

PRIDE IN YOUR LEADERS  
II Corinthians 5:11-15

Intro: While we await the official results of the recent presidential election---we can't help but wonder why things turned out the way they did.

- In fact---I've had a few heated discussions on the elliptical with my friend and workout partner about the election and what happened.
- He insists that Trump lost the election---at which point I interject "apparently"---because of his personal behavior.
- That his moral failings---his defensiveness---and his tweets turned people against him.
- I'm not sure if that's the case or not.
- I even wonder if it's not his moral weaknesses---abrasive personality---and refusal to back down that have made him as popular as he is with some.
- Still---while we both do like some of the changes he has made over the last four years---neither of us are proud of his behavior---or leadership style.
- But the lack of our approval---or even God's approval of his behavior---doesn't disqualify him for political office.
- God has always used fallen---sinful people---to accomplish His purposes.
- In fact---there are no other kind.
- However---the bar is raised for those who would be leaders in the kingdom of God.

- And sadly---some Christian leaders do disqualify themselves by sinful behavior.
- Just last week a pastor GQ labeled a "hyperpriest" because he attracted celebrities to the Hillsong Church in New York---and who baptized Justin Bieber in a bathtub---was fired for moral failings and leadership issues.
- I don't know if Carl Lentz referred to himself as a "hyperpriest"---but the "rising star on the evangelical stage" who draws thousands every Sunday to watch Hillsong productions and hear the "tattooed punk preacher" who sports "the same designer fashions favored by his A-list flock"---definitely sets himself apart from "typical Sunday preachers."
- And---like so many who rise in power and prominence---he apparently thought the rules of morality didn't apply to him.
- But as Solomon noted---"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." (Proverbs 16:18)
- And as Jesus said---"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled." (Matthew 23:12)
- Jesus even went so far as to tell the scribes and Pharisees not to be called Rabbi---"for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers"---and to not even be called leaders---"for One is your Leader, that is, Christ." (Matthew 23:8 and 10)
- That's a pretty strong warning against exalting ourselves---and taking on titles that set us above others.
- However---in our text for today the Apostle Paul makes it clear that he wants the Corinthians to be proud of him---and of other leaders in the church.

- So being proud of your leaders---in and of itself---is not wrong.
- In fact---you should be able to be proud of your leaders---especially your spiritual leaders.
- And we want you to be proud of the leaders at Chatham Christian Church.
- And---even though Jesus did warn the Pharisees not to think of themselves as leaders---being a leader is not a bad thing.
- When Jesus said they shouldn't be called leaders---He was warning them about trying to take His place in someone's life.
- Of setting themselves in positions of spiritual authority over others that belongs to Christ alone.
- Functionally---however---we do have some who lead in the church---and some who primarily follow.
- In fact---some are given the spiritual gift of leadership---and they should certainly utilize that gift for the sake of the church.
- Peter even exhorted elders to shepherd the flock of God entrusted to them---to exercise oversight---and to lead by example.
- But he also warned them not to lord it over those allotted to their charge. (I Peter 5:2-3)
- So yes---elders are to be leaders in the church---but they must never forget that they too have a Leader to whom they are accountable.
- And since elders have been given positions of leadership in the local church---they should be held in honor by the church.
- In fact---Paul says in I Timothy 5:17 that elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor---especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
- So we do honor those who serve as leaders and elders of Chatham Christian Church.
- And next week we will formally introduce those who have expressed the desire---and a willingness---to serve our congregation as elders in 2021.
- Then---in two weeks---you'll be given the opportunity to affirm that you believe them to be biblically qualified to serve as elders in our church family---and to affirm that the financial projection that will also be presented next week is in keeping with good stewardship.
- Obviously---most of us will already know the men who will be introducing themselves.
- But for the sake of those who have recently begun worshipping with us---they will tell us about themselves---their families---and how they have been serving in our church.
- We want everyone to know who is leading our congregation.
- And we want you to be proud of them---just as the Apostle Paul wanted the Corinthian congregation to be proud of him.
- And yes---he did want to be respected as a leader in the church.
- But there were limits to what he would do to make a name for himself.
- As we saw in chapter 4---he renounced craftiness to gain a following---and he wouldn't water down the word of God to make it acceptable---and himself more popular.

- But he did want to manifest the truth in such a way that men would find him commendable.
- That they would know in their conscience that he was a man of integrity---even if they didn't like what he was saying or doing.
- Paul was concerned about his reputation.
- He wanted to be known as an honest---credible servant of God.
- And so do your elders.
- And they can be so known.
- Because like the Apostle Paul---they know the fear of the Lord ---they care about their reputation---they are controlled by the love of Christ---and they live for Him who died for us.
- But of course---shouldn't that be true of every believer?
- So let's take a look at those characteristics in Paul's life---and in the lives of our elders---and make sure we find them in our own lives as well.

## I. THEY KNOW THE FEAR OF THE LORD II Corinthians 5:11

- “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”
- In the previous verse Paul said we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ---and that we will be recompensed for the deeds done in this life.

- And---as we saw last week---those who refuse to obey the gospel will be recompensed by eternal destruction---being cut off eternally from the presence of the Lord.
- Those who have been forgiven for their sins---however---will be rewarded at judgment---praised for the things they did in life that pleased their Father in heaven.
- So Paul isn't saying it's the terror of God's judgment on himself that motivates him.
- He's saying it's his fear of God's judgment on others that motivates him.
- He knows what will happen to them if they don't believe what he has to tell them.
- So he is very concerned about his credibility---and his resulting ability to persuade men to believe him---and to follow him.
- It's Paul's credibility that is in focus here---not his intellectual ability to be persuasive in his arguments.
- It's being able to persuade men of his honesty and integrity---so they will believe him.
- He then notes that he doesn't have to persuade God of his character.
- He has been made manifest to God---God sees him---and God knows his heart.
- He doesn't have to convince God of anything.
- And he trusts that the Corinthians know him well enough to know his character---and to know that he wouldn't tell them things that weren't true.

- What he's concerned about is convincing others---those outside the church.
- He's concerned about persuading them that he can be trusted---that he's not some religious huckster out to take advantage of them.
- He wants to be found credible---because only then will people believe the message he has to share.
- He's not concerned about making the message believable---because he knows it's true.
- He's concerned about making himself believable---so even those who might be skeptical of the message will believe him.
- Our best apologetic---therefore---doesn't come from volumes on Christian evidences---but from the evidence of Christ in our lives.
- And Paul wanted men to be persuaded of his genuineness because he knew what would happen to them eternally if they didn't.
- He feared the judgment of God that would befall them if they couldn't believe him.
- Likewise---we too---as leaders and Christians in general---must do our best to persuade those outside of the church of our integrity.
- And we do so by being completely open---and honest.
- It is important what others think of us.
- So like Paul---and the elders---we do care about our reputation.

## II. THEY CARE ABOUT THEIR REPUTATION II Corinthians 5:12-13

- “We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart.
- For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.”
- Paul says he's not commending himself and his fellow workers to the Corinthians.
- He was convinced he had no need to do so.
- As a whole---the church already had confidence in Paul's credibility and his motives.
- But he also wanted those outside the community of faith to see things in him that would merit pride.
- And that meant those in the Corinthian church would have to be able to answer Paul's critics.
- He wanted them to be able to answer those who didn't know his heart---and who therefore did not judge him aright.
- But the answer he gave seems a little crazy.
- He tells them if someone thought he was beside himself---that he was crazy---they should simply say he was crazy for God.
- And if someone thought what he was doing made sense---they should point out that what he was doing was for their sake.
- Now---when Paul says he's crazy for God---he's not saying he's crazy for being in the ministry.
- He's simply saying that it might appear to some that he's crazy.

- And he did do some things that must have seemed crazy.
- For openers---he gave up a promising future as a member of the Sanhedrin to become an itinerate preacher---supporting himself by making tents.
- And he was constantly stirring up trouble---and being run out of town.
- He certainly didn't fit the picture of a respected teacher and philosopher in the world's eyes.
- He didn't do the things the world thought he should do to be held in high regard.
- Indeed---the world did think he was crazy.
- And what he believed about God no doubt seemed crazy.
- God's ways are not the world's ways.
- And there are going to be times when the world will shake its head in disbelief---and call us crazy for believing what we believe---and doing what we do.
- Some probably think Chatham Christian Church is crazy because we don't operate on a business model.
- We don't even have a constitution and by-laws to guide us---or to protect us.
- And rather than follow Robert's Rules of Order---our elders' meetings begin with prayer and Bible study---and then go into open discussions where we seek to know the mind of Christ.
- And we feel we can best discern the will of Christ by coming to unanimity before making decisions.
- That surely sounds crazy in a world where board members lobby for position---and then take votes to see who wins.
- And then---financially---we operate by faith---without pledges and fund-raising campaigns.
- We simply teach biblical concepts of stewardship---and then try to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God's people
- We do strive to operate in keeping with biblical principles of responsibility and accountability.
- But we don't want to become such a highly organized---tightly knit organization---that success is guaranteed---whether God is directing us or not.
- We want Him to lead us---and we want to walk by faith---not by sight.
- And if you live your life the same way---the world will think you're crazy too.
- If you take the top 10% of your income and give it to the church---before you figure out your bills for the week---the world will think you're crazy.
- If you overlook opportunities for advancement---or miss a business deal for the sake of your family---or ministry---the world will think you're crazy.
- So there are times when we will look crazy to the world.
- But there are also times when we what we do proves to be right---even in the eyes of the world.

- When all the bills get paid---and we have extra money to share or to enjoy---it certainly looks like we're handling it right.
- When our kids grow up to love the Lord---and to be respectful and respectable---it looks like we had our priorities right.
- And when the church thrives---even during a pandemic---in spite of an apparent lack of organizational structure---or without becoming a slave to the latest church-growth techniques---it looks like we're making right decisions.
- And we do want the world to see the good results that come from our walk of faith.
- So we do care what others think---we do care about our reputation.
- In fact---Paul tells Timothy that elders must have a good reputation---even with those outside the church.
- They can't be held captive to the opinions of men---but they should care what others think.
- Because they are called to reflect the love of Christ that controls them.

### III. THEY ARE CONTROLLED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST II Corinthians 5:14a

- “For the love of Christ controls us,”
- The original language here makes it clear that Paul is talking about Christ's love for him---not his Christian love for others.
- It was the fact that he was loved by Christ that controlled him.

- He didn't try to conjure up some religious sense of love for others---and hope that would motivate him.
- He actually felt loved himself---unconditionally loved by Christ---and that love controlled him---and his behavior.
- Because he was loved---he cared about others.
- Because he was loved---he cared what others thought of him.
- Because he was loved---he could handle misunderstandings without being offended.
- It was the love and acceptance he felt in the presence of Christ that controlled his behavior---and his response to those around him.
- Now it is true that we are commanded to love one another---to treat one another in a loving manner.
- And sometimes it is tough to love somebody you don't like.
- But maybe we wouldn't have to work so hard at loving others---if we'd first reflect on the love Christ has for us.
- If we'd bathe ourselves in His accepting and forgiving love---maybe we'd automatically find ourselves more loving and more accepting of others.
- As Christian leaders---and simply as Christians---we are expected to love everyone.
- And we can---if we'll first let Christ love us.
- When we start getting judgmental and critical of others---when we're about to write someone off---we need to remember Christ's love for us.
- If we do---it will control us as nothing else can.

- And while we all need to constantly remind ourselves of God's love---I can assure you that the elders of Chatham Christian Church know the love of Christ.
- And it does indeed control them.
- In fact...

#### IV. THEY LIVE FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR US II Corinthians 5:14b-15

- “having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
- and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”
- When Christ died for all---in a very real sense---we all died.
- Because it was our death He was experiencing.
- We were the ones who belonged on the cross.
- We were the ones who were guilty of sinning against God and man---not Jesus.
- But He died on the cross in our place.
- And because of that---we were willing to die to self.
- We were willing to crucify self---and bury ourselves in a watery grave of baptism.
- And we then found ourselves rising to walk in newness of life ---a life directed and motivated by the Spirit of God.
- And we discovered that in doing so we had really lost nothing ---but had in fact gained everything.

- We discovered the abundant life Christ desired to give us---and now we want everyone to discover that same life.
- We want everyone to find what we have found in Christ.
- We want our family---our neighbors---our co-workers--- everyone---to discover that if a man seeks to save his life---to use it for himself---he'll lose it.
- But if he'll lose his life for Christ's sake---he'll find it.
- Our elders---and most of us here this morning---have discovered that fact.
- And if you haven't---we want that for you more than anything.
- That's why we do what we do as a church.
- That's what motivates us as a body.
- And that's why you can be proud of Chatham Christian Church and her leaders.
- I can assure you that the elders have asked Christ to take their lives---and have consecrated their lives to Him.
- And it's our prayer that you will follow their example---and do likewise.