

## Building Up Your Church

(2 Corinthians 12:11-21)

In this passage, we find some key reasons the church at Corinth is not doing well. It has all kinds of problems. There are problems on the inside tearing the church apart, as well as the sins of its members that are ruining the church's reputation on the outside. Therefore, Paul writes about some of the things that can ruin any church. In this passage, we can find some principles needed to build up your church, beginning with ...

### **Defend church leaders against slander (12:11-18).**

Paul writes, *I have been a fool!* (12:11a). Paul has reluctantly defended himself, but it has been so distasteful he feels like he has *been a fool*. He knows what truth recorded in Proverbs 27:2?

Nobody likes to hear you "toot your own horn." Only arrogant people do that. Paul continues, *You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you* (12:11b). Paul is broken-hearted that the church at Corinth failed to defend him from slander. The Corinthians have forced Paul to defend himself because they refused to do so. Their failure to defend Paul is inexcusable because they know the allegations against him are false. As we have mentioned several times, Paul lived among the Corinthians and taught God's Word for a year and a half (Acts 18:11).

When a church leader (or anyone) is being slandered, those who know the truth should immediately come to his or her defense. The only way to stop vicious gossip is to confront it. That is the right thing - the good thing to do. What does God tell us in James 4:17?

It is a sin to hear good people being slandered and not do anything to stop it. If someone tries to share vicious gossip with you, ask these questions: "Where did you hear that?" and then, "Why are you repeating it to me?" Even if a story is true, the only reasons to repeat it are to help or protect someone. Otherwise, repeating it is nothing more than the horrible sin of gossip.

Paul writes that the Corinthians know Paul is *not at all inferior to these super-apostles* (12:11c). *Super-apostles* are a facetious reference to the false teachers. Actually, Paul is superior, not inferior, to these false apostles because he is a **true** apostle. Paul continues by humbly describing himself, *even though I am nothing* (12:11d). Concerning this, what does Paul write in Galatians 6:3?

He knows we are spiritually *nothing* apart from Jesus Christ. We *can do nothing* of spiritual value without Christ (Jn 15:5).

When Paul was in Corinth, God verified him as a true apostle by supernaturally empowering him. Therefore, Paul reminds his readers, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works* (12:12). God performed many miracles through Paul in many places. However, in Corinth, Paul demonstrated God's power with great *patience* time and again, so there can be no question he is a true apostle.

Continuing, Paul writes, *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!* (12:13). This means the only thing he failed to do for the Corinthians, which he did in the other churches, was become a financial burden to them. So, Paul sarcastically asks them to *forgive* him of this *wrong*.

Paul explains he is ready to visit them for *the third time* but will not be a burden to them. He wants them, not what they have (12:14a-b). How does he further explain his reasoning (12:14c)?

Paul is their spiritual father, and children do not normally provide for their parents. However, parents often provide for their children even after they are grown. I once saw this sign that said: "Money doesn't buy everything, but it does keep the kids in touch." I would add "grandkids" to that statement.

To explain his sacrifice, Paul writes: *I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?* (12:15). He will gladly spend all his money and himself for their souls. However, it seems to Paul that the more he loves the Corinthians, the less they love him.

Now Paul comes back to one of the accusations made against him. *But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit* (12:16). Paul's critics erroneously claim he *got the better* of them *by deceit*. In his defense, what does Paul ask in the next verse (12:17)?

Then, Paul specifically refers to Titus, to whom Paul gave the difficult job of delivering the severe letter to Corinth (8:6, 16, 23). The Corinthians know Titus well. Paul asks if Titus *took advantage* of them. Paul next challenges the Corinthians to remember that he and Titus acted in *the same spirit* and took *the same steps*. They did things in the same way with impeccable integrity (12:18).

There is no excuse for not defending church leaders when they are accused of things you know are untrue. Never forget the word "devil" translates the Greek word DIABOLOS (dee-ab'-o-los), which means slanderer. One of Satan's most effective weapons is to slander church leaders.

To build up your church, **defend church leaders against slander** and ...

### **Denounce divisive sins (12:19-20).**

Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to misunderstand his defense. Therefore, he writes he is defending himself *in the sight of God and speaking in Christ*, which means for spiritual reasons, not to protect his reputation. His defense is for the worthy goal of upbuilding, or strengthening, the Corinthians, whom he calls *beloved* (12:19).

Paul writes, *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* (12:20a-b). Paul is afraid when he comes to Corinth, he will find things not to his liking and the believers will not like his response. Then, in the remainder of verse 20, he lists eight sins he fears he will find in the church that will tear it down.

The first is *quarreling*, or "debates" (12:20c). This refers to contention and strife. What truth do we read in Proverbs 17:14?

Quarreling may seem like a minor matter. However, it is like a small crack in a dam that gets larger until the dam breaks. So, *stop quarreling* before it starts and spirals out of control.

Second, Paul lists *jealousy*, or "envyings" (12:20d). Jealousy (ZELOS, zay'-los) is resentment against a rival (Acts 5:17). How does God warn us about jealousy in Proverbs 27:4?

Anger and wrath can be cruel, but they usually don't last very long. In contrast, *jealousy* can fester and grow for years or even a lifetime. It is impossible to appease *jealousy*, which is usually accompanied by *every vile*, or evil, *practice* (Jas. 3:16).

Third, Paul lists *anger*, or "wraths" (12:20e). The word translated anger (THYMOS, thoo-mos') refers to hot or violent anger that results in wrath, which is anger let loose.

Fourth in the list is *hostility*, or "strife's" (12:20f). This refers to selfish ambition that causes rivalry and factions.

Next is *slander*, or "backbitings" (12:20g). This translates a Greek word (KATALALIA, ka-tah-la-lee'-ah), which means to defame someone.

Sixth, Paul lists *gossip*, or "whisperings" (12:20h). The Greek word means "to whisper in someone's ear." *Slander* is done openly and publicly, but gossip is done privately or secretly.

Seventh on the list is *conceit*, or "swellings" (12:20i) The Greek word (PHYSIOSIS, fi-see'-o-sis) means "puffed up or swelling with pride." The obvious display of pride is arrogance, which is an offensive exhibit of superiority or self-importance. What does God say about pride and arrogance in Proverbs 8:13b?

Pride is a horrible sin because it makes us unwilling to admit any other sin.

Finally, Paul lists *disorder*, or "tumults," which is disorderly behavior caused by the previous sins (12:20j).

To build up your church, **defend church leaders against slander, denounce divisive sins, and**

### **Determine to avoid all sexual sin (12:21).**

In verse 21a, Paul first writes that he fears God will again *humble* him when he visits the Corinthian church. Next, he writes about his fear that certain sins are still present in the lives of the members. If this is true, he may have to *mourn* over the situation (12:21b). These sins are ruining the church's reputation, as they will any church. Here are the sexual sins Paul fears some have not repented of: *impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality* (12:21c).

*Impurity*, or "uncleanness," refers to sexual impurity or perversion. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul tells us God's point of view concerning sex between two women or two men. Just prior to these verses, what does Paul write to introduce this passage (Romans I :24)?

Next, Paul lists sexual *immorality*, or "fornication" (12:21). This translates the Greek word (PORNEIA, por-nee '-ah), from which we get our words "porno" and "pornography." It means "illicit sexual intercourse." This includes adultery, but also all sex outside the marriage of a man and woman. Paul has already commanded them: *Flee from sexual immorality!* (I Cor. 6:18a).

The third sexual sin Paul lists is *sensuality*, or "lasciviousness" (12:21). This refers to "promiscuity," or unrestrained, indiscriminate sex.

Paul fears God's commands he related in *1 Corinthians* have gone unheeded. As Christians today, we must not follow the Corinthians' example. We must not let a pagan society dictate what is right and wrong sexually. We must always remember what truth expressed in 1 Corinthians 6:20?