

The Less I Be Loved

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Mike Miller

Straight Paths Bible Church

2 Corinthians 12:15-21 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

- I. Paul is answering an accusation, or at least a supposed accusation against him from some of the people in this messed-up church.
 - A. It appears that there were people in this church who were accusing Paul of trying to get their money from them through trickery, and by sending others to do it for him.
 1. They came up with this nonsense in spite of the fact that he never took anything from them for himself.
 - B. Paul's statement, "...being crafty, I caught you with guile" is said as though he is repeating what he has heard, or suspects they have said about him.
 1. They apparently had accused him of sending Titus and others to take up offerings that he later pocketed himself.
 - C. "But be it so ..." he said; in other words, "...it doesn't change how I feel about you, or my desire and purpose concerning you."
 - D. Paul was not going to be bitter and angry with them even though they were falsely accusing him and causing people to think evil of him.
- II. Paul was good at taking abuse.
 - A. He took it from those who hated him.
 1. For an example, there was the jailer in Acts 16 who was about to kill himself with his sword when he saw the prison doors open and thought all the prisoners had escaped.

Acts 16:28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

2. Paul and Silas had just been beaten by these people and thrown into jail unjustly, but Paul still didn't wish the jailer dead.
 - B. He took it from those whom he loved.
 1. These people at the church of Corinth who were living in sin and confusion and had made a mess of the church.
 - C. Paul's life was about bigger things than quarreling with people over foolishness, even when his name and reputation was at stake.

1. He left it in God's hands to defend the truth about himself.

(v. 19) Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

- D. Paul knew that striking back at these people would only cause debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, and tumults.
 1. This will destroy all hope for a blessed relationship with them in the future.
- E. And furthermore, it will settle nothing.
 1. If someone is lying about you then they obviously are misinformed about you, or they simply have contempt for you.
 2. If they are lying about you and know it, then no amount of reasoning about the truth is going to get them to admit they are lying.
 3. If they have contempt for what you believe and what you stand for, then no amount of reasoning with them is going to persuade them otherwise.
- F. Paul was always looking forward with wisdom and prudence.
 1. He knew that they would meet again and he didn't want to ruin the opportunity to be with them again in love and fellowship.
 2. He didn't want to do or say things that would break their relationship, or so poison it that he would not be able to influence them for good anymore.
- G. He was looking forward to being there with them again and he wanted it to be a blessing to himself and to them, so he behaved himself wisely here.
 1. Paul did not "get in the flesh" like so many people do and then excuse themselves for it.
 2. He not only did not strike back at the false, foolish, and malicious accusations, he addressed them as "dearly beloved" and assured them that he was for them and all he did was done for their edifying.
- H. This is Christ-like behavior and it is pleasing to God and will bring the best results for everyone, including ourselves.