



Rev. Eric Smith | August 17, 2025
Sermon | A Pastor's Heart to Build a Healthy Church

Introduction:

Through Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we see over and over how God's design for the local church is stronger and more enduring than the brokenness around us. In this part of his letter, Paul opens his heart as a shepherd. He's been misunderstood at best and more likely maligned by the very people he sacrificially poured his life into. Instead of walking away, he pleads with them to see his genuine longing for their spiritual good.

If you've ever served in ministry, parented a wayward child, or tried to reconcile with a friend who misunderstood you, you know Paul's tension—love drives you to reach out to maintain the connection and the desire for relational health compels you to address what's broken.

Scripture:

2 Corinthians 12:11–21 NLT

11 You have made me act like a fool. You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these "super apostles," even though I am nothing at all. 12 When I was with you, I certainly gave you proof that I am an apostle. For I patiently did many signs and wonders and miracles among you. 13 The only thing I failed to do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a financial burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong!

14 Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have—I want you. After all, children don't provide for their parents. Rather, parents provide for their children. 15 I will gladly spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.

16 Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But others still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery. 17 But how? Did any of the men I sent to you take advantage of you? 18 When I urged Titus to visit you and sent our other brother with him, did Titus take advantage of you? No! For we have the same spirit and walk in each other's steps, doing things the same way.

19 Perhaps you think we're saying these things just to defend ourselves. No, we tell you this as Christ's servants, and with God as our witness. Everything we do, dear friends, is to strengthen you. 20 For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior. 21 Yes, I am afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence. And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.

Outline:

When I am a member of a healthy local church in a broken world, I . . .

• **Give More Than I Take (vv. 11–15)**

- We Are Contributors!

A healthy church grows when we gladly give our time, energy, and resources for the spiritual good of others.

• **Build Trust by Living in the Light (vv. 16–18)**

- We Operate with Integrity!

The local church flourishes when we reject hidden agendas, keep our relationships honest, and prove trustworthy in how we treat one another.

• **Keep Short Accounts with God and Others (vv. 19–21)**

- When we mess up, we fess up!

The local church stays healthy when we practice repentance often, welcome accountability, and quickly extend forgiveness.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul spends so much time defending his motives in ministry? How does this challenge our own expectations of leaders?
2. Which of the sins in v. 20–21 are most tempting in our church context? How can we guard against them?
3. How can leaders and members work together to create a culture of trust in the church?
4. What does sacrificial service look like in your ministry or life group right now?
5. Where do you need to repent today so that the church can breathe “clean air” again?