



**2 Corinthians 12:11-13:4**  
**True Motives for Real Suffering**

Summary: What would make you keep going if you were questioned and criticized when you should have been commended, appreciated, and obeyed?

Have you ever been misunderstood? Have you ever tried to do something or say something that didn't come out right? Or maybe, it came exactly the way you wanted, but it didn't land right – people didn't take it the way you thought they should? It's kind of a rhetorical question, because I don't know anyone who could answer anything other than yes.

Well, today we're going to talk about that. We're going to look at someone who was misunderstood even when he was doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons - it just wasn't getting across. I think there's going to be some encouraging stuff here for those of you who have tried to love someone who is hard to love – could be one of your children, or one of your siblings, might be your boss or your spouse or your friend – you have reached out to them, spoken up to them, tried and tried and tried to get through to them, and it seems to do nothing but wear you down. Because, that happens, doesn't it? That's real life.

We've been looking at the apostle Paul and noticing how difficult his life has been. We've seen the emotional and physical difficulties he faced. We looked at the fact that he prayed and prayed about something painful in his life and, for a time at least, it seemed like God was silent. Then, when God finally did speak, He said, 'I'm not going to heal that. I'm going to give you grace instead – you'll experience weakness, but you'll also experience My strength.'

You know what? I think some of us could accept that – it wouldn't be easy, but we could learn to face difficulty, trials, even pain in our lives if we could also experience the presence of God and still see the results we were working toward. Some of us can imagine that right?

But did you catch what I did there? I slipped something else in. I said, some of us could imagine exchanging our weakness for God's strength, *if we still saw results*.

But what if you endured all the pain, difficulty, and trials with the strength of God, and you didn't see the results you were working for? What if you were misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned by the very people or person you were trying to help. What then?

Well, that's the situation Paul faces in Corinth. That's what we explore this morning. We'll note three specific grievances as Paul lays out the things he's done right and calls out the inappropriate responses he received. Then we'll see his warning of impending judgment

and notice how Jesus is the only sufficient motivation for enduring this kind of persistent rejection and suspicion of your good intentions. Read with me:

**2 Corinthians 12:11** I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. 12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. 13 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!

So, here is Paul's first grievance. He should have been commended – instead, he's been questioned. Some people in the church in Corinth, not all of them, but some of them, have recently been impressed by people who claim to be apostles. And being impressive was important in Corinth. They liked athletics and they made a big deal about public speaking – they looked and listened for the “influencers” of their day.

The problem was, Paul didn't fit that type. He wasn't impressive physically and wasn't a great public speaker. He was average, or slightly above average, but he didn't stand out. And so, there were some who said, why should we listen to this guy? We should listen to those guys; they seem pretty cool.

This is the same problem every parent, grandparent, teacher and coach faces – how do I get my kids to listen to me, when they're so impressed by other people, they listen to these other voices.

This is how relationships fall apart with adults, this is how affairs start, this is how people get caught up with and carried away by movements. Someone else or something else catches their eye, seems impressive, seems interesting, and slowly attention starts to shift away from where it should be.

I think some of you know what I'm talking about. And so, I think some of you can feel Paul's pain. You can feel the pain of his legitimate sense that 'I'm trying so hard here, with all the right motives, I'm seeking your best interest and you just don't seem to care.'

So, he points back to all the evidence for why these people whose hearts have left him should come back. He laid out some of his credentials. This other group, the impressive people who captured the attention of the Corinthians, boasted about all their qualifications, so Paul laid out a few things he had done as well, but what he really emphasized was everything he suffered, all that he had been through in order to show the love of God to these people.

He reminds them – if you're looking for something impressive, what about the **signs and wonders and mighty deeds** God did through me when I was there in person? You saw that, you remember that. You have stories to tell if you just think about it.

And again, maybe that's true of you too – you haven't performed [signs and wonders](#), but you have done some pretty amazing stuff for the sake of this person or people you love. They have things they could point to, if only they would remember, and then value what you did, what you said, what you gave.

Paul had a legitimate grievance against the Corinthians – they forgot, overlooked or minimized what actually happened. Paul says you should be [commending](#) instead of dismissing me. You shouldn't have been so easily distracted or drawn away by these other people. But you were.

And the worst part is, you were drawn away by people *who just want to use you*. People who want to take from you. He says the only thing I did wrong was that I didn't charge you for what I did.

Now, if you remember, this was at a time when speaking was a form of entertainment and education and people expected to pay for it. You remember one of the Roman emperors around this time actually paid a guy the modern equivalent of a million dollars a year to hang around the palace and entertain and educate his guests with impressive speeches.

So, this group of impressive people show up in Corinth and meet the Christians and tell them, we can be impressive for you, but people usually pay a little something for this kind of service. And the Corinthians, caught up in the culture of their day, said 'Sure thing! We're happy to throw a little coin your way if you can impress us.'

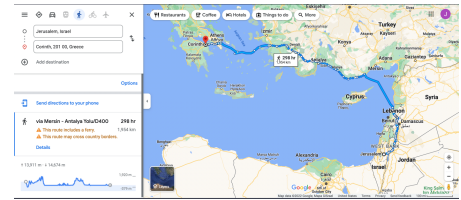
So Paul says, with Scriptural sarcasm, 'well excuse me for not being [burdensome to you](#).' Excuse me for looking out for your best interest by letting other churches support me so that I could come to you free of charge. I'm sorry for not leaving you an impressive bill for my services. But, I'm not about to change. Notice, he writes:

[14 Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! \[It seems as though this is an accusation they've made against him – that he's up to something, but he points out his absolute integrity\] 17 Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?](#)

If you're taking notes, here is Paul's second grievance – he should have been commended by the Corinthians, but also, he should have been appreciated. They should have been able to see and understand what was happening and be grateful for it. And, again, some of them were. But not all of them. And that's the group he's addressing right now lest their attitude continue to spread.

He points out to them all that he has done for them and that his aim, all along was to do them good, it was all for their benefit. He says I'm getting ready to come to you a third time.

Now, that might not stand out to you the first time you hear it. But remember, this is the ancient world. If Paul needs to get from Jerusalem to Corinth, that's 2000 km each way. Google can get you there, but it's going to take 298 hours of hiking and you're going to have to take a ferry. If you hike eight hours a day, six days a week that's going to take over six weeks – one way!



This isn't like you jump online, find some cheap fares and decide on short notice to go visit friends or family. No. This is a commitment. And Paul does it three times. And he never asks them for anything, other churches are supporting him *so that* he can do this for the Corinthians. But he's OK with that. As he says, [parents support their children](#).

Now there are two things going on there. One he's reminding them that he was used by God to start their church. He's their spiritual father in a sense. But then, he's also kind of reminding them: *they're acting like children*.

At some point boys and girls grow up and begin to take on their own expenses. At that point it's not wise for the parents to keep covering them. Well, these Corinthians may think of themselves as all grown up and independent but they're not as mature as they think they are, or else Papa Paul wouldn't have to keep covering them.

And again, maybe you know what that's like – the person you love is trying to act independent, they've got this, they know what they're doing. And you're reaching out to them at your expense – whether that's in terms of time, money, materials, or just emotional energy. You're not trying to gain anything *from* them, you're trying to give *to* them.

If so, you understand exactly what Paul is saying in verse 15 ... [I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.](#)

You know, it's like, where's the payoff? I keep putting all this time, energy, attention, and money in and I'm getting nothing out. In fact, it's all inverted, the more I put in, the less I get back!

Now, there's a way to do this that is flat out creepy, stranger-danger, stalker stuff here. I keep loving you and you won't love me back...yeah, the problem might be with you, not them at that point. But what we see with Paul is a genuine, pure, holy motive – he is willing to be poured out and [spent](#) for the sake of their souls.

And yet, notice this in verse 16 – they're suspicious of his motives the whole time. People just don't understand him or what he's doing or what he's all about, so they assume there must be something happening behind the scenes. There must be some secret – this all must be some kind of elaborate plot – he's luring them in with his kindness and then there's going to be a hook.

Can you feel this? I need you to try. Paul is doing the right things, the right way, for the right reasons. He's doing exactly what he should be doing, the way he should be doing it, and not only is life hard, not only does he have this thorn in his flesh, not only are some people not responding to or appreciating what he's doing, they're actually questioning him, suspecting him, maligning him because they just don't understand.

Church, I need you to see this. I need you to understand. Because the same thing is going to happen to some of you – you're going to do everything right and still be completely misunderstood. It's not you – it's them. They can't imagine, they can't fathom, they can't conceive that someone really would do the things you're doing, the way you're doing them, for selfless, sacrificial, spiritual reasons. You're not the only one that's ever happened to. Expect it.

Well, we've seen Paul's first and second grievances, they should have commended him, they should have appreciated him, now we come to the third, they should have obeyed him.

19 Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But *we do* all things, beloved, for your edification. 20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish;

Paul says, I'm afraid that when I come I'm going to be disappointing to you and you're going to be disappointing to me – you'll still be living in a way that I have tried to call you out of, a way that is centered on selfish desires and behavior instead of following Christ. He lists the kinds of things he's afraid they're still caught up in today – and remember, he's writing this *to people in the church!* He says:

( vs 20 cont.) lest *there be contentions*, (strife, arguments) *jealousies, outbursts of wrath*, (this is intense anger, fits of rage – toddlers aren't the only ones that throw tantrums, they just look a little different in your thirties, forties and fifties, right?) *selfish ambitions, backbitings* (slander, defamation of character – saying bad things about people when they're not around), *whisperings, conceits* (pride, an inflated ego – it's literally translated as swelled headedness, having a big head – making it all about you), *tumults* (disharmony);

Who wants to live in this kind of situation? And yet, how many people do? How many people live exactly this way? How many of you could use this to describe your workplace? Well, remember, this is written to the church at Corinth. This is what their lives looked like. So, this might not just describe your workplace, this might describe your office when you work from home.

And that's not all. There were social sins and sexual sins too.

21 lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness (that's a

general term for impurity – it means to be morally filthy), **fornication** (that’s the Greek word *porneia*, it’s where we get pornography), **and lewdness** (or unbridled passionate cravings, it’s an eagerness for lustful pleasure, rank promiscuity, throwing off every constraint of social or religious boundaries for behavior) and now watch this: **which they have practiced**.

Paul is concerned that when he comes back to Corinth for the third time he’s going to find people caught up in the same kind of social and sexual sins that he’s been calling them out of for years. He’s afraid, that for some people *in the church*, nothing has changed.

I need you to notice the scope and the scale of it all too. Paul says I’m afraid I will mourn **for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced**.

This is the kind of people you could find in the church at Corinth. **Many** people, who had lived this kind of life. Today we often associate those who are focused on sexuality identity and conduct as being “progressive,” they’re trying to lead a wave of change based on acceptance, affirmation, and normalization.

But if you go back far enough in history, those people would have been *the conservatives*. They were trying to hold on to behaviors, beliefs, and identities that were commonly accepted in the culture. The “progressives” were people like Paul who encouraged people to adopt a Biblical sexual ethic that received identity and boundaries as established by God and something we’re accountable to Him for.

You have to know, absolutely have to know, that there were ancient Greek words for almost all the sexual stuff you see and hear about today *and more*. We’re not inventing anything – *we’re sliding back into it*. And it wasn’t good. Everything people want to endorse and affirm today was fully accepted back then, and it wasn’t liberating, it was oppressive, it was abusive, it was dehumanizing and destabilizing especially for women, youth, and those without wealth or status. God sets boundaries. We are wise if we accept them and we will regret if we don’t.

One last thing – the problem is not that **many** people in the church had been part of these things – the only problem was *they still were*. We believe the power of the gospel is sufficient to cleanse you from every sin, to free you from every addiction and to radically, completely, and wholly change your life. I don’t care how much **uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness** you’ve been part of – you are welcome in this church. But listen to me: the gospel is calling you out. God has a better plan for your life. Your past can be filled with anything, but your future should be fixed on one thing: absolute surrender to God and what He wants to make of you.

Notice, Paul says, you should have commended me, you should have appreciated me, you should have obeyed me, I’m reaching out one last time – encouraging you to repent, because judgment is coming.

**2 Cor 13:1** This will be the third time I am coming to you. *“By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”* 2 I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— 3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

It's not a threat, it's a promise. If you insist on living your own way, doing your own thing, you will face the power of God and the judgement seat of Christ. Paul says I have been patient, I have been kind, but sooner or later you cross a line and it's time to take disciplinary action. In this case, it's likely excommunication – putting someone outside the fellowship of the church and treating them like a non-Christian since there is no evidence that they are anything else.

It's important to note, Paul isn't going off on some power trip here. He isn't flexing his authority. He is modeling exactly what is true of Christ. In fact, each of Paul's grievances is mirrored by Christ.

Jesus should have been commended by people when He walked the earth – He did countless signs and wonders, marvelous miracles, and the crazy thing is, no one denied it, but there were some who saw what He was doing, heard what He said, and still criticized and questioned him. They said He casts out demons by the prince of demons Beelzebub. They said yeah, He healed this person, but He shouldn't have done it on the Sabbath. They criticized Him instead of commending Him.

He should have been appreciated. He wasn't a burden to anyone, never took advantage of anyone, He was the picture-perfect example of selflessness and self-sacrifice. If anyone sought to demonstrate love to the unlovely, it was Jesus who reached out to people who smelled like alcohol, slept around, cheated people financially, lied, and were boastful and arrogant. His harshest words were for people who tried to act religious but were actually corrupt inside – but if you knew your life was a wreck, He received you with open arms. And still, people who thought they knew what they were doing, conspired to slander and murder Him, to get Him out of their way.

He should have been obeyed. He came to call people to repent – that means to turn around, to stop all the stuff that is leading you away from God and start living differently. That was the core of His message: repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. And yet, as it says in John's gospel:

**John 3:19...** this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

People rejected Jesus, just like they rejected Paul, not because they didn't understand what He was saying, but because they understood and they didn't like it. Still, He went ahead

with His suffering. He went to the cross and became the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – He became a substitute for us, receiving what He didn't deserve so we could receive what we have not earned.

And now that's on offer to us – if we will obey Him, appreciate Him, and commend Him. If we will allow Him to reorganize our lives. If not, He will keep calling. He is patient and persistent, like Paul. But the day will come, without warning for some, when we will face our Maker and be required to give an account. We have seen the weakness of God, one day we will see His power with absolute, inescapable clarity.

If you have already surrendered to Christ, my encouragement to you is to continue to allow God to direct your steps, even if, like Paul, it involves difficulty, pain, and perpetual misunderstanding and lackluster response from those you desperately love. Paul knows what that is like, Jesus knows what that is like – when it's hard, ask Him for help. Ask Him to keep you from giving up or growing bitter. Ask Him to give you strength.

If you have not surrendered to God, or if you find yourself riding the fence – if your life looks more like the Corinthians than Christ, it is my hope that you would yield to God today. Surrender. See and appreciate all that God is doing to reach out to you, to call you to turn, and let Him have control of your life today. There is a judgement coming, a test you will not pass. Let God save you from it as you surrender to Him.

Let's pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Corinthians 12:11-13:4 True Motives for Real Suffering

Summary: What would make you keep going if you were questioned and criticized when you should have been commended, appreciated, and obeyed?

- Have you ever been misunderstood while trying to do something good for someone? What happened? Were they ever able to see or appreciate what you had said or done?
- Paul suffered and didn't see good results – the people in Corinth still resisted him. Why is it easier to suffer when we see something good come of it? Where and why has God called you to go through something difficult without seeing the results you hoped for?
  - What helps you keep the faith and endure in such difficult times?
- Do you ever think seeing signs and miracles would make life easier? Paul did all the signs of apostle in Corinth and the people still resisted him.
  - What other examples can you think of in Scripture where people saw signs and wonders and still were not convinced to respond to God wholeheartedly?
  - What can we learn about the value and importance of miraculous signs from all of this?
- Have you ever taken a long trip to visit someone in response to a crisis? What happened and where did you go?
- Paul says **the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved**. Have you ever been part of a situation like this? Were you the one who was loving or the person who was being pursued?
  - How far and how long should we pursue someone?
  - Read Romans 5:8. How does that verse support what we see here?
- Would you rather be part of a church marked by social and sexual sin or one that is absolutely pure and holy? What is the potential strength or advantage of each?
- What role do you see patience playing in Paul's relationship to the Corinthians? How role does God's patience play in your relationship with Him? What role should it play in your relationship with others? How much is too much?