

# Paul the Apostle - a Vibrant Life (Part 3)

by Denny Kenaston

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*Paul's ministry was characterized by integrity, honesty, and a commitment to living out what he preached, demonstrating the power of God's Word in action.*

**Duration:** 1:09:36

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 2 Corinthians 4:2

**Topics:** "Paul The Apostle"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of living a truthful and righteous life as a testament to one's faith. He refers to the apostle Paul as an example of someone who manifested the truth through his actions and conduct. The speaker also mentions a powerful autobiographical sermon by Paul in 1 Thessalonians chapter two, where Paul describes how he and his apostolic team conducted themselves in Thessalonica. The sermon encourages believers to be careful with their words and actions, so as not to offend others and bring blame to the ministry.

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## Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the free will offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. And redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.

I don't believe we can ever get away from the wonder of that. We can never get away from it. Amen.

Greetings in Jesus' name this morning. What a joy to seek the Lord together like this. I must admit I was a little jealous last evening of all my responsibilities and all the freedoms that you brothers have this week.

But the Lord, He also gives me times to set aside and seek the Lord. Last night I needed to leave as soon as the message is over and I saw you brothers up here on your knees and I wanted to be there with you. But I needed to go home and prepare for today.

But I just want you to know that God dealt with my own heart last evening in that message. I also live in a world filled with lust just like you men do. There's covetousness everywhere.

And God is continually dealing with my heart about my view of money. And last evening Brother Dean was speaking about children. I still have children at home.

I have two little boys that are growing up. Twelve and ten. Thirteen and ten.

I'm not sure how to sort through all of what God was dealing with my heart about last evening. But I just want you to know that God was dealing with my heart about all those things. Just like you.

So I thought at least I can be as accountable as you all are. Even though some of my responsibilities don't allow me to just sit and plow and plow and plow. But God gives me those opportunities too.

Alright, let's stand for a word of prayer and then we'll get into our message today on the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Let's pray together. Thank you Lord this morning for that fountain filled with blood that flows from Emmanuel's veins.

Yes Lord, the blood has not lost its power in all these two thousand years. We thank you this morning God that there is precious blood on the mercy seat in heaven. The fountain lies open God.

We acknowledge our need of the blood of Jesus Christ to keep on cleansing us from all sin. Thank you Lord. We come to this session in need.

We look up to you Father and we ask you that you would in mercy, stoop in kindness and pity and meet our needs today. There are things you want us to see. There are things you want us to understand.

There are things you want to deal with in our hearts Lord. And God that cannot take place unless you by the Spirit of God do deal with us. So we ask you again today God that you would open the eyes of our understanding.

That we may be able to see and hear what the Spirit of God is saying to us. We pray this Father trusting you. In Jesus name.

Amen. You may be seated. Opening your Bibles now to 2 Corinthians.

We'll be starting there in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. One of my favorite subjects here today. We have three but one of them is very dear and precious to me. Not that I know a whole lot about it.

This morning we want to begin by looking at the integrity of the Apostle Paul's ministry. We mentioned that a little bit yesterday. We want to look at it more fully this morning.

Paul in most of his epistles you see him speaking, writing about his earnest care to be open, to be honest before all of those that he ministers to. He went out of his way to be honest and upright in the sight of God and man. I believe he's an example to all of us to follow.

We mentioned his testimony already, maybe it's two days ago, that he gave there before that king, I believe it was Felix, where he said, herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. Now that is an exercise, but it's one that Paul was continually busy about. It's not that Paul was a perfect man and he never did anything that was wrong.

But Paul was an upright man, which if I can give a definition of that, that is a man who kept his heart clear before God. He was a man who exercised himself. He was a man when he found himself where something wasn't quite right between him and someone else, he went and made those things clear.

He was a man where when he got on his knees before God, and he opened his heart up and came to God in prayer, he allowed God to try the reins of his heart. And as he found things there that were with issue between him and God, he made them right. He was an upright man.

A man of integrity. Paul also was constantly dealing with men who were other than this. Men with impure motives.

Men who wrested the Scriptures for their own designs. In his day they were the Judaizers. Maybe in our day they're different ones.

But the point is, there were men who were feigning themselves to be the ministers of Christ with all kinds of wrong motives in their hearts and in their lives. And because of this, and because Paul saw these things, he had an even extra double motivation to live such a life and to exercise his heart in such a way that he could say, as he wrote back to those men, you know what kind of a heart I had when I was there with you. Beautiful.

And because of these false brethren that were coming there behind him, Paul was constantly speaking about the integrity of his ministry. Reading in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 1 and 2a, first, we find these words, Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, this ministry, the one we spoke of yesterday, this spiritual ministry, this ministry that cannot be touched with human hands, this ministry where the hearts of men and women are changed into the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God, since we have this ministry, Paul says, as we have received mercy, we faint not. But, because we have this ministry, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully.

We find Paul using words like this in all of his epistles. I'm sure he's alluding to those who are doing the opposite. They are using the Word of God craftily.

They are being deceitful. They are feigning themselves to be something that they are not at all. They are feigning themselves to be those who love these people.

But in reality, they have totally different motives in mind. And all they are out to do is get converts after the law of Moses with Jesus tacked on the side. May I say it that way? Paul knew this.

So thus he is able to say, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We are going to be open and honest before you. And not walking in craftiness, not trying to figure out this and that, and how should I behave in this situation, and what should I say in this situation.

Paul didn't play politics like so many of God's people are doing today, and like so many of God's ministers are doing today. He didn't play politics. He was who he was.

He was real. He was open. He was honest.

He didn't hide any of what he was. He said it like it was, and he lived it like it was. He was a man of integrity, and he was upright in his heart.

Also, I want you to notice, and we read it the other day, but let's read it again today in light of the integrity of his ministry. In chapter 2 and verse 17 he says, We are not as many which corrupt the Word of God, but we are those that are of sincerity and of God, and in the sight of God speak we in Christ. Now what he's simply saying by this is, we stand and speak in the sight of God.

We stand to share with you, but while we stand to share with you, we leave our hearts open for the probing of God. We acknowledge that God is watching and listening to everything we are saying. It's quite an awesome revelation when you think about it.

And I believe that Paul was of the character that when he was finished talking to men about God, he went and talked to God to see what God had to say about what he said when he was talking to men. We're looking at the integrity of his ministry. Turn also with me to chapter 6, verse 3 and 4. Find it all the way through this epistle again, because he is writing in defense of his ministry to these people.

Chapter 6, verse 3 and 4. And we read this verse yesterday, but let's read it again. Listen to Paul's words. Giving no offense in anything that the ministry be not blamed.

Giving no offense in anything that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God. These words speak about the integrity of Paul's ministry. I'm not sure exactly what he means by this.

Because sometimes as a minister you do need to make offense. Sometimes you do say things that, you know, are going to offend somebody. Sometimes out of the integrity of your heart and the honesty of your heart, you have to say what is true.

And as you say what is true, it may offend somebody. But while all of that is true, here is Paul also giving his testimony. And the motivation of his heart was that the ministry would not be blamed.

And that with all that he knew how to do, he would not give offense to the ministry. That means he was careful about what he did. It means he was careful about what he said.

He was careful about how he said it. I think of these beautiful words over in the book of James. They must go there.

They are staggering words. But James warns us and says, My brethren, be not many masters knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. And that word master there means teachers.

Be not many masters or teachers knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. And he goes on to say these words. And these are staggering words.

For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. I believe that Paul, in the integrity of his heart, was careful.

He thought it out. He was prayerful about what he said and how he said it. Yes, sometimes you do need to just say it like it is.

And yes, somebody may be offended by it. But at the same time, I believe that God would have us to be like our Lord Jesus Christ in the words that we say and how we say it and when we say it. That the ministry be not blamed.

This was the integrity of his heart. In chapter 7, in verse 2, listen to these words. Again, he is pleading with them.

He says, Receive us. We have wronged no man. We have corrupted no man.

We have defrauded no man. Receive us, Paul says. Don't you remember how we were when we were there? Paul, writing about offerings and how to deal with them, writes these words which are filled with the integrity of his heart.

In chapter 8 and verse 20 and 21, look at these words. He says this, in verse 20, Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered to us. He is talking about an offering that was given that needs to be carried to Jerusalem and given to the saints there that are in need.

And he says, we want to avoid this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us, providing for honest things not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. Look at that integrity. I want God to judge my heart with what I do with His money and I want my brethren to be able to do the same thing.

And while God looks at my heart and knows there is no covetous motivation in there, man can also look at my life and my actions and say, that man is not covetous. The integrity of his heart. In 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 4-6, we hear these words coming from Paul.

He says, but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts. There again is the integrity of his ministry. For neither at any time use we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness.

God is witness. There it is again. He keeps that heart wide open before the Lord and so much so that he can say, God is my witness.

Nor of men sought we glory. We didn't go there wanting a bunch of attention and wanting to hear our name and all those things. That wasn't our motivation.

Neither of men sought we glory. Neither of you, nor yet of others. When we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ and even again the integrity of his ministry, he could have went there to those churches and said, hey you guys, you need to help me.

I don't have any money and I'm busy preaching and all that. He wouldn't even do that. Even though he had every right to do it.

They that preach the gospel shall live of the gospel. But he didn't do that. His motivation wasn't that way.

He went there and said, hey, if I've got a job that needs to be done, I need a little money. That's very different than the way it is looked at in these days that we live in. Very different.

This is the integrity of his ministry. I like that. There was no question.

And again, there were men. I mean, Paul is speaking in the context of real life that he was living in. And there were men coming along behind him, the Judaizers.

And they were coming alongside taking an offering. They were coming alongside getting an offering. Taking advantage of the situation.

Paul wasn't that way. Are any tents need mending? I'll take care of that. Brethren, let us be honest.

First of all, let's be honest with God's Word. Paul was. And not take it and twist it.

And be open. If someone thinks we're twisting it, be open. Let us be honest with God's money.

It is God's money, isn't it? I mean, all of it. As I understand it, in the New Testament, it all belongs to God. We are simply stewards.

That's what we are. Let us be honest with God's money. Let us be honest with God.

And I know, I believe you are. That's what a week like this is all about. It's about getting honest with God.

And I was back praying before the meeting, and I heard Brother David's words about protracted meetings and how the Word just keeps plowing and it keeps hammering away. Meeting after meeting. It just keeps on coming.

And the key to that whole thing is just an open and an honest heart. Just let it come in. Let it make me uncomfortable.

And let it try me and prove me. Let's be honest with God. And I know you are, and I bless you for it.

And let us be honest with each other. Amen? And I know you're doing that too. In those little prayer groups.

Opening your heart one to another. Let us be honest with one another. We have Paul as an example, and his example is a challenge to every one of us.

Let's go on to the next point here. The ministry of his life. Now, I know we could... Everything that I'm saying this week is the ministry of his life.

But I'd like to just pull that aside and make a point out of it here. Because it's very important. Paul was a show-and-tell Christian.

You know how they used to do, the little children did when they went to school? Show and tell. Paul, he was a show-and-tell Christian. Everywhere he went, he showed them how to live, and he told them how to live.

What a powerful combination that is. This is probably the most powerful part of his ministry. If you were to search it all out.

What he preached, he lived. And what he lived, he preached. And brethren, this is ministry par excellence.

When those two come together, you have ministry taking place. When those two come together, lives get changed. When those two come together, anointing comes.

When life and words flow close together, beautiful things happen. Whether it is you and one of your brothers. Whether you're a minister of the gospel.

Whether you're a deacon in a church somewhere. Whether you're a father, a husband. Or whether you're just ministering to those that you find in your workplace.

When words and life come together, ministry begins to take place. With Paul, there was very little or no gap between what he said and what he lived. Can we say that today? He could.

And by the way, this was the power and influence of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. His words and his life were inseparable. Everything he said, he lived.

Parents sometimes will say to their children, foolishly, don't do as I do, do as I say. And they kind of snicker when they say that because they know and they are acknowledging to the children that there is a difference. And they are acknowledging by their words that the children recognize that there is a difference.

But they are also acknowledging the blindness of their heart. That they do not see what a grave thing that is. This big gap between what I say and how I really live.

I'm sorry, brethren. This will not work. They will do as you do.

They will not do as you say. It's very interesting. I don't think you'll mind if I say this.

I guess no one will know who it is. But a dear brother that I've known for a few years came to me a couple of days ago here at these meetings. And he told me why he's here.

He said, Brother Denny, there's one reason why I'm here. I now have so many children. And I see so much of me in my children that it bothers me.

And I came here to get my life straightened out for the sake of my children who are watching everything I do. I thought, what a wise man that is. To be that honest on the first day, that's a wise man.

With Paul, he lived it. In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, if you want to flip back over there just for a minute, I want you to notice that this living epistle that Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 was written in two ways, not one. Remember what he said there in verse 1? He said, Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? And what he's saying is, we don't need any letters.

Nobody needs to write a letter about me and who I am in relation to you. Why, Paul? Because ye are our epistles, written in our hearts and known and read of all men. What Paul is saying is, you are a living epistle of my life and my ministry among you.

That's what he's saying. And brethren, this morning, may I just interject to you that epistle, that beautiful epistle, that beautiful exercise, that spiritual exercise that I spoke about yesterday, that which God's Spirit writes upon the fleshly tables of our hearts, that takes place two ways, not one. It takes place by the ministry of the Word through the Spirit of God.

An anointed Word will touch the heart of a man or a woman and change them. But may I also add to that, that an anointed life will do the same thing. I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day, wouldn't you? I mean, you can talk to me about prayer all you want, but if you show me how to pray, I'll learn more in one hour with somebody who knows how to pray, in ten hours with somebody who tells me about prayer.

And it's that way in every area of our lives. That's very convicting, isn't it? When we begin to come to grips with the fact that really, if all we have is something to say, we really don't have much. Amen? We've got to have something that we live.

Paul had it. And he left behind him a string of churches who were living lives in such a way that he could say, You are my living epistles. And in another place he said to the Corinthians, You are the proof of my apostleship.

Powerful. It happens the same for us, brethren, whether it be in our church, among our brethren, with our wives, or with our children. Oh, that God would so help us that we could be in our homes, an anointed man with an anointed word, an anointed life with anointed words, that are spoken and lived out before the face of our children, that they may see what Jesus is like by the way we live.

This is where God is going. This is what God wants for every one of us. And we know that.

It's not new what I'm saying. Back to chapter 4. In verse 2b now, we're going on here with the reading. He says, seeing we have this ministry, this very responsible spiritual ministry, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.

But, those were all the negative things. Now here's the positive. By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

You know what he's saying there? I live the truth before you. That's what he's saying. He's talking about his life.

So clear a right life that he could say to them, You know how I lived when I was there. You watched what I did. You saw what I did when sufferings came my way.

You saw what happened when I was stretched beyond my measures. You saw what I was doing. You saw it every day.

I manifested the truth before your very eyes. I gave you something that you could look at, that you could put your hands on, that you could get a handle on yourself, that you could look at it and say, I want that for my life. The word manifest means to bring it out and shine the light on it.

Hallelujah. I like that. Bring it out there and shine the light on it, so everybody can see what the truth is all about.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, we find one of the most powerful autobiographies that Paul wrote of himself. We do not have time to look at all of that, but I would encourage you to take a look at it sometime. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. It is a sermon.

It is an ordination sermon par excellence. You'll never get a better text than that. As Paul writes a testimony of how he and his apostolic team conducted themselves when they were at Thessalonica.

We cannot read all those verses, but I would like to read a couple of them. Can we just turn there? Let's start reading in verse 8, as we look at the ministry of his life, or the way he lived. Paul says, and remember, he's not just talking about himself, he's also talking about Timothy and Silvanus.

There were three that went there. He said, So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail, for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

You know what he's saying? He's saying we worked every day and we preached every night, laboring night and day, that we would not be chargeable unto you. Now, there's nothing wrong with giving an offering when you're preaching, but look at Paul's life. So clear that he could say to them, you guys remember how it was when I was there, and not only me, but Timothy also, and Silvanus.

Look at verse 10. He says, Ye are witnesses, and God also. Look at him.

He keeps saying that. This man lives his life before God in such a clear way. He has the approval of God so clearly on his heart that he keeps referring to this.

You're my witnesses, and God also. He was looking at it, and he probed my heart day by day while I was there, and he bears witness that this is how I lived when I was there. Look at those words.

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holyly and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe. Paul gave them something to look at. Amen? Notice back in 2 Corinthians 4, what he goes on to say after what we just read there in verse 2 and verse 3. He goes on to say, But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

We know that, don't we? If the gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost. But then he goes on to explain, In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not. Now let me ask you a question.

The God of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not. They can't see the gospel. But let me ask you this question.

Did he blind these eyes? Or did he blind the eyes in their heart? Which ones does he blind? He blinds the eyes of their hearts. And with the eyes of their hearts, they cannot see the glorious gospel. That's true.

But brethren, he cannot blind the eyes that are in their heads. Let's give them something to look at. Amen? I mean, I am weary.

I am weary of the Gallup polls that continue to tell us that there is no difference between Christianity and the world around them. I am weary of that. And all the while they're out there saying, oh, well, you know, we've got to be like the world to win the world, and let's have a seeker-friendly church, and the young people like games, so we'll put up a gymnasium, and they like the psychedelic lights, so we'll have a disco over in the back side of the church, and they like to dance around and get excited about the music, so we're going to change the music, and we're going to change all these things.

And by the time we get done changing everything, they change us instead of us changing them. It wasn't that way with Paul. He gave them something to look at.

And I'm not talking about walking around with suspenders on. Let's get a little bit deeper than that. Amen? I mean, if that's all you've got to show is your black shoes and your black suspenders, you better go to the cross again.

That's not going to change anybody's life. And I'm not saying those things are wrong. But I think sometimes we think we're pretty, because of the way we look.

Well, I believe in looking right, but I believe in living right also. And this was the effectiveness of the Apostle Paul's ministry. He gave them something to look at.

So much so that he could write back to them and say, you brethren, you know how we lived when we were there. How wholly and unblameably and justly we lived when we were with you. And that's not just the Thessalonians.

He wrote things like that to almost every one of the epistles. And I don't think he was a perfect man, but he was a blameless man, which means he made things right when he did things wrong. God help us all.

Just to do that, let us give the world something to see. Let us give our families something they can look at. Let us give our brethren in the church something that they can see, an example to follow, that they can look on.

The younger ones can say, I want to be like that. So that's what humility is. So that's what sacrifice is.

So that's what prayer is all about. And on and on and on I could go. That's what God wants.

Listen, brethren, that's fertile soil in a church when young converts have a beautiful example that they can get their eyes on and look at and not just hear about, but see the very light being lived out in the lives of the brethren that are in the church. The ministry of His life. I wonder if it isn't the most powerful aspect of all of His ministry.

Brethren, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, the way you live. And glorify your Father which is in Heaven. Let's go on to number three.

Paul's ministry of suffering. Paul's ministry of suffering. Chapter 4, verse 6 is where we want to read here.

But let me just say a few introductory comments first. Paul embraced suffering with delight. Paul embraced suffering with delight.

Do you believe that? You say, brother, yeah, that's a pretty weird statement you just made there. I mean, who likes suffering? Amen? Well, let me tell you a thing or two, brethren. I'll tell you who likes suffering.

Soldiers! They like it! They like the foxhole! They like the troubles they go through! They like the mud! That's all part of being a soldier. Soldiers. They plan on suffering.

Don't they? I mean, they plan on it so much, they even expect sometimes to get their arm blown off. Or maybe their leg. Or maybe their whole life blown into eternity.

And they go anyway. Paul's ministry of suffering. He embraced suffering with delight.

Verse 6, For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shine in our hearts. Hallelujah, brethren. He has shine in our hearts.

Do you know what you have? And why, Paul? Why has He shine in our hearts? To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But, we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Now, that is by God's design.

God has deposited His Son in my heart, but left me in an earthen vessel. That is by God's design. And you can be sure, if God designed it that way, He's got a multitude of eternal reasons why He did it that way.

But one of them is clearly stated in this verse. That the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. God wants us in this place.

God wants us dependent. God wants us undone. God wants us taxed beyond our limits.

God wants us at the end of our rope. That's where God wants us to live. But we're Americans.

And you know, America, I mean, you know, you get anything you want, anytime you want. You can get a drink whenever you want. You can eat wherever you want.

You can rest most of the time whenever you want. You can go wherever you want. You can buy whatever you want.

And with all that ever you want, that us American Christians have, it's a little hard for us to grasp the ministry of suffering. And sometimes I think we need a good old dose of persecution. And someone has said to me already, Brother, don't you pray for persecution.

That's not right. Okay, I won't pray for persecution. I'll just pray for purification.

Amen? It's okay to pray for that, isn't it? We have this treasure in earth and vessels, brethren. Now listen to what Paul says. Staggering words.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. Why? There's a treasure inside of me, Paul says. We are perplexed, but not in despair for the same reason.

We are persecuted, but not forsaken. Yeah, you can stick me in a jail and put me in the stocks, but I am not forsaken, I'll tell you what. I'm going to sing and pray until an earthquake comes and shakes the whole prison and opens up the doors and gives me a whole family of converts while he's at it.

Yeah, I'm persecuted, but I'm not forsaken. Cast down, but not destroyed. Now listen to what he says next.

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. This was one of Paul's ministries. To bear in his own body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

Why, Paul? That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Now that's back to that life. The ministry of that life.

You see, Paul understood when I suffer and I yield to that suffering, I am broken. And when I am broken, the life of Jesus flows out of me. And Paul understood that and knew it experientially to the point where he did in fact embrace suffering with delight.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. And then he finishes concluding that principle with these words.

So then, death worketh in us, but life worketh in you. Now that is the ministry of suffering. Death worketh in me, but life worketh in you out of that death.

The ministry of suffering. Look at these staggering verses in Colossians. Colossians chapter 2 verse 24.

It's just one verse, I'm sorry. Paul says, I, Paul, am made a minister. And now look at verse 24 of chapter 1. Sorry, not chapter 2. It's chapter 1 verse 24.

I, Paul, am made a minister who now rejoice. I, Paul, now rejoice. What are you rejoicing in, Paul? I rejoice in my sufferings for you.

And, fill up that which is behind of the affliction of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church. I suffer for the church. That's what Paul is saying.

I suffer for the church. Brothers, suffering is in the New Testament. In fact, it's a New Testament word.

You don't find it in the Old Testament. Whenever I find a word that's in the New Testament and not in the Old Testament, I always say, ah, grace! Grace! More grace has been given. Thus, more things are given.

You know, more grace is given. Thus, now if you look at a woman in your heart in lust after you've committed adultery, more grace is given. Thus, now, God expects us to embrace difficulties and suffering.

And I don't know if you believe that or not. You're looking at me like a calf looking at a new gate. But I'm not making this up.

Paul said these words, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world. Paul gloried in the cross. The cross was a place of suffering.

The cross was a place of physical pain and emotional pain. The cross was a place of brutality. It was a place of heartache and heartbreak.

It was a place of agony and despair. And Paul knew all those words that I just gave you. They seemed to be the everyday experience of his life.

I'm sure they weren't, but it seems that way to me as I read in the epistles. That that's the way it was. Suffering is a New Testament word.

I have been so blessed lately by reading some of the accounts of the persecuted Christians in China who suffer tremendously because they're not willing to shut their mouth about Jesus. They suffer tremendously just for that very one thing. And I have to be honest, brethren, I'm not sure what we would do if we were faced with the same thing.

I wonder if we would open our mouth like they do. I wonder if we'd go out and tell anybody about Christ. I don't want to park there.

That's one of my main points tomorrow. But I wonder. But those dear Chinese brethren, they will not keep their mouth shut about Christ.

And because they will not, they suffer. But you know the thing that I have been intrigued about as I read about those dear brethren over there that are suffering for Christ's sake, it seems like they, just like Paul, have tasted the reality of what happens when they suffer and it seems like they delight in the suffering. They're not afraid to suffer.

And that confounds the authorities again and again. You know, they think, oh, we're going to get these guys. Yeah, we'll beat them real good and then they'll be quiet.

And they beat them real good and they're excited after they got beat. So they stick them in solitary confinement and don't let them eat for two weeks and they come out rejoicing. They can't figure this one out.

But the reason why they can do that is because they embrace suffering. It's not a terrible thing to them. They're not sitting there in the cell saying, poor me, oh, life's so hard.

My wife burnt the eggs this morning. The cereal was a little stale. Thanks to the bent and dents.

I wonder how we look at it, brethren. Suffering. I can't give you all the verses, but let's look at a couple of them anyway.

Romans 8. Look what Paul says in Romans 8 and verse 15. He says, For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Verse 16.

The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Here's the verse I want to look at. And if children, then heirs.

Oh, praise God. Heirs. Heirs of God.

And joined heirs with Christ. Oh, let's stop and don't read any further. Those are wonderful words, aren't they? Heirs of God.

And joined heirs with Christ. Oh, my. Look at our position in Christ, brethren.

Let's read the rest of the verse too. If so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified together. Now, look at this fanatic.

Look at his words. For I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Sounds like radical to me.

Sounds like it doesn't bother him very much. It sounds like he's expecting the suffering. It almost sounds like he delights in his suffering.

And he does delight in his suffering. It was a ministry for the Apostle Paul. He expected that he's going to suffer.

2 Timothy 2.8. That'll be the last one we'll read. I have ten more, but we'll only read two. 2 Timothy 2.8. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel wherein I suffer trouble.

As an evildoer, even under bonds they threw me in prison. But the word of God is not bound, he says. Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

It is a faithful saying. For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we believe not yet, he abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself.

Isn't it interesting that those two flow together there? The suffering and also the denying or the not denying of him. And those two do flow together. And sometimes I wonder if that's why we don't suffer.

It's because we just don't simply open our mouth very often. And therefore, we do not suffer. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.

Anyone want to reign? We shall also reign with him. Brethren, I don't think we see suffering right. That's my honest opinion.

We're so used to American Christianity that we read our Bible with American eyes. We just kind of skim over those verses and they don't mean anything to us. God wants us to suffer.

You say, well, brother, what are you saying now? Just to go out and get myself beat just for suffering? No, I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that. You know, there are many, many ways that you can bear a cross in this life, even in this prosperous America.

You can bear a cross. You can do it. Number one, you can accept the infirmities of your own flesh.

Any of you tired of dragging your body around with you? It doesn't get up very good in the morning, does it? And for some of us that are getting a little older, it creaks every now and then. And it hurts if you sit too long and then get up and start moving. And when you go to a prayer meeting and you get up off your knees after the prayer meeting, it takes you a few steps before you straighten up.

You can accept the infirmities of your flesh and recognize that it is by the design of God that God put us in this earthen vessel and, yea, in this old body that's getting older all the time. It's God's design. And maybe you're here this morning and you're not very smart.

No big deal. Accept the infirmities of your flesh. Paul accepted the infirmities of his flesh.

Maybe you stutter. That's not a problem. God can use stutterers.

Look what He did with Moses. Someone was telling me, I don't know if it was yesterday or the day before, of a friend of theirs that they know that stutters when he talks. And if you stutter, God bless you, I don't mean to section you out.

Forgive me. Maybe I shouldn't even say it. He said, this dear man, when he talked normal in conversation, he stuttered.

But when he got out behind the pulpit, he lost his stuttering. And probably there was a few times when he said, now God, if you can do that for me in the pulpit, you can surely do it for me out of the pulpit. But for some reason, God didn't take it away.

Can any of you figure out what that reason might be? He might be a humble, broken man all the days of his life. I don't know what it was that Paul's thorn of the flesh was. I don't know.

But God let him keep it. That he might be humbled by it. We can do the same.

You can bear a cross in prosperous American Christianity. You can accept the disciplines of the Christian life. You can do that every day.

You can choose them, brethren. You can choose to not eat any time you want to. You can go on a three-day fast every month.

You can do it twice a month and it wouldn't hurt you one bit. And you know it. I mean, I don't believe in dieting.

Amen? Come on, that's for the world. There are so many things to fast and pray about. We shouldn't be dieting to lose weight.

Just quit eating. And seek the face of God. You can accept the disciplines of the Christian life.

Prayer and fasting. You can get up in the morning and seek the face of God. You can drag that old tired carcass out of bed every morning and seek the face of God.

You want to suffer? Try it for a week. Get up at 4.30 in the morning and seek the face of God. Get out there where it's cold when you're tired.

You know when you start reading your Bible and you find yourself going to sleep? Well, get out of that easy chair that you're sitting in and stand up by the kitchen table and read standing up. And if you can't do it reading standing up, read while you're walking. And if you can't do that, go for a walk outside.

We can bear the cross. We don't have to wait until persecution comes. We can bear the cross any time we want to.

Amen? You can go to that early morning prayer meeting. Fastings and prayer and giving. You can give until it hurts.

You can say, I think I'm going to drive this old junky car around for a while and give the money away to the missions. You can do that. How about watchings? When was the last time you stayed up half the night just to be alone with the Lord? And then went to work the next day? Oh no, that would be suffering.

That's right! That would be suffering! How about loneliness? Everybody else having a good old time, but not you. You're alone somewhere. How about sleeplessness? How many of you ever woke up in the middle of the night? Let me see your hands.

One o'clock in the morning, you just... How many went back to bed after you woke up? Let me see your hands. That's right! Maybe God wanted you to get up. Maybe God wanted you to get up.

You know what happens in the middle of the night when God wakes you up like that and you go downstairs and you turn that light on and you open up your Bible and all of a sudden God visits you as you're sitting there in that chair in the middle of the night and you realize, Oh, God woke me up. I better be quiet. I've got too many points here.

You can submit yourself to a fervent prayer life. You can do that. You can say, I'm not going to pray anymore.

Lay me down to sleep prayers. I'm going to cry out my heart before God when I pray. You can suffer.

You can suffer by striving against sin in your life and say, I am not going to accept that sin in my life. I will not allow it. You have not resisted under blood, striving against sin.

Not yet. Not a one of us. You can accept every new obedience to the Word of God and say, I'm going to do it.

I don't care what anybody thinks. You know, so many of us, I'm telling you, it's a shame. Us religious people, we are so concerned about what everybody else thinks that we don't obey the Word of God.

That's not right. Well, you know, in the setting that I'm in, if I open my mouth and started getting excited about Christ, they'd throw me out. That's right.

They would. And guess what that is? That's suffering. One brother told me, he said, my background is Amish and I got excommunicated a few years ago.

It was the sweetest time of my life. He said, then after I left, all the troubles and the excommunication troubles passed away, I settled down in nice, easy American church life. He said, almost lost out with God.

We can accept every new obedience in the Word of God and say, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. We can suffer.

For the redemption of souls. We can do that. You see, I'm going to go talk to that person who does not want to talk to me.

I'm going to go talk to that person that may spit in my face. I'm going to go talk to that person that will sneer at me. I'm going to go speak up in the midst of that family reunion when everybody else is fooling around.

I'm just going to speak up and say, I don't feel good about what we're doing. And everybody will look at you, you know, and every eye will be on you. Yes, my brethren, that is suffering.

You say, well, what will the relatives think? And what will the church people think? And what will my mom and dad think? Oh, my brethren, what will God think? Do we ever stop and think, what will God think? While we're there hiding our light under a bushel, God is saying, who will stand in the gap? We can accept the trials of life that purify us. We can receive them. We can take the chastenings of the Lord which God does bring into every one of our lives and we can accept it.

See, so many times, we're so unused to suffering that when chastenings and troubles come, we kick and fuss. I mean, we're like a little child that's over his daddy's knee and daddy's trying to give him a good whooping in there, carrying on and kicking and screaming. And you know, the daddy's there saying, son, until you settle down, I'm just going to keep on going.

Until you settle down and submit your heart to this spanking that I'm giving you, it's not going to go well for you. And so many times, when God tries to spank us because we're not used to suffering and we don't see what beautiful things that happens to us, we kick and scream and carry on and God doesn't hardly get anything out of us because of it. Well, that's about all that I can fit in here.

But in closing, let me say this. The Apostle Paul, he understood this very, very well and he knew, I'm going to get gold out of this. I mean, just picture that man's life.

Here they come. They've all got rocks in their hands and they're upset and they're screaming and I hear my name. In the midst of all the noise, I can hear my name.

It must be trouble for me again. Paul suffered so many things. He embraced it.

Didn't he? So did the early church, didn't they? He looked at that crowd coming his way with all those stones in their hands and he just went, Yes, Lord. Yes. Make me like Jesus, Lord, with every stone.

Make me like Jesus. Oh, Lord. Father, we do see.

We do see it. It's in the Bible. It's the truth.

It's Your heart. We see it in the life of the Apostle Paul. We see how You worked in his life through it all.

And Lord, we acknowledge this God is our God forever and ever. Lord, I don't know what You'll do with this message and how You'll work it out in all of these men's lives. God, we pray, we beg You to work it out in our lives.

We trust You to do that. In Jesus' name.

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