

In the Corinthian church, some teachers were saying negative things about Paul, so we see in 2 Corinthians that Paul often has to explain and defend himself to the Corinthians. However, we learned last time that this letter was not only meant for the Corinthians, but was also meant for other churches in the region, who would not know about the situation in Corinth. What spiritual value does this letter have for them and for us today? As Paul explains himself, he talks about the motivation behind his service, which is the same motivation we should have. In v. 12 and 14 Paul uses the word “boast,” which usually has a negative connotation. But here the boasting is not bragging about his own holiness, but rather celebrating his relationship with the Corinthians in the Lord. So what is Paul’s motivation as he serves the Corinthians? It’s not guilt, obligation, or selfish gain. In v. 12 we see Paul’s motivation in three phrases, which begin with the word “in.”

First, he says that he conducted himself in holiness and sincerity. The word “holiness” here means integrity or transparency, rather than being set apart like the items in the temple. Transparency and sincerity here should be treated as a single concept (i.e. transparent sincerity or sincere transparency). Those who serve should do so without ulterior motives. Those who serve in the church should be sincere. If you do not consider me sincere, then I have failed and I would encourage you to find a church where you think the pastor is sincere and trustworthy. Transparency involves vulnerability, which means you should be able to see my faults. For me, Pastor Richard is a good model for this sincere transparency. But I know his sincerity because I have a relationship with him. To establish transparency, it must be developed through contact and relationship. This contact usually occurs outside Sunday morning service. As a pastor, there are some times when I am busy and others when I have discretionary time, especially during the week days. I want to spend time with you, and it’s a part of my job description. It is important that we get to know each other so that this sincerity and transparency can develop, which in turn leads to trust. It’s important that those in the church trust those who serve, and that those who serve are trustworthy and transparent. You may not agree with the decisions we make, but we strive to make these decisions thoughtfully and with sincere intent, so we ask that you trust us. The church can flourish if there is trust between the leadership and the church.

Second, Paul serves not in worldly wisdom. Church is not the primary place where you should be seeking worldly wisdom. This worldly wisdom comes from experiencing life in this world, and can take the form of practical knowledge about finances, maintenance, parenting, or health. But 2 Timothy 4:1-2 says that the pastor's primary function is to preach the word of God. This is spiritual wisdom that has eternal value. This wisdom is what you should be seeking when you come to church. Those who teach in the church should focus on teaching spiritual truth, just as we all should strive to learn this truth more and more.

Third, Paul serves in God's grace. We are all dependent on God's work in this place. So we must operate through prayer. Let us pray for the church, for its leaders, and for its activities. Let us pray for each other in the church, for we all depend on God's grace. None of us should think we are self-sufficient professionals. We rely not on ourselves, but on God to do His work through us. When we become proud, we must fall on our knees and ask for God's help. This is the source of motivation for us.

It's difficult being a pastor these days, when there is such easy access to sermons from other famous pastors. But these pastors cannot get to know you, and you cannot get to know them. In this church, you should get to know the leaders who serve you. We should strive to build a trusting environment where we can be transparent with each other as we all rely on God's grace.