

On Christmas morning, we had a broad overview of this passage, and we homed-in on the topic of 'reconciliation'. But there's a fair bit **in** this passage, and I said at the time, that we'd have to dig into it more, a bit later on. ... Well, it's later on, and we're going to dig into it today, and a bit more again, next week.

The trouble for us preachers, is usually, we have an aim to tailor the message that we're going to preach, (from any given passage), so that it's going to be what **we** think, is most relevant for our congregation... And that's good, because we need to personalise our messages... But sometimes, when we do this, we fail to teach 'what the passage is actually about' and therefore, we miss out on something really important, that God is revealing in His word... And I reckon this passage could be a prime example...

There are some real gems of verses in here, and some amazing theological themes: e.g.

**5:17** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

We could have a whole message on that, and in fact, next week, a fair bit of our message **will** concentrate on that

**5:21** *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Now, that's really deep. And we could spend a lot of time discussing that.

And if I was to tailor a message, I could give you a few really good messages, and we could learn a lot, but in doing so, we'd completely miss, what the passage is actually about...

Alright, do you want to know what it's about? Paul is defending his ministry... We've already touched on this (in previous passages)...

When Paul left Corinth, to go and preach in other places, some false apostles moved into town, and they were running Paul down, and bad-mouthing him, and turning the church against him...

And Paul found himself on the outer. And this whole passage is Paul defending himself:

- He's defending the way he conducts himself (as an apostle and a preacher);
- He's defending the **message** that he preaches; and

By doing this, he's not just 'blowing his own trumpet' ("Ow, look how good I am")... I think he's actually laying down (for the Corinthians, and also for us), something really important. He's giving us some pointers of 'what we should be looking for' in a servant of God – what we should be looking for, in a preacher / pastor / minister / bible teacher / evangelist...

From time to time, I get asked, "How do I tell if someone's a false teacher?" And that's an important thing to know. You know, we tend to think that false teachers are an anomaly

(they're not very common, and **we're** not somebody who would ever find ourselves being led by one), but the Scriptures not only warn us about false teachers over and over again, but in the Scriptures, we see examples of false teachers popping up, reasonably often.

And what Paul is doing here, is he's revealing not only what are the attributes of a **genuine** teacher, but he's also squashing some commonly held mis-conceptions of what people **think** they should be looking for in a pastor...

The simple fact of the matter is, "Sometimes we're impressed by the wrong stuff."

When the prophet Samuel, was sent to anoint a new king for Israel [eventually anointed David], even this Godly prophet was naturally drawn to the biggest; strongest; most kingly-looking warrior type (why wouldn't he? He was looking for a king)...

<sup>1 Samuel 16:7</sup> But YHWH said to Samuel, "Do **not** look on his appearance **or** on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For YHWH sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but YHWH looks on the heart."

And there lies the problem for us: We have a tendency to look at external appearances. **man** looks on the outward appearance, but YHWH looks on the heart.

And yet sadly, (for most people), when they're choosing a church; or when they're choosing a pastor or whatever, they actually make their decision based on external appearances...

Some people are so shallow that it's actually based on the physical appeal of the person up the front: An entertaining speaker, perhaps; or somebody with a good physique, and not too bad to look at... *And if you're listening to the recording, you're quite welcome to imagine that **I'm** just like that (cool-looking dude), but you'll be disappointed when you meet me (or if you download the video).*

They say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"... But for God, all he cares about, is what's in the heart... And when it comes to picking whether someone's a good pastor/preacher/teacher/whatever,, that's where we've gotta be looking – in the heart...

5:12 pretty much tells us the purpose of what Paul's writing here:

**<sup>12</sup> We are **not** commending ourselves to you again (even though it might sound that way, he's not blowing-his-own-trumpet) but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.**

Alright, Paul is confident, that God knows he's genuine (V11), and he's hoping, that the Corinthian church will also start

looking at his heart, and that they'll realise that he's genuine, too...

But how can that be? How can **I** judge a person's heart? And how can **you** judge a person's heart??? Well, obviously we **can't**, at least not in the way that God does. But when it comes to whether someone is a servant of God, or whether they're someone who's probably going to lead us astray, we **are** told to judge. We have to be discerning – we're told to be 'fruit-inspectors'. And what we're told to look out for, is the content of a person's character; and the content of what they teach...

So, what are some of the things we should look at:

Well firstly, what's their motivation?

What motivated Paul?

Principally, Paul and his fellow missionaries, aimed to please God. (That was their motivation). They:

- feared the Lord
- were controlled by the Love of Christ
- lived for Christ.
- lived righteously (being a new creation),
- preached a message of reconciliation (between humanity and God) – be reconciled.
- Preach righteousness

And in all of those things, their motivation was to please God. It wasn't about pleasing self – it was about pleasing God... That's the role of a servant (you know), to please the Master...

Alright, Paul wasn't 'in it' to please people... But what the Corinthian church thought of him, still mattered.

If the church in Corinth didn't recognise Paul as being an apostle of Christ, they wouldn't accept his teaching. And if they didn't accept his teaching, they would continue to be led astray by **false** apostles and false teachers. And that's why Paul can quite honestly say, <sup>12</sup> **We are not commending ourselves to you again**

His intent, is to help them to learn to recognise true servants of God, as opposed to false servants, who are all show...

So, his motivation (even in what we might see as, 'him defending himself'), is to please God. He's pleasing God, by establishing his call, so that the message that he preached would be accepted. And we're going to talk more about the message that he preached, next week.

Righto: so, let's skip forward now, to 6:3.

<sup>3</sup> **We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way:**

What's this obstacle that he's talking about?

One of the greatest barriers – one of the biggest obstacles – one of the most common stumbling blocks for people to come to faith in Jesus, is when ministers of God (or Christians in general) behave badly...

*I do a little bit of IPSC pistol shooting. And for anyone who knows anything about IPSC, it's all about a combination of speed, power and accuracy... And because of this, some of the guns are amazing pieces of machinery... And IPSC can be shot with a gun that could've been bought 2<sup>nd</sup> hand for \$200, Or you could have a brand new custom made race gun that cost \$15 000...*

*One looks old and terribly **unimpressive**. The other, is a high-tech work of art...*

*But the thing is, a \$200 gun that doesn't jam, will beat (every time), no matter how fancy it is, a \$5000 gun that doesn't behave like it should, and has a habit of jamming...*

Why am I telling you this? Do you get the analogy I'm making? No matter how impressive the person might seem, if the bearer of the good news, behaves badly, it discredits the message.

- When the flash tele-evangelist is caught in adultery; or
- When the church treasurer, is caught in embezzlement;
- When the pastor tells a few untruths, to make himself or his church look better;
- When a priest is found to be an abuser of children;
- When a leader of a church gets involved in dodgy deals;
- When a Christian takes advantage of others in business;
- or
- When they're known for their selfishness, anger, bitterness, or hatred,,,,,

That reflects very badly on Jesus, and it reflects very badly on the Good News that we preach ... It discredits it.

But Paul made sure that his behaviour, and the behaviour of those that he ministered with, **wouldn't** be a stumbling block that would keep people from Jesus... When it comes to being a servant of God, **integrity** means **everything**.

He said:

*As servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way:*

And I'm going to put 4 little words up there on the screen:

- By;
- With;
- Through;
- Treated

How did they commend themselves? How could the Corinthian church tell that Paul and his missionary mates, were true servants of Jesus?

**By their:**

- Great endurance
- purity
- knowledge
- patience;
- kindness;
- the Holy Spirit;
- genuine love;
- truthful speech; and
- the power of God;



Those are the attributes. **That's** what we should be looking for in our leaders.

Let's unpack that a bit:

### **Great endurance.**

In today's church, in many ways, sadly, we have become a generation of pikers [for those who are listening to this from overseas, and aren't familiar with our Australian language, a piker (Macquarie Dictionary) "*One who opts out of an arrangement or challenge or does not do his fair share*" ... In other words, "*When the going gets tough, the tough go somewhere else*" ...

*A piker, is someone who goes to the toilet when the washing up begins.*

And in the Christian community, I often hear people talking about "open doors" and "closed doors". And if the going gets a bit tough, we decide, "God must have closed this door to ministry". And we act as if it's a biblical concept... Do you know how many times in the New Testament, the phrase is used about a "door being closed to ministry"???

Any guesses?... Zero.

The phrase **is** used about a door being "open to ministry", but never is a door "closed to ministry". There's times when God **forbid** ministry from beginning in certain areas, and there's times when the going got so tough, that the apostles were run out of town, but that was always a last resort. **Great endurance**, is a characteristic of true servants of Jesus...

This is what Paul endured

- Great endurance in:

- afflictions;
- hardships;
- calamities;
- beatings;
- imprisonments;
- riots;
- labours;
- sleepless nights;
- hunger

What did it mean for Paul to endure? It meant, through all that, he didn't give up.

He didn't get up one morning and say to himself,  
*“That was a pretty severe beating I copped yesterday. Maybe God must be closing the door here. And people are rioting in town because of the message I'm preaching... God must be closing the door.”*  
He kept on preaching the Gospel. Great endurance.

Next, they commended themselves by **purity / holiness**...

Some church leaders work on the principle that if they're **too** holy, they won't be able to connect with people... And so, you see them in a social setting, and they swear; or they drink too much; or they join in with coarse joking...

Paul would have none of that. God's holy people, are meant to be holy, and we're meant to be getting holier.... And true servants of Christ, **must** be holy, and we'll talk more about that next week – the way that we have become a new creation, to live a life of purity and holiness...

Leaders in the church, should be examples of purity and holiness: In what we say; in what we do; In everything about us...

## Knowledge

There's not much point in being a bible teacher, if I don't know Christ, and if I don't know the Gospel.

*Mind you, some of the pastors, of some of the biggest churches in the world at the moment, are very good communicators; and they tend to have effervescent personalities,, but they **don't know the gospel**. It's obvious they don't know the Gospel, because that's not what they teach.*

One of the most important things to watch out for, is what the teacher teaches. Is what they teach, the truth? Or is it just what people **want** to hear? Or are they just regurgitating something they've heard some other 'celebrity pastor' teach, and because **they** said it, it's gotta be right, but it's not actually biblical at all???...

The Corinthian church could tell that Paul was a minister of God, because he **knew** Christ, and he knew the Gospel, and that's what he taught.

## Patience; Kindness.

They're fruit of the Holy Spirit, aren't they. And guess what? That's the next one.

The Corinthian church, should've been able to recognise that Paul was a fair dinkum servant of God, because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. And when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, the recognition of that, isn't so much in an elaborate display of gifts (they can be faked, and the devil can mimic signs and wonders). The evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit, is the **fruit** of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is living inside of us, He is changing us to become more and more like Jesus.

And so Patience, is a fruit of the Spirit.

Sometimes we get **impatient**, and we want everything to happen on our timetable. Servants of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, are patient. But the Greek word here, is μακροθυμία, (makrothymia ) (long suffering). It's not just about waiting an extra 40 seconds to cross the road because the traffic is particularly busy (St George standards)...

This kind of patience, is about "long suffering". Servants of Christ, put up with a lot, and don't just lash out.

And they're kind. It's about "goodness; kindness; friendliness".

And they're filled with "**genuine love**"

It's interesting that he used that word "genuine" there, isn't it... That should be a 'heads-up' to us, that "Not everything that we perceive as 'love', is genuine at all."

The Greek word there for “genuine” is an interesting word ἀνυποκρίτως, (an-u-pokritō), (Not play-acting)... Paul didn't just pretend – he didn't just act as if he was loving... Paul genuinely loved those people in Corinth, and that's why it broke his heart, that they would turn against him.

*And I've met some leaders of churches, who could make you feel like you were the most important person in the whole wide world,,, bit it was all an act. The love wasn't genuine at all – they'd just mastered the art of 'flattery'...*

And genuine love, doesn't only tell you what you want to hear. Genuine love, tells you the truth, no matter how much you don't want to hear it.

Which brings us to **Truthful speech**

You'd think that this would be an obvious attribute of a Servant of God, wouldn't you??? *And I know I have many faults, and some of you might be very happy to point them out to me,,, But I hope, that it will always be said of me, “He doesn't lie.”* You see, if I can be caught in a lie, can anything I say, ever be trusted?...

And sadly, in my experience, it's not **uncommon** for leaders of churches, to be a bit loose with the truth... Oh, they mightn't think they're big lies... They might feel that it's just a harmless little mis-representation / exaggeration of the way things really are... A little white lie... But you know another name for a little white lie? It's a dirty great big lie...

And a true servant of God, must **always** be truthful in their speech... Anything else, destroys their credibility, and the

credibility of the Gospel message that they preach. And when a leader of a church tells one person one thing, and another person the opposite, in my book, that's not truthful speech...

## And the **Power of God**...

The success of the Gospel, and the growth of the church of Jesus Christ, should **not** be dependent upon slick shows; hip marketing; or positive 'spin'... The success of the Gospel, comes through the Power of God.

And if there's anything good that happens in the ministry of this little church here (and it does. A lot of good is happening), we know that this comes, through the Power of God...

It's not because we're 'slick'. And **you** know, it's not because your pastor is so wonderful... It's by the Power of God.

Next heading: **With**

How did Paul manage to do what he did? Was he super-human?

- Great endurance
- Purity / holiness
- knowledge
- patience;
- kindness;
- the Holy Spirit;
- genuine love;
- truthful speech; and

- the power of God;

How? When Satan is trying his darndest to bring about the downfall of men & women of God, How did Paul manage to maintain this level of integrity? He did it **with**:

- weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left.

We're not on our own. **God** is our strength. And if God is on our side (or more appropriately), If we're on **God's** side, we've gotta be doing things **God's** way. True servants of God do **not** resort to underhanded ways, or to the tactics of the world... We have weapons of righteousness. In Ephesians 6, we can read about the armour of God:

- truth;
- righteousness;
- readiness;
- faith;
- Salvation;
- Word of God; and
- Prayer

That's our weapons of righteousness...

But even so, the road travelled by a true servant of God, isn't an easy one... The next heading is "**Through**"

- honour and dishonour;
- slander and praise;

In ministry, true servants of God, go through a lot.

Sometimes a servant of God will be honoured. But sometimes they'll cop it. Sometimes they'll be praised. At other times they'll be slandered... And sometimes, you'll hear a servant of God getting slandered, and you'll believe it...

And sometimes a false teacher will be honoured and praised,,, and they become more popular, and get a greater following, while true, faithful servants of God, are slandered... Paul knew very well, what that was like...

Which brings us to our next heading:

**Treated:** Paul and his mates had been treated (even by people in the church):

- as imposters, but they weren't imposters at all – they were true servants of God;
- as unknown and yet well known (by God);
- as dying and behold, we live;
- as punished and yet not killed;
- as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
- as poor, yet making many rich (spiritually rich, when they preached the Gospel);
- as having nothing, yet possessing everything (the Kingdom of God was theirs).

The thing is, true servants of God, are a bit of an enigma. What you see, isn't what you always get... A true servant of God might cop abuse and get slandered, while a false teacher gets highly honoured.



And I think what Paul's teaching us today, is sometimes, we get impressed by the wrong stuff. The attributes of a genuine servant of God, stem from the heart. Don't look at outward appearances – they're easily manipulated... And don't look at popularity. Look at the heart.

You'll hear people boasting about their pastor; or some particular celebrity preacher; or some famous author... Be discerning. Dig into their boast. What are they boasting about???

Don't be impressed by the wrong stuff. Be motivated by a love of Christ, and be impressed by those who please God in what they do and what they teach...

Questions???

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<sup>i</sup> Delbridge A et.al, The Macquarie Dictionary 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, Macquarie University, Australia. 1991.