

## “The Heart of a Pastor”

*2 Corinthians 12:14-21*

**Theme:** A pastor’s selfless devotion focuses on the spiritual maturity of God’s people.

**Introduction:** The measure of a pastor’s ministry is not reflected in how many people he attracts, the praise he gets, or the comforts he enjoys, but in the spiritual health of the people God has entrusted to him. Faithful shepherding isn’t about using the flock to build the shepherd’s own kingdom; it’s about giving his life to nurture the flock for Christ’s kingdom.

The Apostle Paul understood this. As he writes to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 12:14–21**, his heart is laid bare. He knows some in the church have misunderstood him, questioned his motives, and even resisted his leadership. Yet, instead of defending himself with anger or withdrawing in frustration, Paul reaffirms his commitment to them. His aim is not to take from them but to give himself for their spiritual growth. His words reveal the heart of a true shepherd—one whose devotion is rooted in the glory of Christ and the advancement of His people.

[Read Text]

This passage highlights three qualities of a pastor whose selfless devotion to Christ is focused on the spiritual growth of God’s people.

1. **The Sacrificial Heart of a Pastor** – vv. 14–16a — willing to spend and be spent for the sake of the flock.
2. **The Sincere Heart of a Pastor** – vv. 16b–19 — conducting ministry with transparent integrity and pure motives.
3. **The Sanctified Heart of a Pastor** – vv. 20–21 — burdened to see God’s people turn from sin and grow in holiness.

This is what pastoral ministry looks like when it reflects the heart of the Chief Shepherd—selfless, honest, and passionately dedicated to the spiritual growth of God’s people.

The theme of these verses is: ***A pastor’s selfless devotion focuses on the spiritual maturity of God’s people.***

### **I. The Sacrificial Heart of a Pastor – 12:14-16a**

#### **A. The Determination of a Pastor – v. 14a**

1. Having planted the church in Corinth during his first visit in AD 51, he returned to confront their sins in AD 55, and now intends to visit them yet again the following year - *“Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, ...”*
2. Yet, despite the criticism leveled against him by his enemies that the reason he doesn’t charge for his ministry is because he has nothing worthy to offer, Paul persists in serving them free of charge

– “... and I will not be a burden to you;”

3. Unlike the false teachers who sought to enrich themselves at the expense of the Corinthians by convincing the saints that what they had was worth the fees, Paul didn't want their money – but rather their hearts – ... *for I do not seek what is yours, but you;*”
4. He didn't want their hearts for his own sake or popularity, but if he had their hearts, the Corinthians would have the Gospel.
5. A pastor is determined to so represent the Lord Jesus Christ that the hearts of God's people are irresistibly drawn to faith and faithfulness – *Colossians 1:28-29*.

**B. The Devotion of a Pastor – v. 14b**

1. Paul then refers to the simplest relationship model to express his feelings and dedication to the saints in Corinth, for whom he serves as a spiritual Father.
2. He states, “*for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.*”
3. This isn't a guide on inheritance and leaving estates to children, but an observation of the natural order – parents provide for their children.
4. Most parents love their children with boundless love, which makes them willing to do whatever is necessary to provide for and protect their children.
5. Paul declares, 'This is how I feel about you as saints in Christ Jesus, for whom I labored to bring to new birth' – *Galatians 4:19; 1 Corinthians 4:15*.

**C. The Drive of a Pastor – vv. 15-16a**

1. As a result, Paul declares that there is nothing he would not do to ensure they faithfully follow Jesus Christ.
2. He states, “*I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.*”
  - a) “*spend*” [*δαπανάω*] – to use up or pay out physical resources; it can also mean to wear out or destroy – speaking of the lack of limits of what he is willing to lay out on their behalf.
  - b) “*be expended*” [*ἐκδαπανάω*] – a willingness to sacrifice himself until he had nothing left to give.
3. This is true regardless of the gratitude shown in response to his sacrifices – “*If I love you more, am I to be loved less? But be that as it*

*may, I did not burden you myself.”*

4. Regardless of the cost, sacrifice, response, appreciation, or respect shown, a pastor remains dedicated and actively involved in shepherding God’s people for the glory of Christ Jesus – cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9.

## II. The Sincere Heart of a Pastor – **12:16b-19**

### A. The Integrity of a Pastor – **vv. 16b-17**

1. Paul employs absurdity as irony to highlight his integrity – *“Nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.”*
2. This is probably a statement made in response to the accusations by the false teachers, who claimed that Paul doesn’t deserve any fee and that he is waiting for the right moment to trick them into giving him money.
3. However, his integrity is unassailable since Paul had never done anything inappropriate or even shady – but was an open book for them to read.
4. He even asks, *“Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?”*
5. He challenges them to provide a single example of when he or one of his representatives has used their ministry roles opportunistically or craftily to enrich themselves – Acts 20:33-34; 2 Corinthians 7:2.

### B. The Influence of a Pastor – **v. 18**

1. Not only was he innocent of exploiting the saints in Corinth, but none of those he trained and commissioned to serve with him had misused them either.
2. His influence caused his own heart to be replicated in those he sent to represent him in ministry to them – *“I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?”*
3. Paul’s influence led to the emulation of his example, the sharing of his values, and consistency in conduct among those representing him:
  - a) **Standards** – *“conduct ourselves”* [περιπατέω] – referring to the moral norms by which they lived.
  - b) **Spirit** - *“in the same spirit”* [πνεῦμα] – it was an attitude or disposition of integrity among them.

- c) **Steps** – “... and walk in the same steps?” [ἵχνοϛ] – a reference to “footprints” – Paul’s associates sought to walk in the same direction as Paul – seeking to replicate the attitudes and standards Paul himself demonstrated – **Philippians 4:9.**
  - 4. Such influence exists due to authenticity, genuineness, and consistency, rather than through the exertion of control, intimidation, or manipulation.
- C. **The Intentions of a Pastor – v. 19**
  - 1. The Glory of God
    - a) Paul wanted to avoid conveying to the Corinthians, in his lengthy defense of his credentials, that he was struggling with the fear of man.
    - b) They were not his judges despite their arrogance in judging him – “All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you.”
    - c) Paul was disinterested in sinful men passing judgment on his spiritual ministry – **1 Corinthians 4:3-5; Galatians 1:10.**
    - d) God is the only audience of concern for Him – and thus, Paul was interested in anything he did or said to bring glory to Christ Jesus – “Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ ...”
    - e) God alone will pass the verdict on the value of our lives – something He will do for every single person saved or unsaved.
  - 2. The Good of the Godly
    - a) But he does desire for his ministry to impact those in Corinth for the purpose of enabling them to see Christ developed in them – “... and all for your upbuilding, beloved.”
    - b) Essentially, Paul is declaring that he did what he did because he desired the edification or “upbuilding” of the “beloved” saints in Corinth.
    - c) Paul did not view the Corinthians as his judges, but as his mission field, his stewardships.

### III. **The Sanctified Heart of a Pastor – 12:20-21**

- A. **The Concern over Sin in the Church – v. 20**
  - 1. Because of that concern for their edification, the presence of sin is a particular concern.

2. This concern is evident – *“For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish.”*
  - a) *“what I wish”* – would be for them to be living for the glory of Christ Jesus.
  - b) *“what you wish”* – would refer to his tolerance and indulgence in their sins.
3. He is concerned that their habitual sins and even innovative sins may be present without their repentance.
  - a) *“strife”* [ἔρις] – the engagement in rivalry; to take sides to prevail.
  - b) *“jealousy”* [ζήλος] – intense negative feelings or sentiments over another’s success or achievement.
  - c) *“angry tempers”* [θυμός] – the eruption of intense displeasure or dissatisfaction with an outcome; rage.
  - d) *“disputes”* [ἐριθεία] – selfish ambition and contention
  - e) *“slanders”* [καταλαλιά] – publicly speaking ill of another, defamation.
  - f) *“gossip”* [ψιθυρισμός] – the private murmuring of information about someone that causes the spread of negative association with the subject of conversation.
  - g) *“arrogance”* [φυσίωσις] – Lit. “swelled-headed” – the conceited assumption that one is all they should be while others fail to measure up.
  - h) *“disturbances”* [ἀκαταστασία] – destabilizing opposition to righteousness.

**B. The Chagrin over Sin in the Church – v. 21**

1. He is also concerned that when he comes, he will be *“humiliated”* [ταπεινός] – the result of losing prestige and being mortified at the results of one’s efforts is so fruitless.
2. Paul declares, *“... and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented.”*
3. *“mourn”* [πενθέω] - The chagrin of a genuine pastor is evident when sin exists within the church – it becomes the “fly in the ointment” that changes everything – 1 Corinthians 5:6.
4. This is why it is essential to repent of our sins quickly and regularly

– “... of the *impurity, immorality, and sensuality* which they have practiced.”

- a) “*impurity*” [ἀκαθαρσία] – the indulgence in vile, sexual corruptions.
- b) “*immorality*” [πορνεία] – the pursuit of sexual pleasures without the responsibilities of a marriage relationship.
- c) “*sensuality*” [ἀσέλγεια] – the lack of self-restraint in violating barriers and self-restraint, indecencies.

5. A faithful pastor will not allow sin to persist within the congregation of the Lord but will seek to shepherd the guilty through to repentance and restoration until it becomes impossible – 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

**A pastor's selfless devotion focuses on the spiritual maturity of God's people.**