

(Through the Bible) 2 Corinthians - Part 2

by Zac Poonen

A true servant of God is motivated by the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ, and lives for the purpose of pleasing God and glorifying His kingdom.

Duration: 57:40

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:12

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon delves into 2 Corinthians, highlighting the inner life of a servant of God, exemplified by the Apostle Paul. It emphasizes the importance of following Christ's example in practical situations, having ambitions aligned with pleasing God, and the fear of the Lord in accountability. The sermon also touches on surrendering to God's will, the need for humility, handling trials with grace, and the significance of staying devoted to Jesus Christ amidst challenges.

Transcript

Let's turn this evening to 2 Corinthians and continue where we left off in the morning. We look at chapter 5. We saw that 2 Corinthians describes the inner life of the man of God whom God can use to do his work on earth. There are a number of things we see here which we can consider.

I believe if you are serious about serving God as he wants us to, the Lord has given us the Apostle Paul as an example, an example that we can follow because he said, follow me as I follow Christ. Jesus is our example, but sometimes we wonder how to deal with the practical situations which we face. For example, we don't see Jesus establishing churches and appointing elders and things like that.

And there we have an example in the Apostle Paul and a man who went through a lot of persecution in his life and he reveals to us the inner secret of his life in 2 Corinthians more than any other letter. In verse 9, he speaks about his ambition. See, all young people have ambitions.

The world is full of young people who have ambitions. The problem is they've got the wrong ambitions. A lot of people, their ambition today is to make money or become great or famous or do research and get a name for themselves.

So many things. Paul also had an ambition when he was converted. He says, our ambition, we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, that means whether we are in heaven or absent from heaven.

In the previous context, he says our home is in heaven, and whether we are there or here, it doesn't make a difference. Whether we are at home with the Lord, like it says in verse 8, or absent from the body, it doesn't make a difference whether I'm there or here. My ambition is to please him.

In other words, when I get to heaven, listen to this carefully, my ambition and goal is not going to change. Can you honestly say that? That when you get to heaven, your ambition and goal is not going to change. A lot of believers whose ambition on earth is something else think that once they die, they get to heaven, okay, then we'll have an ambition to please God.

No, he says whether at home or absent, whether I'm here or there, it makes no difference. My ambition is going to be exactly the same. And that is the man who is in tune with God, because he's in tune with heaven's values.

And he will be the most effective servant of God on earth because he's in tune with heaven. Trouble with a lot of Christian workers today is they are not in tune with God or heaven. And then he says, verse 11, he speaks about the fear of the Lord.

In the King James Version, it says the terror of the Lord. And knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. In what context is he saying that? He's saying that in verse 10, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may be rewarded in his body for the things that he has done, whether good or bad.

So, he says, I know that one day I'm going to stand at the judgment seat of Christ and I'm going to be evaluated for every single thing that I ever did in my whole life, whether it's good or bad, the words, the thoughts, the motives, what I did with my body, it's all going to be evaluated and I'm going to be rewarded accordingly or I'm going to lose the reward. See, this judgment seat of Christ is different from the judgment, the great white throne judgment of God, which is only for unbelievers. This is a judgment seat only for believers.

Believers are going to be judged and rewarded according to their faithfulness. And he says, since that is true, we know the fear of the Lord, we are accountable. It's something like, supposing you're working for a company and they give you 500,000 rupees in cash and say, please get on the train here and take this to our headquarters in Delhi.

I don't think you'll get much sleep on that train in the three nights you spend in it because you can't afford to lose this. And I don't think you'll take any of that money and live lavishly on the journey all along, because when you reach the other end and you present this to the headquarters of your company, you'll have to account for every rupee in that packet they gave you. And you'd be so careful, you would not leave the compartment, leaving that package alone there.

Now, Paul realized that life is like that. The number of days God gives me, 365 days a year, many opportunities he gives me, he gives me time, he gives me money, he's given me intelligence, he's given me many, many things in this body. And when I reach the other end of the journey, I'm going to be evaluated for every single day of my life on earth.

And so the same care that this man has, who's going in the train with that money, Paul had with his life. He says, I know the fear of the Lord, and therefore I persuade men. And then he goes on to say, it is the love of Christ that controls us.

There are two things that should motivate us in our life. One is the reverence and fear of the Lord, mentioned in verse 11, and the other is the love of Christ. The love of Christ controls me, he says.

He was motivated by love in everything he did, and that was the secret of his life. And then he tells us in verse 15, we've already considered in Romans 6 this great truth that Paul kept on speaking about in the last part of verse 14, if one died, all died with him. He speaks about it in Romans, he speaks about it in Corinthians, he speaks about it in Galatians.

I'm crucified with Christ. One died, all died. This is one of the unique revelations that God gave Paul.

We don't see Peter and John and James writing about it, but they all know about the forgiveness of sins. One of the unique revelations that God gave Paul was that when Jesus died, in God's eyes, we all died with him. And so he says, if we all died and we rose again with him, this is one of Paul's great themes, verse 15, that now that we live, we should no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and rose again for us.

Now, I've often said, if you ask people, why did Christ die? The answer that most people give is from 1 Corinthians 15, Christ died for our sins. Correct. But that's only one part of the answer.

The other part of the answer is here, verse 15, Christ died, read it, it's in your Bible. Christ died that we should never again live for ourselves, but for him. How many of you know that Christ died for that purpose? See, that's the other side of the coin.

One side of the coin says Christ died for our sins. The other side is Christ died that I might never again live for myself. So, if you are living for yourself, you are frustrating the purpose with which Christ died.

Did you understand that? For example, if you keep on living in sin, you are taking advantage of the fact that Christ died for our sins. You are taking advantage of the grace of God. And anyone, any believer who lives for himself, we have to say, has not really understood the full purpose with which Christ died.

The aim of the devil is to blind our eyes to the full truth of God. If he can help us to make us see just a little bit of it, then he succeeded. Either he tries to prevent us from seeing anything, and if we see something, he makes sure that we don't see the full thing.

He says, okay, you've seen Christ died for our sins, I'm going to make sure you don't see any more. But Christ died that we might never again live for ourselves. He died to deliver us from a self-centered life.

And then we discover, when we put these two verses together, 1 Corinthians 15, 3, and this verse, that the root of all sin is self-centeredness. That a man lives in sin because he lives for himself. And as long as you live for yourself, you will never have victory over sin.

It's like keeping the root of a tree still there, and every time something comes out from that, you're chopping it off, cutting it off, cutting it off, cutting it off. It'll keep on coming. The only solution is pull out the root, and then you won't have to keep on using your scissors to keep cutting off that plant that keeps coming up from that root.

Now many people, they've got rid of sin on the surface, but the root is still there. The root of living for oneself. Now I want to say to all of you, my brothers and sisters, that you'll never get victory over sin as long as you live for yourself.

That's impossible. Because the root is there, and you can pray and cry and fast, you say, Lord, deal with this root. Help me to die once and for all to decide in my life that from this day onwards, I will never make a decision with me as the center of my life.

I will never make a decision in terms of how will this benefit me. Do you know the number of people who make decisions in Christian work by this question? How will this benefit me? How will this benefit my family? Why you keep making decisions like that, that's how every unconverted, godless sinner in the world also makes decisions. How do they make their decisions? How will this benefit me and my family? And you do Christian work, and you also ask the same question, how will this benefit me and my family? You are no different from him, except that he's probably an atheist, and you go to church.

Inside, you're just the same. Jesus died to deliver us from that, so that never again in our life do we make a decision by how will this benefit me, but we make a decision by will this glorify God? How will this benefit God, and his kingdom, and his purpose? If I can find people here who are determined to live like that from today, how will my life benefit God? How can this decision I take benefit God? How will my going and living in this place benefit God, and his kingdom, and his purpose? How will my choosing to settle down in this place benefit God and his purpose? How will my working with this group, or that church, or this organization benefit God and his purpose? I tell you, you get a hundred people like that, we can turn India upside down. It's very difficult.

The vast majority of people in Christian work, I tell you, I've seen it for 41 years, seek their own. They've never understood this verse, that we are not supposed to live for ourselves anymore. They skip verses like that, and go to verses like verse 17, all things are passed away, and all things are become new, we have become a new creation.

Let me ask you, even if you go to verse 17, what are the old things that have passed away? That should have passed away, that is living for myself. Has it passed away? Has everything become new? Has my ambition become new? Have my goals become new? Okay, verse 20, we are ambassadors for Christ, and we are entreating you. That's a tremendous calling, to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ.

And that is why there's a dignity about us. Let me ask you a question, even the ambassador of some very poor country in India will have a certain dignity about him. And then, the bigger the country, and the more powerful the country, the more the dignity in an ambassador.

Now, we live in a world where we have one superpower, the United States of America. Think of the ambassador of the United States of America in India, can you imagine the dignity with which he conducts himself, because he knows that he is representing the one superpower in the world, okay? He won't do anything cheap or undignified. He won't go like a beggar, asking people for money, and he won't do anything which dishonors the name of his country.

Now, can you imagine the ambassador of the United States of America coming to your house and saying, can you please give us some money to help our country? Can you imagine that? If such a white man comes with a suit and tie and says, I'm an ambassador of America, we want some money because our country is having a tough time, even 10 rupees will do. You will say, you're a liar, you're not the ambassador of the United States, I cannot believe that the ambassador of the United States behaves like that. But if another man comes in and says, I'm an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, can you please give 10 rupees for our work, you say, yeah, sure.

Why do we believe the other person? Because we believe the ambassador of America is way up there, and the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ is way down here, a beggar. Do you know that there is one superpower in the universe? Not the world, the world's superpower we know. I'm talking about the superpower in the universe, which is that, that's God, it's the kingdom of God, it's Jesus Christ.

And that chap may be the ambassador of the greatest superpower in the world, but with all humility I can say that I'm an ambassador of the superpower in the world, of the universe, not just the world. And that's what you are, at least that's what you say you are, but do you conduct yourself with the dignity of an ambassador of the one superpower in the whole universe? I tell you the thing that has grieved my heart and made me so sad is when I see the name of Jesus Christ dishonored by the undignified, cheap way in which people go around begging and say they are ambassadors for Jesus Christ, very, very sad. I, you know there's a verse in Psalm 50 which says, the Lord says, if I were hungry I wouldn't tell you, I own the cattle on a thousand hills, God says, and that's what a servant of God says, if I were hungry I wouldn't tell you, I'd tell my master in heaven.

If you're in touch with him, he'll listen to you. You see, an ambassador in a country has to always be in touch with his home country. He cannot afford to be out of touch with his home country even for a single day.

This is how we are called to live. I long with all my heart to see the day in India when we shall have servants of God, they may be very poor, they may not afford, may be able to afford anything more than a bicycle, maybe they cannot even afford a scooter, but I want to see men and women who've got a dignity, even if they are poor and they wear very simple clothes and they can only wear chapels and ride a cycle and live in some village, but with a dignity of an ambassador of the greatest superpower in the universe. Is that the impression we get of Christian workers? No, India has got a picture of Christian workers who are beggars, they're just dignified beggars.

Always asking for money, always running after rich people, what a tragedy. That's not an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Always remember my brother, sister, you're a servant of God, you're an ambassador of Jesus Christ, wherever you go, when you travel in a train, remember you're an ambassador of Jesus Christ, when you travel in a bus, you're an ambassador of Jesus Christ, wherever you go, you're an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6, he speaks here in verses 3 to 10 about the way he conducts himself as a servant of God, he says, in nothing I want the ministry, giving no offense, verse 3, to anyone so that the ministry does not get a bad name. As an ambassador, he doesn't want to do anything that would bring a bad name on the ministry, and so in everything, this is a wonderful verse, in everything, verse 4, I want to commend myself as a servant of God, in endurance, in affliction, in everything, in hardships, in distress, in beatings, imprisonments, labor, sleeplessness, hunger, purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, and so on.

Sometimes, verse 8, glory, sometimes dishonor, people appreciate us, people condemn us, evil report, good report, people say good things about us, people say bad things about us, but we are the same servants of God, in good report, bad report, when people slander us, people say good things, some people call us deceivers, some people call us true servants of God, to both we manifest ourselves as servants of God, to the world we are unknown, but among God's people, we are well known, verse 9, as dying, but yet we live, we go through so many sufferings, but we don't die, till God's time comes, we live, and as punished, verse 9, are disciplined by God, but not put to death, sorrowful, but yet rejoicing,

sorrowful because we are concerned about so many people lost in sin, concerned because so

many believers are carnal, that's the sorrow, not sorrow because people are hurting me, sorrowful because of the sorrows of other people, and yet always rejoicing, because I join the Lord, as poor, yet making many people rich, spiritually, having nothing, yet possessing all things, I possess all of heaven and earth, it's at my disposal, whatever I need, God provides me, but in actual terms, the bank account may be low, and we may be living at times from day to day, God takes care of us, this is how Paul lived, he did not believe in a prosperity gospel at all, and then he says about his heart towards these Corinthians, the Corinthians were very narrow hearted towards Paul, and Paul said, our heart is wide open to you, I believe that's very important in our service to other people, that our

hearts must always be wide open towards them, even if they are, verse 12, narrow hearted towards us, you are restrained in your own affections, you are narrow hearted towards me, but I'm wide hearted towards you, there's a little poem I read once, which said something like this, they drew a circle that pushed me out, they called me a heretic, and various names like that, and drew a circle which only included their own people, but love and wisdom told me how to win the victory, I drew a circle that took them also inside, that's God's way, let the other people draw a circle which does not include you, we are the only ones, if you love and you have wisdom, you'll draw a bigger circle and take them in, that's how Paul was, his heart was large, you cannot serve God if your heart is narrow just

towards people in your denomination, or people who agree with you in everything, people who see everything exactly like you, and many people are like that, but your own service for God will be limited unless your heart is large towards all of God's people, then we have this wonderful verse about working together with unbelievers, verse 14, do not be bound together with unbelievers, do not be yoked together, there was an old testament law that you must not yoke an ox and a donkey together, you must not be yoked in partnership with unbelievers in business, for example, because in business they may want to do some cheating and unrighteous practices which you don't agree with, in Christian work, it's not just with unbelievers, with people who don't have your sense of values, that is an

unequal yoke, see your standards are so high and his standards are so low, can you imagine putting a yoke between two bullocks, one whose height is this much and one whose height is this much, it will be difficult for them to plough together, unequal, you may say he is a believer, but look at his sense of values, he allows a lot of things which you will not allow, so that's an unequal yoke, in marriage, if you marry someone who does not have your sense of values and your goal and your vision, that's an unequal yoke, don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, because what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness and light with darkness, so here it speaks about calling us to be separate, verse 17, therefore come out from their midst and be separate, don't mingle with people

who don't know the Lord in work, I'm not saying in your office or in your neighborhood or your relatives, we have to mingle with unbelievers in the world, but when you work, for example, I want to speak very plainly here and well, I hope you don't get offended with the truth, but I find there are people who are believers in some denominational churches and in those denominations, the leaders of those churches are unconverted, I mean they themselves will say our bishop is unconverted, I say then what in the world are you doing in a church where your leader is unconverted, the leader doesn't know God, if he's not born again, the Bible says he's a child of the devil, and it doesn't make a difference whether he's an archbishop or a bishop or anything, if he's not born again, God's not going

to see whether he's got a cross around his neck or wears a purple dress or a white dress, is he born again, I'm really amazed at people who say I'm born again, but my bishop, my leader is not born again, what are you doing sitting in that group then, you should be getting out of there, how can you follow a leader who's a child of the devil, or don't you believe that there are only two categories of people in the world according to 1 John 3 10, those who are children of God and children of the devil, that's what it says, I believe a lot of believers don't believe that, they think somehow because God sees a cross around the neck, he'll take him to heaven, I'm sorry to say he won't, he sees the heart, don't be fooled, there's a lot of compromise in the lives of many believers, and it's not

only people who are unconverted, there are people who know that their pastor is a crook, he's just out to make money, I say what in the world are you doing following such a pastor, your leader is a crook and you're following him sitting in that church, sad, Jesus said the blind leaders lead the blind people, they both fall into the ditch, you want to avoid the ditch, don't follow these blind leaders, that's true, be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, come out and be separate, touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a father to you, I have never in my life regretted obeying that command, and when you obey that command, chapter 7 verse 1, having these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, if

you want to perfect holiness in your life, you have to cleanse yourself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, these external filthiness of associations that defile you, the internal filthiness of motive, attitude, cleanse yourself and perfect holiness, God's will is, are you holy, you must perfect your holiness and you can only do it in the fear of God, if you're afraid of men, you're afraid what will that person say, what will that person say, what will my relative say, what will my uncle say, what will my auntie say, I want to tell you, you'll never perfect holiness in your whole life, you've got to perfect holiness in the fear of God, you've got to fear only one person, God, that's all, but God has sent in his word, stand for that, and then Paul says in verse 2 again, I've got a lot

of room in my heart for you, please make some room in your heart for me, have I taken advantage of you, no, have I wronged any of you, have I corrupted any of you, no, then why don't you receive me, in chapter 7, we read of, you know, when Paul wrote that very, verse 11, we read of that very strong rebuke that he gave to the church in Carnton, the first letter, telling them, you put that man out of your midst, you're allowing that man to live there and you're corrupting your church, and when they got that letter, they really took it seriously, and it says, I caused you sorrow, verse 8, by my letter, sometimes when God's servants write to us or speak to us, they have to speak very hard or write a letter which is very strong and it causes sorrow, and he says, but it caused you sorrow only

for a while, and I don't regret it, verse 8, because the sorrow, verse 10, which is according to the will of God, produces a repentance that leads to salvation, and what earnestness that repentance brought, godly sorrow, vindication of yourself, what fear, longing, zeal, they were, they took Paul's letter seriously, and this is how true repentance is.

In chapter 8 and chapter 9, Paul writes to them to collect money to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem, now notice very carefully, he was not telling them to collect money for his ministry, now some people use this passage, chapter 8 and chapter 9, say Paul wrote to people to collect money, we also tell people to collect money, but Paul was not telling people to collect money for his ministry, he was not even going to touch one paisa of that money himself, we have every right to ask rich believers to give money to help poor believers, if we don't touch it ourselves, that's the example of the Apostle Paul, he never touched one

paisa of that himself, he trusted God for his needs, when he could not get enough, he stitched tents and earned something, and sometimes he just went without food,

but he would not lower his standards, because he was an ambassador of the world's greatest universe's greatest superpower, and if he was hungry he was not going to tell anyone, except God, so here he urged them to collect money, he said you fellows have got a lot of money, and there in Jerusalem there are poor believers, please provide for them, I believe it's good and a good example here for every servant of God to have his eyes open to see where believers under his responsibility are poor, and urge rich believers to help them, very good example, because those rich believers may not know about these poor believers, and so it's good to tell them here's someone who can be profited by your money, in fact in the New Testament we never read a single example of any Apostle or any servant of

God asking people to give money for their ministry, never, they only told God, never find an example like that anywhere in Scripture, but they did many times urge that they should give money to the poor, and so that's what we see in chapter 8, and we read there of the churches in Philippi who gladly gave even though they were very poor, and then he gives the example of Jesus in verse 9, he says you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich, he says think of what Jesus did, he had everything in heaven, and he came down to earth and became poor, he hung on the cross stripped of everything, so that we can become rich, so what is he saying therefore, is he saying that therefore you should just

enjoy your riches, no, he says follow the example of Jesus, now some people take that verse and say Jesus became poor so that I can be rich, now I'm rich, that's not what he's saying, he says look at the example of Jesus, who gave up everything for the sake of others, you also be willing to give up everything for the sake of others, he's not telling you to be rich, he says if you become rich help those people who are poor like Jesus, who was rich and came down and became poor, you see how you can take a verse of scripture and misunderstand it, misquote it for your own benefit, you want to justify all the money you make and that you hoard up for yourself, and you say well Jesus became poor that I might be rich, but that's not the meaning of that verse, it's so clear in the context that

that verse means you follow the example of Jesus, who helped others who were poor and you must help others who are poor, that's the context of the whole chapter, if you take a verse out of context you can teach almost anything you like, and then you'll build a cult like this prosperity cult today, and verse 20 and 21, he says in distributing this money we are very careful that nobody should discredit us, because we have a great regard that we must do what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men, Paul was very careful in the collecting of this money that nobody should say that somebody is swiping some of this money for himself, so Paul said he himself would not take that money or transport it, but we have sent Titus, verse 18, Titus and we have sent

along with Titus verse 18 another brother, and these two brothers he would never send one person to transport money, always two people who have a good testimony and they will take that money and give it to the church in Jerusalem, it's very important to be very clear in the matter of money, now chapter 9 he says and verse 6, again he's talking about the subject of giving, he says if you are very miserly in your giving, you will reap also like that, that means if you sow a little bit of seed, you'll get a little bit of a harvest, if you sow plenty of seed, you'll get a bigger harvest, now many people use this verse to urge you to give money to them, particularly television evangelists, they'll say you must put seed, put that seed into our ministry and here's our address and send money here

and you'll get a big harvest, these are hucksters and hoaxes who are out to deceive simple believers, Paul was not saying put a seed into my ministry, you know I'm serving the Lord, I'm doing all these things, send some money to me and you'll get a harvest, this is how people misquote the scripture, was Paul saying that you should give money to him, no, he says go and give it to other people, you remember what Jesus told the rich young ruler who came to him, beautiful words, go sell what you have, give it to the poor, he didn't say sell what you haven't come and give the money here because we've got a lot of needs, we've got to support all these people and their families, no, he said you give your money to the poor and you come, I want you without your money, where in the world do you

find servants of the Lord like that, who can tell a rich person, brother I don't want your money, I want you, go and give your money to any Christian group or organization, you come to our church and let me build you up into the likeness of Jesus Christ, we're not one bit interested in your money, that's how Jesus was, but it's almost impossible to find a pastor like that, who will tell a rich person in his church, give your money somewhere else and you come here and listen to the Word of God, I do it all the time, we're not interested in your money, we're interested that you become like Christ in your life and if you want to give to the Lord, there are so many places you can give, there are poor people there, there are poor people there, Paul says give it to them, I'm an ambassador of

the world's, universe's greatest superpower, so you take care of these other people, that is the dignity of a man of God, please remember that.

In chapter 9, he goes on to say, God loves, verse 7, a cheerful giver, in the Old Testament, the emphasis was on how much you give, in the New Testament, the emphasis is on how you give, cheerfully or reluctantly, it's not a question of percentage, it's not quantity, but quality, you notice that throughout the New Testament, you find this emphasis on quality, your service, quality, the type of church you build, quality, even your giving, not quantity, 10%, but quality, whatever you give, give cheerfully, but remember, if you give stingily, you'll reap stingily, I believe there are many, many believers who are poor because they have given stingily to God and therefore, they don't have a ministry in their life, they are miserly in their giving, be large-hearted in your giving to God, be

rich towards God, many people have gotten to a lot of financial difficulty because they have not learned to give to God generously, in my single days, when I was single and I didn't have much expense, what God gave me, I could give freely and through the years, when I got married and got into a lot of need financially, I can say today, I never had to get into debt, I never had to borrow at any time, even though there were times of great financial difficulty because God repaid what was given earlier, so learn to give, and you will find your financial problems are solved, but give wisely, don't give to people who ask you to give it to them, pray and give where you find God leads you to give, particularly where you see the need is greatest, don't give to people who spend lavishly and waste

God's money, give where the need is greatest, give to the poor, not to the rich, give to those who are really in need of it, and you will find that God gives you a rich harvest in your needs, I don't believe it's God's will that a believer should be in debt or in constant financial problem, usually such a person has never in his life been rich towards God, he's been miserly towards God and he finds in his time of need, God is also miserly towards him, so let's learn a lesson from that, okay, we go on to chapter 10 and verse 1, Paul says, I myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and Paul, he was a great apostle and these people were just such young believers, but he humbles himself right down to their level and he says, I urge you by the meekness and gentleness of

Christ, this is how he always spoke, and he speaks here about something about our thought life, he says, it's important that we, he speaks about the weapons of our warfare in verse 4, which are powerful, you know, to the destruction of fortresses, he's speaking about fortresses in our thought life, you know, in our thought life, he speaks there about verse 5, bringing every thought captive, the last part of verse 5, to the obedience of Christ, so he's speaking about our thought life and in verse 4, he says, our thought life has got fortresses, fortresses, you know what a fortress is, an enemy builds a strong fortress, like a certain dirty thought pattern, that's a fortress or a selfish thought pattern, that's another fortress and we just can't seem to conquer this fortress for Christ and

we find when we sleep at night, it's all these dirty dreams that come out of this fortress inside our mind, is that God's will that we live like that forever, no, God's will is that we bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, so we are going to destroy these fortresses with weapons, spiritual weapons and one of the great weapons is the Word of God, if you fill your mind more and more and more and more with the Word of God, you'll find these fortresses get demolished and the soldiers inside those fortress get destroyed, see I've been a young man like many of you are and I've struggled with dirty thoughts like all of you are struggling and I found this was a solution in my life in my younger days, I meditated and read and read and read and flooded my mind with God's Word and

a little picture the Lord gave me was like this, our mind is like a bowl full of dirty water because we put a lot of muck and dirt in it in our unconverted days and our thought life is like a bowl full of filthy muck and dirty water and I cannot access that but if I pour a jug of clean water into that bowl gradually that water overflows, overflows, it gets diluted, diluted, diluted, diluted and after some years that bowl becomes clear water, it takes a long time, that's the effect of pouring God's Word into our mind that over a period of a number of years it becomes clean but if every now and then I throw a little bit of dirt inside then of course it'll be dirty again and by the power of God we can ask God to give us grace to bring every thought captive that means when I'm tempted with a

thought to reject it.

Okay, we go on to verse 13, Paul speaks here about not boasting beyond our measure, he says God has appointed a certain sphere for my ministry and he says I don't have any desire to go outside that sphere, for Jesus that sphere was Israel and he hardly ever went outside that.

Paul had a certain sphere and he says this is the sphere of my ministry, God's given it to me, I'm not in competition with Peter, I'm not in competition with Andrew, I'm not in competition with Matthew, I'm not in competition with any others, Thomas has gone to India, I'm not in competition with him, I'm in, God has given me a sphere and I'm going to work in that sphere, he had a clear understanding of where God had called him to, I find a lot of preachers today don't have such a clear understanding of their boundary and that's why they're always clashing with other people, they're getting into their boundary and they're getting into this boundary because they don't have an understanding of the boundary which God has drawn around them.

Okay, now we go to chapter 11 verse 3, he speaks here about how, verse 2 he says I'm like a man who's leading you to be engaged to Jesus Christ, to be married to Jesus one day and I've got a tremendous jealousy that you should not fall in love with anybody else on the way, think of Abraham's servant who was taking Rebekah all the way from there 400 miles to Isaac and during that way if some handsome young fellow came along and tried to win Rebekah's affections, what would Eliezer do?

Eliezer would say get away, this girl's already booked, she's booked for my master's son and he would tell her don't be attracted by all these fellows over here, Paul preserved, wanted to preserve the church in Corinth like that for Jesus, that's a jealousy, I, you are reserved for Jesus, you cannot live for the world, you cannot live for money, you cannot live for honor, all these other fellows come and want to attract you, I want you to live for God, a true servant of God has got a jealousy like that for his people that they should be kept like a pure virgin for Christ and he says but I'm afraid that Satan will come like the old serpent in Eden, verse 3 and how very cunningly he drew Eve away, I'm concerned that your heart will be drawn away from devotion to Jesus Christ, how do you

know that you've become a backslider, how do you know that you've gone astray, when you believe some wrong doctrine, no, according to verse 3, you've gone astray, the moment you lose your devotion to Jesus Christ, you've gone astray, that's the mark of going astray, every believer who has lost his devotion to Jesus Christ has gone astray already and our job as servants of God is to preserve them in devotion to Jesus Christ, that's the most important thing and the devil is always seeking according to this verse to lead people astray from devotion to Jesus Christ, from fervently loving Jesus Christ, what's the use serving him, what's the use evangelism, what's the use teaching, what's the use building the church if he had lost our love for Jesus Christ, the Lord told the church in Ephesus,

you do so many good things but you don't love me like you did at first, I don't want all your service, please remember that our calling is to be, to keep ourselves in a devotion to Christ and to keep others whom we serve in devotion to Christ and then he speaks in verses 5 to 13, how he was not a burden to people financially, he says when I verse 9, when I was present with you, I was not a burden to anyone, Paul was very careful that he was not a burden to people financially, he tried to work with his own hands, sometimes he received gifts verse 8 from other churches but in Corinth, he was not, they didn't accept his ministry too freely and we must never receive money from a church or from people who don't accept our ministry, we must have a dignity and keep ourselves aloof because when

we receive money, it's an act of fellowship, there's nothing wrong in receiving money if a person has accepted your ministry but the Corinthians had some questions about Paul's ministry so he didn't receive anything from them and he said, I will not be a burden to any of you and then in verse 23 onwards till the end of the chapter, he speaks of the tremendous trials he went through, imprisonments beaten, 195 stripes on his back, verse 24, beaten with rods, shipwrecked, many types of dangers, sleepless nights, verse 27 and it says here, he was in hunger and thirst, often without food, verse 27, in cold and exposure, which means there were times when he did not have warm clothing to cover himself, he didn't have money to buy warm clothes, he didn't have money to buy food sometimes, all of

this was what God took him through to teach him, to make him a mini forerunner for other people who were suffering and he went through all that and he humbles himself and says, do you know once I was going to be captured in Damascus and they had to lower me in a basket, verse 33, through a window, now if something like that happened to you, you would not like to talk much about it, it's such a humiliating thing, the great apostle sitting in a basket and being lowered through a window, but he wants to make himself small in the eyes of these Corinthians, he doesn't want them to think I'm a great man, he says, you know when once I had to escape, I had to sit in a basket and they lowered me through a window and I escaped like that, God did not send some mighty angel from heaven to take me

away, I'm just an ordinary man, I had to escape just like other people, because he says in chapter 12, verse 6, I don't want you to think of me, last part of verse 6, more than what you can see, see we have a

desire that other people should think more highly of us, but Paul was concerned to lower himself, in chapter 12, verse 1, he says about this vision he had, he was taken to heaven and for 14 years he never told anyone about it, what a man, he kept quiet about these tremendous experiences he had, if you were taken up to third heaven, you'd be waiting for the next meeting to testify about it to everybody, Paul kept quiet about it for 14 years and then he speaks about this thorn in the flesh he had, verse 7, which God gave him to keep him humble, it was a messenger of Satan, verse 7, but

even a messenger of Satan, God permitted it, so that it would keep Paul humble, sometimes God permits a messenger of Satan to remain, sickness is a messenger of Satan, I told you the other day, sickness is never from God, why do I say that?

Jesus said, you evil fathers know how to give good things to your children, how much more your heavenly father will do good things to those who ask him, I'm an evil father compared to God, I will never give sickness to my children, never, and if an evil father like me will not give sickness to my children, how can almighty God give sickness to his children, that is impossible, sickness is from the devil, every sickness, but sometimes God may permit it, like here, a messenger of Satan, verse 7, the Lord, Paul said, Lord take this away, God said, no, I'll give you grace to overcome it and this sickness will keep you humble, because you're being used so mightily, Paul, you're in danger of spiritual pride, sometimes God allows some affliction to be in us, to keep us humble, so that we can

serve him, finally chapter 13, verse 4, he says, Jesus was crucified in weakness, but he lives because of the power of God, and he's saying that true Christian life is one where we are weak, and we live by God's power, that's how he concludes this episode, now I want to quickly go through 12 points, 12 marks of an ambassador of Jesus Christ in this episode, I'll just read them out give you a reference, and you can look it up yourself, think of these in your life, Paul, an ambassador of Jesus Christ, 2nd Corinthians 5, verse 20, that's what I would say is the title of these 12 points, number 1, he was called by God, chapter 1, verse 1, it's all from 2nd Corinthians, he was called by God, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, he did not call himself, God called him, very, very

important, don't go into a ministry if God hasn't called you for it, number 2, he was utterly sincere, he was utterly sincere, chapter 1, verse 12, one of the most important things God requires from us is honesty, sincerity, you may have many weaknesses, but if you are honest and sincere, you can be a true servant of God, number 3, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, chapter 1, verse 22, whatever your other qualifications may be, if you are not anointed with the Holy Spirit, brother, don't try serving God, forget it, go and do something else, number 4, he loved those whom he served, he really loved those whom he served, chapter 2, verse 4, he says, I want you to know the love I have especially for you, number 5, he depended totally on God, chapter 3, verse 5, our sufficiency is from

God, he did not depend on any human resource, he may have used things people gave him, but he did not depend on people, he did not depend on anything human, he depended totally on God, number 6, he never gave up, chapter 4, verse 1, since we have this ministry, we don't lose heart, we never give up, you may be tempted many times to give up in the ministry, Paul never gave up, number 7, he was an example to other people, chapter 6, verse 3 and 4, in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, he was an example to others by his life and the way he conducted himself in different situations, number 8, he never took advantage of anyone, chapter 7, verse 2, he never tried to make other people his servants to go and do things for him, he never took advantage of the goodness of other

people, he never took advantage of other people's hospitality, nothing, number 9, he handled money wisely, chapter 8, verse 20 and 21 and also chapter 11, verse 19, in money, you know, he says there that he was not a burden to anyone, he was very careful in handling of money, he never took money from people where he felt that they didn't accept his ministry, he was not a burden to anybody, number 10, he stayed within the boundaries that God appointed for him, he stayed within the boundaries God appointed for him, chapter 10, verse 13, we saw that, number 11, he was willing to suffer, chapter 11, verse 23 to 33, all those external sufferings, he was willing to suffer, 11, 23 to 33 and also chapter 12, verse 9 and 10, to the thorn in the flesh, if God permitted that suffering, he accepted

it and finally, number 12, he longed to lead believers to perfection, chapter 13, verse 9, he says, we pray, we rejoice when you are strong and we pray that you will be made perfect, this was the apostle Paul.

So, let me repeat that, he was called by God, he was utterly sincere, he was anointed with a spirit, he loved those whom he served, he depended totally on God, he never gave up, he was an example to others, he never took advantage of others, he handled money wisely, never being a burden to others, he stayed within the boundaries God appointed for him, he was willing to suffer and he longed to lead other believers to perfection, let's follow in his footsteps and serve the Lord like that, let's pray.

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