2 Corinthians 12:14

I Seek Not Yours, But You — Spending and Being Spent

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:14–21

> *“Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you; for I seek not yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*
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> *But be it so, I did not burden you; nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? Walked we not in the same spirit? Walked we not in the same steps?*
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> *Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? We speak before God in Christ; but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults. And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness which they have committed.”*

The Third Time — God’s Purpose in the Hindrance

The statement that it is the third time he is ready to come does not mean he had been there twice before. He had been in Corinth only once, but he had purposed

on one previous occasion to come, and that did not occur, and he had purposed again. It was no doubt a good thing that he was hindered, so that we have these writings. Had he come, the matter might have been dealt with in a different way, and there would very likely not be this epistle. The Lord's preventions of certain things are his purpose, and there is always a purpose in it. One may get fretful about being hindered in something one has purposed to do, and then later see how wise it was — that God brought something better out of it. His way is always better than our own.

The Parents for the Children — A Misused Text

The point about the children not laying up for the parents but the parents for the children has troubled saints over the years and has sometimes been used to defend the worldly practice of hoarding up. C.H. Mackintosh addressed this directly in his lectures on Luke 12. He says: the apostle is certainly not teaching Christians to hoard. He is not teaching heavenly men to lay up treasure upon earth. He simply refers to a common practice in the world and a common feeling in nature in order to illustrate his own mode of dealing with the Corinthians, who were his children in the faith. He was not going to burden them, for he was the spiritual parent. If the saints of God are satisfied to go back to the world in its maxims, then let them hoard with all diligence — and let them remember that the moth, the canker, and the rust will be the end of it all. But faith lays up its treasure in those immortal bags where there is no corruption.

To take this as literal instruction for Christian parents to accumulate for their children is to put one Scripture against a great many others that teach the opposite throughout the New Testament. The Lord's own words in Matthew 6:19–21 are plain: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there

will your heart be also." What a man focuses on tends to take a larger part of his attention, to enlarge in his estimation, while peripheral things fade. The apostle's charge was Christ. If our focus is there, and our laying up is in heaven, it will grow on us. Jesus the goal before our soul.

If this passage were to be taken as a literal instruction for parents, many parents simply lack the capacity to do anything of the kind. Spiritually, however, there would always be a capacity. And the whole point of verse 14 is about a spiritual parent and his children in the faith, not about temporal inheritance. To make the accumulation of an earthly inheritance the objective of the Christian life presumes, besides everything else, that the Lord will have left us here long enough to accomplish it. That is not where the Lord's coming stands in faith's expectation.

I Seek Not Yours, But You

This is a very precious statement. The apostle had already written the two substantial chapters on Christian giving — chapters 8 and 9 — and then, a few chapters later, he says, I seek not yours, but you. Chapters 8 and 9 are therefore modified and illuminated by this line. He was not an extractor of gifts. Every appeal that arrives asking for a charitable contribution is actually seeking yours. Paul was not seeking theirs. He was seeking them.

The Corinthians were within the sphere of his ministry; they were already his in one sense. What then did he want? He wanted them — not merely their deeds, not merely their words, not merely their thoughts, but them. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 he says, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." That involves something more than behavior, more than deeds — something of value formed in the inner man, in the soul. Then he could say, a chaste virgin. Satan also desires men, as the king of Sodom desired the men from Abraham: keep the goods, but

give me the men. But for entirely different motives. And Abraham gave him nothing.

This I seek not yours, but you stands in striking contrast with all fleshly philanthropy, which always insists on a return of respect, recognition, and exaltation. Paul was not looking for his name in brass on the building. He was not even looking for their affection, as verse 15 makes plain. He was walking practically in the good of first love — first not in the chronological sense, but first in priority — filled with the love of the Lord to the exclusion of self.

Most Gladly Spend and Be Utterly Spent

Darby's translation of verse 15 has: "Now I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls." The word utterly is a modifier that is not in the King James. And most gladly is stronger than very gladly — it is the extreme, the limit. So not only was he not looking for their substance, but he was not even looking for their filial affection in return. He wanted their profit, no matter what it cost him personally, and whether they loved him for it or not.

This strikes at the very root of fleshly philanthropy. Fleshly philanthropy insists upon a return — some monument, some recognition, at the very least some gratitude. Paul was not looking for any of that. He would be utterly spent. And the end of verse 15 — "though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" — is put there, one would think, to exercise their conscience about their attitude toward him, which was far from what it ought to have been. They ought to have loved him more for his faithfulness, not less.

Being Crafty, I Caught You with Guile — A False Charge Answered

Verse 16 says, "but be it so, I did not burden you; nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile." He is not confessing that this is what he did. He is

answering a charge they had made — that having appeared not to seek their money directly, he had been crafty and had caught them by guile through those he sent. Darby has a note on this: the apostle is not saying he did this, but is answering a charge that he had kept up appearances by taking nothing himself, while knowing how to indemnify himself by using Titus to receive from them. The charge was false, as he proceeds to show. To take verse 16 as a confession would be to read into it an apostolic authorization for being sneaky in Christian service — that one may do things that are crafty and wrong in order to get more souls saved or benefit the saints. That would be a wrong deduction entirely. But that they could stoop so low as to charge him with something like that is perfectly understandable in connection with their carnal state.

Did Titus make a gain of them? Walked they not in the same spirit, and in the same steps? What this reveals is the power of the world upon their minds. When worldly thinking gets hold, all of one's serving and being served is looked at from a worldly perspective. Worldlings have good reason to be suspicious of each other's motives — and of course they do. But to import that perspective into the fellowship of the saints, and to look upon the service of such a one as the apostle Paul from that angle, produces all this. It shows they were not walking in love: love thinketh no evil. None of these things would have been in their thoughts if they had been. The new creation, and a man in Christ, is characterized by love — not love with a second motive hidden beneath it.

We Speak Before God in Christ — For Your Building Up

Think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? Darby notes that they had long been supposing that the apostle was excusing himself — that his conscience was uneasy, that he was protesting too much. And on and on the mind builds up its proof-positive case. But it was all myth, all supposition, none of it true. One must beware of imputing a motive where something is not clearly in evidence. Even for a person not walking in carnality, it is important not to impute motives

without evidence. The Scripture's constant reiteration holds: in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. And not everything that presents itself as a witness is actually one. Even in the Lord's own case, they suborned false witnesses. Care must be taken.

We speak before God and Christ. That is the position from which the apostle spoke. His words and conduct were before God and Christ — that is a guard on what is said. Had the Corinthians been speaking before God and Christ, everything would have been different. But their carnal state precluded them from speaking from that position.

What the apostle was doing was not excusing himself. An excuse is when there is a piece of conduct and one provides a reason to avoid blame. That was not what he was doing. He was explaining what it means that if any man be in Christ, there is new creation. That concept is so large that one verse in 2 Corinthians 5 is not enough to set it all out. It includes this chapter: it has something to do with a man in Christ being caught up to the third heaven; it has something to do with spending gladly and being utterly spent for souls; it has something to do with a profound and deep love. He was not writing these things as an excuse for his conduct — though he does address a false charge and prove it false.

Darby's translation of verse 19 omits the words "we do" — added by the King James translators — and just gives: "All things, beloved, for your building up." That is, strictly speaking, a grammatical sentence fragment. It makes no complete sense in itself. But it is beautiful that way: there is no large "WE DO" at the front of it, no boasting for self. All things — beloved — for your building up. The gifts at Corinth had been used for self-building, making self important. This is the diametrically opposite spirit.

I seek not yours, but you.