

- Good morning, everyone. Good to see you, especially given the fact that the time changed. Gaining an hour in the fall is not bad at all, but losing an hour in the spring can be a little rough.
  - Anyway, I appreciate everyone who made it this morning.
  - So, last week I attempted to finish Chapter 12, which didn't happen. And, as I stated at the end of last week's message, I want to pick back up on the last few verses of Chapter 12 before we move into Chapter 13. So, with that in mind, let's back up and re-read the final verses of Chapter 12, and use that as a segway into today's teaching.
- Beginning with verse 14 and finishing up with verse 21, here's what Paul wrote:

**2 Cor. 12:14** Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children.

**2 Cor. 12:15** I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

**2 Cor. 12:16** But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, devious person that I am, I took you in by deceit.

- Paul, once again, is using sarcasm to drive his point home.

**2 Cor. 12:17** *Certainly* I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?

**2 Cor. 12:18** I urged Titus *to go*, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit *and walk* in the same steps?

**2 Cor. 12:19** All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for building you up, beloved.

**2 Cor. 12:20** For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish, and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, selfishness, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

**2 Cor. 12:21** *I am afraid* that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and indecent behavior which they have practiced.

- In this last section of verses of Chapter 12, Paul pretty much ends with an exclamation point or “crescendo” of sorts as he defends his Apostleship. Remember, Paul has been writing to the Corinthian church for quite some time, ‘rebutting & refuting’ those false teachers who’ve have made their way into this fellowship and have been trying to

downplay Paul and the other Apostle's position and authority.

- I say this is a crescendo moment because he makes a move from speaking about the issues (somewhat subtly) to speaking much more direct and much more sarcastically. That's where he is in the final verses of Chapter 12, and as I said, he pretty much cuts to the chase where he reminds them that neither he nor the other apostles have been a burden to this church.
- Now, when he speaks about being a burden, he's speaking specifically about taking money from the church, which I find interesting, especially in light of what we see in churches today. I'm not going expound on this too much other than to say, the Church at Corinth is wealthy. It has money.
  - Corinth was a wealthy area. It was a double seaport town. Corinth was an isthmus, a narrow strip of land which connected the Gulf of Corinth in the Ionian Sea with the Saronic Gulf in the Aegean Sea. And that entire area was a very wealthy place during that time.
  - And so, as I said, the Church at Corinth had money, and Paul urged them in his writings to take up an offering. But like I said, it wasn't for him or the other Apostles. He wanted to take up an offering for the poorer church of Jerusalem. And Paul was known for this. He wanted the wealthier churches to help provide for the basic needs of the poorer churches.
  - And so, what's that tell us, or more specifically, what is one of the examples or models we can deduct from Paul's behavior? It's a model that says churches should help one another. It also gives us a reason why God requires us to give in the first place. To help one another.
- You see, as a believer, God requires you to give. But the question is how much or what percentage should you give? Well, let's see if Paul can give us the answer to that question. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2:

**1 Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you are to do as well.**

**1 Cor. 16:2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save as he may prosper, so that no collections *need to* be made when I come.**

- If you grew up in church, or have been in church very long, you have probably heard the 10% rule of giving or tithing your whole life. 10% is a derivative of the word "tithe" – tithe means a tenth in Hebrew, and of course the debate over the 10% rule has been a doozie over the years.
  - Do I tithe off of my gross or do I tithe off of my net? First of all, let me say, if you have ever wondered about whether you tithe off the gross or net, I can solve that debate for you right here and right now. I know it's shocking. I profess to have an answer.
  - But I promise you, I don't have the answer because I am smart or because I simply know more than other people do. That's not it at all. I have the answer because I question everything and then I go study for myself to find that these things might be true.
    - And so usually, when someone brings up a controversial topic such as giving,

my curiosity is peaked. Especially when there is some argument or disagreement over whatever the topic may be. That's what usually makes me go dig, because truthfully, seminary or no seminary, degrees or no degrees, I simply don't trust anything preachers or so-called Bible experts say.

- And why? Because just about every topic I have ever studied has been taught from a standpoint of tradition, which then has somehow modified over the years to fit inside a church tradition box. And generally speaking, what I discover when I study is that most of what I've been taught was wrong. And this topic of giving is no different.
- Let me expound a little on this. Years ago, I was a deacon at another church, and every year, old deacons would roll off and new ones would roll on. Sometimes it would be deacons who had previously served in that role, and sometimes it would be brand-new deacons who would be serving for the first time.
  - When a new deacon was nominated by the church, the current body of deacons along with the pastor would discuss the new nominees. Specifically, whether or not they met the qualifications of deacon as laid out in the pastoral epistles – 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.
  - Anyway, one year we were discussing a particular individual who had been nominated, and by the way, was more than qualified to be a deacon. I believe he had previously served as a deacon, and during the discussion time, the preacher brought up a concern about this candidate.
    - He said, "I have a problem with this man being a deacon because he doesn't tithe 10%". Now, at that time I was young and didn't know anything, but I remember thinking to myself, how does the preacher know what that man gives? I also remember thinking, is the preacher supposed to know what people give? That was a little unnerving.
  - Having said that, I don't specifically remember questioning the whole 10% concept at that time, primarily because I was told that 10% was the requirement. So, I believed it. But later on, as I was questioning several other church traditions, I did go study the topic of giving (in depth), and just like all the other topics I studied, I discovered that what I was being told was wrong. There was no 10% rule in the New Testament. This was an Old Testament requirement.
    - And furthermore, to be honest with you if you want to get technical with it, if you use the Old Testament standard, the 10% rule wasn't correct either, because when you study giving and sacrifice in the Old Testament, what you will discover is the percentage is more around 21%. That's if you follow the rules of sacrifice and giving to the letter of the law.
    - And so, I remember being conflicted. I would say I was disturbed. Disturbed by the fact that the preacher was looking into what people gave, because even though I didn't know for sure, I felt fairly confident that the financial oversight of the Saints was not part of his job description. Which turned out to be true. It was actually none of his business.
  - Anyway, that incident (among others) was bothersome, and it caused me to dig deeper and discover for myself. What did this man's giving habits have to do with being a deacon? I wanted to know, and so I did something crazy. I went to the place in the scripture that outlined the qualifications of deacon. You want to hear them?

- Let me read them to you straight from the pages of God's Holy Manuscript.

**1 Tim. 3:8** Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not insincere, not prone to *drink* much wine, not greedy for money,

**1 Tim. 3:9** *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

**1 Tim. 3:10** These men must also first be tested; then have them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

**1 Tim. 3:11** Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

**1 Tim. 3:12** Deacons must be husbands of one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households.

**1 Tim. 3:13** For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

- So, there you have it. The qualifications for becoming a deacon. But did you notice what's not a qualification for becoming a deacon? Giving 10%. As a matter of fact, giving isn't mentioned at all. But should a deacon give? Of course he should but based on the requirement for every believer to give.
  - Every believer should give as they have been blessed or prospered. That's what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians. Which means if you are a deacon, the requirement to give is assumed. But not because he's a deacon, but because that's the requirement of every believer. Having said that, that is between the individual and his Maker. Not the preacher or any other Christian. Anyway, you get my point.
  - Paul said, "I didn't burden you. I didn't ask you for money for myself or for any of the other Apostles." But that begs the question. How did Paul and the other Apostles survive if the churches didn't give them money. How did they make it? They had a job.
  - Paul was a tent maker. He worked outside the church. And just an FYI to you, that's where ministry takes place. It happens on the highways and byways of life. So, Paul had a job, but does that mean Pastors shouldn't be paid? No, it doesn't. The church is actually told to support the ministers, but Paul chose not to take any money.
    - And let me say this, if the Pastor receives support from the church, it shouldn't be ridiculously low, but it also shouldn't be extremely high either. It should be based on what the church can afford, a wage that can help take care of his basic needs along with the needs of his family.
    - In other words, the preacher shouldn't get rich on his salary. Meaning, if he can afford a mansion or a jet on his salary, I would say he is paid too much, wouldn't you? But how much is too much? I don't know, that would be a matter of prayer for the fellowship and a matter of conviction for the Pastor.
  - My point is, giving is a requirement by God for every believer. But it's not a mandated 10%. It's to give as you've been blessed.
- Let's move on. I'll digress on this topic. In verse 19, Paul writes something, something

that I find somewhat interesting, when he says:

**2 Cor. 12:19** All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for building you up, beloved.

- Over these past several weeks, we have studied and talked about how Paul has been defending himself to this church, trying to regain their confidence and their trust. But, here in verse 19, Paul says:

**2 Cor. 12:19** All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for building you up, beloved.

- Now, in the spirit of time, I am going to paraphrase his statement for you really quick. What he is saying is, from the church's standpoint it would appear that Paul and the other apostles have been defending themselves. And that is true. But there is actually more to it than that.
  - Listen to the second part of the verse one more time, where Paul says, *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for building you up, beloved.
  - What he is saying is, yes, on the surface and in your eyes, we have been defending ourselves, but in reality, through my writing I have been teaching you something. I have been building you up, edifying you.
    - In other words, through my writing you have received two lessons, the one you read about and the one you don't. The one you read about is the surface message, but the one you didn't read about is the message behind the message, and that message, that secondary message, is what builds you up.
    - Hang with me for just a minute folks. Think about what Paul is saying. The life-changing power of God's Word many times comes by way of the message behind the message, and we don't have time to study all the secondary messages we have unraveled throughout Paul's writings here today.
  - But proof of this lies in what Paul himself just said in verse 19, when he said that all this time the church thought Paul was defending himself, but he was actually building them up. What you can infer from Paul's statement is that:
    - A – Yes, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians as a way of defending himself and the other apostles back against these false teachers who had slipped into this church (that was the surface message). But behind the scenes:
    - B – While defending himself, His words, His Words of Truth were building them up. In other words, the surface message accomplished one thing but the message behind the message accomplished something else. And what did it accomplish? Paul said it "built up the saints".
- Now, the logic and reasoning behind his statement is an interesting one, and we could

study Paul's reasoning for weeks. But (once again), we don't have time. Having said that, what you can know is this. The process of building you up spiritually, based on what the Bible teaches, many times comes by way of the hidden revelations of God, which is brought about through the process of rightly dividing His Manuscript through study.

- So, this is just one example of the surface message and then the power of the message behind the message. Over this past several weeks on Wednesday night, I have been teaching you How to Study Your Bible as if you were preparing to teach it. And ultimately, what that does is it causes you to dig. It causes you to think critically.
  - And this is so important because when you do that, when you pull out those hidden messages and revelations of God, that's where the power inside God's Word lies. And let me say this, this process takes practice to learn how to do it. You must study, and as you study you must do it intentionally, starting out with prayer. Asking God to reveal Himself to you.
  - And then, slowly and methodically work your way through each verse of scripture. Notice I didn't say work through the pages of scripture, and there is a reason for that. Because if you do it correctly, for the most part you won't be able to move that fast. It's one verse at a time, and sometimes, it's just one word at a time.
  - And so, speaking of moving fast, let's finish up by focusing on Verses 20 & 21:

**2 Cor. 12:20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish, and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, selfishness, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;**

**2 Cor. 12:21 *I am afraid* that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and indecent behavior which they have practiced.**

- Paul says he is afraid that when he comes to visit them, he is going to find them in a place that neither he nor they will be proud of. And then he says, not only is he afraid of what he will find, that there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, selfishness, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances among them.
  - He says I am afraid when I come again my God may humiliate me before you. That's a strange statement, isn't it? It is, but not really. He is simply saying that he and they will be embarrassed as it relates to where they are as a body of believers. So much so that he may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past.
  - But the sin is not really the issue. That's not the point. The issue is not that they sinned. The issue is they have not repented of their impurity, their sexual immorality, and indecent behavior, which they have practiced.
- Now, let's do a little exercise as it relates to Paul's writings, shall we? What would you say is the 'surface message' of these verses? It would be exactly what he is writing about. This church is in a really bad spot, so much so that Paul fears what he will find when he comes.

- What would you hope would be the application for this church? That they would straighten up before he arrives? Correct? But, what's the message behind the message? What's the revelation inside this message, or what's the life-changing message behind the message? Another way to say it is, what's the disturbing message behind the message?
- Well, in order to extract that, you start by digging. By asking questions. And what might be a great thing to ask yourself as it relates to this church's situation? How about this – are these people even saved? Are these folks true believers, because their behavior is disturbing, and it doesn't sound like the behavior becoming of Christian men and women, does it? I wouldn't think so.
  - So, with that question in mind, I wanted to know. So, the first thing I did was study the background and history of this church, as it was at this point in time. Unfortunately, what I discovered was that these were indeed true believers. And I am not going to lie to you, I was hoping that wasn't the case, because it would be a whole lot easier to accept if they weren't believers. But they were.
  - And so, now, what do we do with that? Well, let's look at the message behind the message, which is what? Just because you are a believer, you are not immune to sin. Even sin of the highest level. And what do I mean by sin of the highest level? Right, because we would say, well, I thought all sin is the same.
- It is in the eyes of a Holy and Righteous God. It's not that one sin is worse than another, but the degree of sin in your life speaks volumes as to how far away from God you are. Remember, what is going on with these people isn't just going on in private. It has made its way into this fellowship.
- There are some pretty bad things happening inside the walls of this church, and the church has turned a blind eye to it, and the party responsible is so comfortable with it they don't even feel the need to repent over what they have done.
- So, as we close this morning, one more time, what is the message behind the message? Well, first of all know this. What is happening inside this church could happen to you. It could happen to us. That is the reality. As a matter of fact, it happens all the time in churches, and not just with church members but with church leaders as well.
  - But why? There must be a reason, and there is. It begins when we forget to keep the main thing the main thing. When we fail to spend time with God in prayer and study. When we forsake the assembling of the believers (when we don't attend church).
  - And so, if that's the case, then what shall we do to prevent such a thing? We better be vigilant and we better take it seriously. We better work on our relationship with God daily. That is the only chance we have, because according to 1 Peter 5, our enemy walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.
  - Which means the enemy is just waiting for an opening in your life. So, we must be vigilant church, but more than that, we must follow the instructions set forth by scripture. Instructions that will ensure we can fend off the enemy. And what would that be?
- We must fill our lives with more of God and less of this world. We must spend time with God in prayer and then study His Word correctly (which is in context) by rightly dividing the truth. And just so I don't leave you with zero practical application as it relates to this issue this morning, let me read to you from Colossians 3, where Paul gives us some clear



instruction on how to prepare ourselves. How to ward off the enemy. Listen to what he says in Colossians 3:1-17:

**Col. 3:1** Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above (verb – action on your part), where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

**Col. 3:2** Set your mind (verb – once again – action on your part) on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

**Col. 3:3** For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

**Col. 3:4** When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

**Col. 3:5** Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

**Col. 3:6** For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

**Col. 3:7** and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

**Col. 3:8** But now you also, put them all aside: (verb-action on your part) anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.

**Col. 3:9** Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,

**Col. 3:10** and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

**Col. 3:11** *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

**Col. 3:12** So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (Verb – action on your part)

**Col. 3:13** bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

**Col. 3:14** Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

**Col. 3:15** Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

- And then, here's the key folks. This is where all of this is made possible. Verse 16:

**Col. 3:16** Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing (urging) one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**Col. 3:17** Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus,



**giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**