

INTEGRITY

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts...” —2 CORINTHIANS 1:21

It can be very distressing to have our motives misunderstood, but to be accused of a hidden agenda can be extremely disheartening and painful. Leaders in the Corinthian church were not only trying to expose Paul as a false apostle, but were accusing him of having a personal agenda.

When trying to discredit someone, it is usually much more effective to attack, not merely the work, but the person. When being accused of a hidden agenda, the accuser normally feels at liberty to say what that hidden agenda is. In Paul’s case, it was simply to promote himself, but nevertheless false allegations gain traction and, consequently, our characters are held under scrutiny and our credibility questioned.

In Paul’s response to the church, he explains why they should trust him. “Now this is our boast,” he says. “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” (2 Corinthians 1:12). The thrust of Paul’s statement is that his integrity is not based on worldly wisdom, but is a consequence of his dependence on God.

The moral qualities that are seen in God, they can expect to see in Paul, because his dependence on God means he is not operating by human skill or wisdom, but out of the activity of Christ working in him. By

challenging Paul's motives, the church was also challenging Christ's motives. Conversely, whatever they might praise and credit Paul for would be praise and credit due Christ, as it was the very life of Christ operating in him.

The Christian life is not trying to be like Christ, but allowing Christ to be Himself in us. The result is that the characteristics we display will exhibit the character of Christ. We know from Paul's writings that the human nature is bankrupt. He says that "in myself there dwells no good thing". In other words, we don't put confidence in the flesh, because we're incapable of living the Christian life out of our own abilities and disciplines. This is not something natural, but supernatural, and the default position of someone living in Christ is that they act with honesty and integrity. It's a holiness and righteousness received from God, alone, and if we're conducting ourselves in this way, then like Paul, standing firm in Christ is the only defence we need.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, in my interactions with others, I ask that You keep me deeply rooted in You, so that it is your life in me that connects with others. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: What would be my honest response to accusations of having a hidden agenda?