

¹² Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. ¹³ For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, ¹⁴ as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵ Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶ I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷ When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

¹⁸ But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." ²⁰ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

²³ I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. ¹ So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. ² For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? ³ I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. ⁴ For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

Does anyone besides me have difficulty with defensiveness? If you tell me that I did something wrong, the temptation that I have to fight is to deflect the criticism. I think defensiveness is such a popular method of dealing with conflict because we're under the delusion that it works.

Defensiveness is like a fried egg in a Teflon pan—it just won't stick. Defensiveness does not work and it's an awful way to deal with conflict. I like what Neil Anderson says about defensiveness. If you're wrong you don't have a defense and if you're right, you don't need one. This is good general advice and we could all learn from it, but it cannot be taken as an absolute. Paul often does defend himself against his detractors and he does it quite vigorously and against specific charges. In fact, the defense of his ministry is a key theme throughout 2 Corinthians. We will see the topic raised again and again.

Even though we should all avoid defensiveness as much as possible—let me say that again for emphasis—even though we should all avoid defensiveness like the plague, Paul's defensiveness, if we could even call it that, is absolutely necessary. He defends himself because his reputation is bound up with his message. If his enemies can destroy his reputation then his message goes down the tubes as well. The gospel was at stake. Believers in Corinth were tempted to reject him because he used a false notion of what it means to be an apostle, what it means to be spiritual. But the way he lived was integral to his understanding of the gospel and therefore their understanding. Paul needed to defend himself not for his own honor or reputation but for the reputation of the gospel. I submit that this is the very best reason to defend yourself against personal attacks.

First, let's identify Paul's enemies and then move into his defense. Paul refers to them as super-apostles. In 11:5 he writes, *But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles."* I love the way the KJV reads: *For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.* That sounds like the way some well-bred Englishman would say it. The word that Paul used here is stronger than even our word super. He means to say that these apostles were hoity-toity apostles, that they were preeminent apostles, that they thought of themselves as so far superior to average, run of the mill apostles like Paul that they couldn't even see Paul from their high and exalted place in the spiritual stratosphere. Paul used a bit of irony here, not only because these false apostles saw themselves as super-apostles, but because some of the believers in Corinth were also seeing them in this way. To use the words of John the Baptist, in their minds, Paul must decrease and these other apostles must increase. If these intruders had been preaching the true gospel, Paul would have been delighted. If you recall, this was the issue in Corinth when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Early in the first chapter of that letter Paul wrote: *One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."* His point was that he did not care who got the credit because all of these men were preaching the true gospel which meant that all believers were united under the same message. But these super-apostles were preaching a false gospel and the only way they could hawk their wares was to destroy Paul's reputation. This was their strategy—take down the man and his message will follow.

The first thing they attacked was Paul's integrity. *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.* Paul behaved with holiness and sincerity toward the world and especially toward the Corinthian brothers. In other words, he was the same person on Sunday morning as he was on Monday morning. Sometimes we have trouble being the same person on Sunday morning in the car as we are on Sunday morning in the church building. Before you get

out of the car, your kids are bickering in the backseat and so you give your General Patton speech: “Alright, listen up! You will behave yourself this morning in church or so help me I will come down on you like a category five hurricane!” Then you step out of the car with a smile plastered on your face, walk into the building and with a sing-song voice say, “God bless you pastor. Oh Mary, how are you today?” That is a lack of integrity. I understand that sometimes family unity breaks down and the devil loves to attack us on Sunday morning, but if you habitually lack integrity between your Sunday morning behavior and your Monday morning behavior, something is greatly amiss. In contrast, by the Spirit’s power, Paul was able to conduct himself with holiness and Godly sincerity and according to God’s grace.

Their second area of attack was upon Paul’s writing. *For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.* As Paul defends himself you can almost hear what the false apostles were saying about him. Things such as, “Did you actually read Paul’s last letter? Tell me this—was it easy to understand? Was the meaning clear to you? No, it wasn’t because Paul speaks in coded language. You have to read between the lines and know his hidden meaning to understand his letter. Paul is very confusing but we are very clear when we speak to you.” The false apostles engaged in good old-fashioned propaganda and name calling and it worked on some in the Corinthian church.

Furthermore, this demonstrates the principle of authorial intent. In a simplified way, Paul said, “I say what I mean and I mean what I say. Take my words at face value because I am not trying to trick you.” Therefore, when we study Scripture on our own or in a Bible study, the first thing we need to discover is authorial intent. In other words, what did Paul mean by what he wrote? It does not matter what I think about what Paul meant but rather what Paul meant. Christians have developed bad habits in their Bible study and too often say things like this: “This is what this Scripture means to me.” Can you see why that is so dangerous? The meaning of that Scripture starts with what you think it means. That is the wrong starting point. It does not matter what you think it means it only matters what Paul thought it meant. We must first discover the original intent of the author.

Imagine if you write a love letter to your wife and somehow it fell into the hands of a room full of love letter scholars who sat around discussing your love letter. Each of them in turn would pontificate upon the meaning your letter. “Well I think this man was having trouble in his marriage so he wrote this letter in order to apologize to his wife.” “No, no,” says another. That’s not right at all. They weren’t having marriage problems. In fact, they were madly in love with one another. Can’t you see that?” On and on the discussion would go with all one hundred scholars weighing in on the meaning of your love letter. In this scenario, how could these scholars uncover the true meaning of your letter? All they would need to do is ask you what you meant by your letter. It’s *your* letter, after all, and only you know the true meaning, right? Unfortunately, we cannot invite the apostle Paul into our Bible studies and ask him pointed questions about what he meant. Nevertheless, this is still the number one starting point of all Bible study. We first must discover the original intent of the author. We may have different opinions about his meaning and we may not always get it 100% right, but this must be our starting point. And why is authorial intent so vital? Because as we discover what the original author meant we also discover what God meant.

Here is a passage that will give some clarity to what I am saying. *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:20-21). What this means is that the author's of Scripture did not make this stuff up. They "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit inspired them in such a way that the words of the Biblical writers were the very words of God. Therefore, we start with discovering authorial intent, not to honor the writers but to honor God. Their words are his words.

Tonight the two life groups get started and each group will be studying this very text. We will be using the inductive method of Bible study which has three components—Observation, Interpretation and Application. The purpose of the observation phase is to gather all of the facts. If you have watched CSI or other detective type TV shows, do they go to the scene of the crime, find a single strand of hair and confidently conclude, "The butler did it"? That would not only be sloppy police work but it would make every show about three minutes long. All good detectives gather multiple pieces of evidence before making a decision. First you gather all of your facts and then you start to make interpretations about the facts. "I have gathered all of my evidence and I conclude that it was Professor Plum in the Library with the candlestick."

The observation phase is the fact gathering stage. The interpretation phase is where you begin to draw conclusions about what? We draw conclusions about what the original author meant by what he said. If you have done a good job gathering facts, then you will begin to draw good conclusions about what he meant which means you will begin to understand what God intended.

I don't know if you noticed this or not, but when I was talking about authorial intent before, I did not say that it is the goal of all Bible study. Authorial intent is the starting point of all Bible study but the goal of all Bible study is application and obedience to the Word. But before we can apply the word we must understand the word. We gather facts in the observation phase so that we can understand the meaning in the interpretation phase so that we can ultimately reach the point of application to our daily lives. I don't want to give the impression that all Bible study moves neatly and successively through each of the three stages and then everyone goes home and perfectly applies it. When I preach I don't always give you all of my observations but if I have done careful and prayerful study, all of this will form the foundation of my message. Therefore, this process does not always proceed perfectly and cleanly, but this is the best method to use in your pursuit of understanding and applying the Word of God.

Let me take stop for a moment and see if you have been paying attention for the last five minutes or so. I gave you this three-part method of Bible study and I based all of it on verse thirteen--*For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand*. Now tell me—when Paul wrote verse thirteen, do you think his original intent was to make sure that we all understood this three-part Bible study method? That was most assuredly not his main intention. He wrote that verse in order to explain to the believers in Corinth that he always writes with integrity and a plain meaning. He wrote this in the middle of defending his ministry and his letters. So then how did we get from where Paul started to the Bible study method? I started with observations about this letter and the purpose for Paul writing this letter to this group of Christians. The original intent of his meaning was to explain how he always writes with clarity and integrity. I then took his

original meaning and everything I said about Bible study methods was itself an application of his original meaning. There can be a nearly infinite number of applications as long as you start with the original meaning. Many times I have listened to sermons and have concluded that it was a great sermon but the preacher used the wrong text. In other words, the preacher had good things to say but they didn't at all relate to the text of his Scripture. When this happens too often you can be sure that the preacher or teacher is more concerned about saying that they want to say than they are about understanding and applying the meaning of Scripture.

The point of all of this is to let you know, if you don't already, that Grace Church is committed to understanding and applying the very words of God. We gather on Sunday morning so that we can ask, "What does it say?" and when we leave we can say "How do I obey what it says?" It's not more complicated than this. Let's say those two questions together so we burn them into our thinking. "What does it say?" "How do I obey what it says?" let me take that one step further. Instead of asking how can I obey what it says, a healthy church with healthy relationships will ask, "How can we help one another know what it says?" AND "How can we help one another obey what it says?" This is what the Christian life is all about.

Now let's get back to the text,

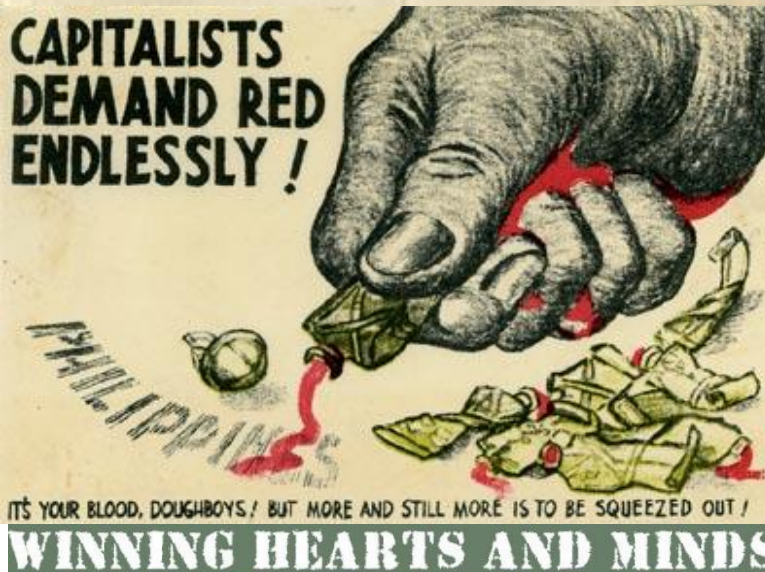
*And I hope that,*¹⁴ *as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.* We should not get tripped on this word boast. Paul does not mean boasting in the sense of bragging. Boasting is his way of defending his reputation and demonstrating his sincerity. He tells the church that he will boast about them on the day of judgment. This day of judgment will reveal all false piety and therefore only genuine, Spirit-born work will last. Even though the Corinthians were a troubled church, Paul knew them well enough to be know that they had already produced lasting fruit in their Christian walk.



In the next few verses Paul explained his original travel plans. *Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice.*¹⁶ *I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.* Paul wrote this from Ephesus so he would have sailed from Ephesus to Corinth. His plan was to travel from Corinth into Macedonia and visit one or more churches there, perhaps Thessalonica or Philippi. Then on his return trip to Ephesus it would have been natural for him to stop again in Corinth (see map). In 1 Corinthians, he wrote that he

planned to make it a visit of several months or more. *Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you*

now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits (1 Co 16:5-7).



But you can hear the accusations of his enemies in verse 17. *When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?* His detractors probably pointed at his change of plans and accused him saying, "See, you can't believe Paul. He says one thing and then does another. How can you trust someone who promised to visit you and then changes his mind on a whim. We would never do that to you." This is the oldest trick in the book called divide and conquer. If you are going to fight a battle with five thousand troops and you are going against an army of fifty thousand, are you likely to win? Apart from a miracle, you will be annihilated. But if you can sow seeds of discord among those fifty thousand and turn half of them against your enemy, suddenly you have them outnumbered. In order to accomplish such a feat, you have to be a master of propaganda. This has been done by generals throughout human history. In 2 Kings 18, General Sennacherib of the Assyrian army marched into Jerusalem and gave along propaganda speech trying to scare the Israelites into surrendering. Assyria could have easily defeated the Israelites, but if they can win the psychological battle and persuade them to surrender, they could spare themselves great expense and loss of lives. During World War 2, The US dropped countless thousands of these

leaflets on the Philippines to win the hearts and minds of the people and help them realize that they were there to liberate their country. But the Japanese responded with their own leaflets bombs trying to convince the Philippine people that Americans were out for blood. Propaganda has been and always will be part of warfare. What PR tool has the US used in the Iraq War? Their goal has been to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people by building schools and hospitals and training their police force, among other things. Even if all of these efforts have been 100% sincere, we can still see the importance of good propaganda. Propaganda serves to divide and conquer and win the hearts of people to your side.

This is what Paul was up against. The false prophets leveled accusation after accusation against Paul. They put together a first century propaganda machine in order to destroy his reputation and his message. Paul is worldly and insincere. Paul is wishy-washy and indecisive. Paul has already appealed to his conscience and his sincerity but the next thing he did was to pull out the big gun—the gospel itself.

¹⁸ But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.

What Paul did here was to link his reputation with the gospel message that he preached. This is not just a he said-she-said kind of issue. It’s not about who is smarter or better looking. It is about the gospel. The believers in Corinth knew Paul and knew the gospel that he preached. Listen to what he wrote in his previous letter.

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Co 15.1-8)

In effect, Paul was saying, “This is what you believed. We preached this gospel to you and you believed it. Timothy and Silas were with me. I am not alone in this endeavor, you know this, so why are you swayed by the opinions of others? Paul is tying his personal integrity in with the integrity of the gospel. This was a bold thing to say. Are we confident enough in our reputation that we could link it with the gospel? Actually, this is reality whether we realize it or not. Our message is already bound up with our reputation. Everyone we come in contact with will equate our reputation with whatever message we have. If we have a good reputation, we will have a good message but if we have a bad reputation our message will fall with our reputation. We all witness to the gospel every day of our lives and we either do it well or we do it poorly. May we help one another strive for holiness, sincerity and the grace of God.

Rich Maurer
January 29, 2011