

“Integrity”

Integrity is necessary on three levels — in your own family (your children and wife should never lose trust in you), in your church, in the wider area of influence beyond the church that you influence through your life and preaching.

David: “let integrity and uprightness uphold me.”

Psalm 101:6; Psalm 15; Dt. 18:13; 1 Tim. 3. It's important to focus on these things because of the influences to minister with vision and focus and energy... Scripture focuses on integrity.

The integrity of my ministry is my own fellowship with Christ. You can't hide a lack of fellowship with Christ. It will be found out.

Having said that, it's a hard thing to attempt to defend your integrity to your critics. What's the hardest thing in my ministry? It is to be falsely accused of being unfaithful and unbiblical, or any other sin. It cuts particularly if you have a life worth defending.

Do you have a life worth defending?

It's not about me. People attempting to destroy the integrity of a pastor has a terrible fallout. In one sense it doesn't matter. It's not about personal feelings and self-esteem and self-protection. It's about what that stuff does to your ministry opportunity.

Does it hurt to have your ministry maligned? Sure — because it cuts you off from the people who buy into those lies. If that stuff is illegitimate, you are in the awkward position of having to defending yourself and being reluctant to do it.

2 Corinthians 5:11 — *we persuade men*. This is not persuasion about the gospel, but about their own integrity. He is under a full-scale assault of the Corinthians. Paul is writing to persuade the church about his own integrity that had been illegitimately assaulted.

He was attacked for his suffering (“he must be under divine judgment”), his honesty (“you don't do what you say you will do...”), his virtue (“I don't have a secret life of shame...”), his openness (they think he's closed; he says, “my heart is wide open”), his supposed desire for sexual favors (“I took advantage of no one”), and his apostleship, his speech, and even his message. They hit him every way they could hit him.

You don't want to appear self-protective, but you understand what is at stake. If your life is worth defending, then defend it. The ministry is at stake. Defend it.

and we are made manifest to God = i.e., God knows my heart. Bring the accusations; God knows my heart. I will gladly stand before His court.

In 1:12, the first court that Paul appeals to is his own conscience. “My conscience is clear.” But in chapter five, he has gone to a higher court — God Himself. If it was an issue with God, then

his conscience would not be clear. (cf. also Acts 24:16 — that's a life worth defending)

His goal is at the end of 5:11 — I don't want you to have doubts about us (me). Listen to your own conscience. Why would he trust their consciences? Because they are believers under the influence of the Holy Spirit. (He wouldn't trust the false teachers.) His trust was an evidence of his credibility.

Why would you want to defend your ministry? Why should you have a life that is defended?

- ✓ He does it for the reverence of God — **Knowing the fear of the Lord** (v. 11). This is connected to the *bema* rewards (end of the chapter). *Fear* = *phobos*, a strong word. Not the judgment of God but the worship and reverence of God that is excited in his soul. What controls my heart is my fear of the Lord. I'm not afraid of God, I love Him. I want His glory.

Knowledge is a settled knowledge. Paul was a worshipper. He lived a doxological life. He wanted above all else to be pleasing to the Lord. If his reputation was ruined, the Lord's name was shamed and His usefulness was gone. So he lived in holiness and godly sincerity. It was his reverence for the Lord.

- ✓ It was his concern for the church. Verse 12 — we would like to so live that you as a church would be so proud of us and would then defend us against the false accusers. The accusations were harming the church — unity was diminished.

He would prefer Ps. 27:2, but no one was defending him. He just wanted the church to defend him; they had the information. What more did they need?

- ✓ We do it for devotion to the truth (v. 13). Paul is not being self-serving. It is for God and for them. If he is out of his mind, it is for God and them. (Obviously the accusation against him was that he was crazy.)

There was a reason he seemed to be crazy — he was fanatical about God. Cf. Acts 24:6 — “you're out of your mind...” This is the fire in the bones that Jeremiah talked about.

- ✓ He did it in gratitude for salvation and saving love (v. 14). He is controlled by the love of Christ. It is Christ's love for him that controls him. Divine love has taken over his life. “I am loved — savingly!”

He defends his integrity and will fight for it because he is so greatly loved by Christ and the only way he knows how to return that love is gratitude that defends the truth, etc. no matter the cost.

One died for all, Paul says. It's one of the great theological statements in the NT. Christ died for His own — for me! I (John) can never get over the fact that when Christ died on the cross He didn't die generally and vaguely, but He died *for me!*

The cross so dramatically changed Paul that he didn't recognize anyone by the flesh (v. 16). He views everyone as either a missionary or a mission field.