are we so anxious to believe things about people that are so negative? We like to, it's fun. It's like eating pizza, give me another piece. It's like, have you— I love it, sometimes my wife is such a delightful creature, she'll have— still have some chocolate. And I'll say, can I have some of that? And she'll break me off this little piece. I'm like, come on. I want to eat it all. You know? And then after I'm done, I want to go to the store and buy more because I like it. It's enjoyable. It's delicious. And it's the same way about gossip. It's delicious, but it goes down into the inmost parts. Yeah, it sticks to you, right. And that's the nasty thing about it.

Nobody ever told me when I was young that there would come a day in my life where I couldn't eat as much pizza and chocolate. I'm glad they didn't tell me; I would have probably sat down and cried. But it actually came, probably sometime in my 40s. In fact, we went over to some friends' house on the 31st, just to get together and hang out, and I walk in the door, and we walked through the kitchen, and what do I see laying on the counter? There's about five different pizzas, piping hot, sitting there on the counter.

I knew I was going to see that, so before I went there, I had a bowl of cereal to try to just take the edge off, sort of, and you know what? I went, I have to say, I went the whole evening, and I didn't eat one piece of pizza. Are you proud of me? Thank you. I just—no, no, no—just because we will probably have pizza this afternoon, so don't worry about it.

But I got to tell you how hard that was. That was really hard, saying... I mean, looking at that pizza sitting there, and I love pepperoni pizza, and it was sitting there looking at me, going, eat me! but I didn't. And I got to thinking about that, and I thought, you know what? I can do the same thing when it comes to gossip and listening to backbiting. I can say no. And so can you because we know that it's not good for us, and it's not good for the Kingdom of God. It's not good for the body of Christ. And you and I can say no. We don't, even though it's delicious, have to gulp it down. We don't have to, right?

I think that's an important thing to remember. It's kind of some of the stuff what Paul's saying here the Corinthians. They had just gulped down these choice morsels, these delicious tidbits of backbiting and gossip, and believed the worst. And Paul's saying, you don't have to do that.

Verse 19, he says, “*Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?...*” Not hardly, he says, “*...It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ (but it’s all been) for your upbuilding (he says, and then, he calls him) beloved.*” Beloved, again that’s not a term that I use when I’m talking to people.

Jay Venon McGee always ended all of his— you guys remember listening to Jay Vernon? What a great Bible teacher from years gone by. He’s with the Lord now. But every single broadcast ended by him calling his listeners, my beloved. And I loved his southern way of saying it too. But it’s a term of endearment, right?

It’s a term of intimacy and love and tenderness, and again, Paul’s talking to these people who are ingrates. He’s talking to these people who underappreciate him. He’s talking about people who have been gulping down these morsels of backbiting and gossip and believed it. And now, they’re withholding their love and he calls them beloved. Do you get that, how cool that is? How Jesus that is, right? But Paul wanted them to know.

And what he is saying here in verse 19 is that he's not defending himself to them as if they considered them the judge and jury. Paul knew that Jesus was the ultimate judge, and he was serving them for Christ. You with me? He was not serving them for them. That's the critical thing that you and I need to see. That's where we fail in our service. We serve people for people; you need to serve people for Jesus. He says, do you think I've been defending myself to you? Nope. I've been saying everything I've been saying before God, right? I've been saying this, I stand or fall to Him. That's what Paul is saying here.

But he says, I’ve been saying these things to build you up to rescue you from this dangerous place you have put yourselves into. And then he ends, he says, “²⁰*For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish , and (on the same token) that you may find me not as you wish...*” In other words, not Mr. happy grandpa, come and sit on my lap, but rather in a place where I need to take out my stick.

Every shepherd had a staff for a reason. And he’s like, I don’t want to use it on you guys. And he’s not talking literally, but figuratively; he’s talking about, I don’t want to have to come and just bring corrections. I want to come and enjoy my time with you. But he says, I’m afraid that when I get there, I’m going to find all these things among you, like: “*quarreling (and), jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.*” Wow, what a laundry list. And yet, he injects the most incredible hope at the end of that.

And, by the way, this list of sins is not your typical list of oh, I messed up today. Like we all mess up every day, right? We all sin. We all sin. We all mess up on a daily basis. This isn't that. Paul's talking about some pretty nasties here. And yet, he injects into that laundry list of nasty sins this hope where he says, I don't want to have to mourn over you. I want instead to come and find that you have repented. I fear when I come that you will not have repented, but I want you to have repented.

I don't know. I just think that's an incredibly important statement because you see, repentance—ah—one of the most underappreciated elements of our Christian walk. We've allowed it to be smeared a little bit by crazy, half-loony people that walk around the streets of major cities with signs and placards that say, REPENT! The world's coming to an end. And then everybody goes, yeah. And they associate that weirdness with the whole idea of repentance.

And suddenly, repentance takes on this connotation of weirdness. It's like, well, weird people repent. No, repentance is critical. It is key to our Christian existence. When we are caught in sin, there's still hope. Repent, turn to God. And that's what repentance is. Turning to God, turning away from that thing, and turning to God. There's always hope. I love it. I love that Paul always injects that hope because there is hope.

I've sat and talked to people, telling them about Jesus, telling them about the cross, and they'll inevitably start telling me about why Jesus can't do anything for them. And it always has to do with the sin—the brand of sin that they're into. Yeah, you don't know about my life. And then they'll start telling me things that raise the hair on the back of your neck. Yeah. But you know what? There's repentance, no matter what it is, no matter what it is that you have done. Repentance is always an option. Turn to God; there's hope.

If you're just going to stay where you are and say, I can't be saved, well, you're stuck. But don't do that. Don't let the enemy keep you there, right? Don't let the enemy keep you in that place of sin, thinking somehow that you're the worst of the worst and there's no possible hope for you. There is always hope because Jesus died for the worst of sinners. And if that's you, own up to it, but know this: there's hope, always, always hope.