

Character – Our True Defence 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 17 July 2022



Church leaders come under scrutiny – it just comes with leadership.

Sometimes the scrutiny reveals real flaws and ungodly failings that must be brought to light and addressed and frankly all too often many accusations against leaders are true.

But, many times spurious allegations are raised as a way to discredit a godly leader. Throw enough mud and some sticks.

Several years ago, I received an email attacking one of our Elders. It criticised decisions this man had made and also his character.

It ended with a demand – that Elder must step down immediately or the email would be sent to the whole church.

I have to tell you – every fibre of me wanted to reply and say – are you kidding? – feel free to hit send.

I knew our Elder's character and reputation. I knew the church recognised his character and would read this email with near amusement.

When attacks like this come, and unfortunately, they come far too often, our only real defence is our godly character.

Many of the decisions an Elder board makes are open to criticism.

Do you sing a song if it was written by Hillsong or not?

Do you throw your support behind a certain political issue or not?

Do you go to two services or do a church plant?

I can tell you by long experience – that when a decision like this comes up – you will have some pushing hard for one conclusion and others pushing just as hard for a different result.

And when a decision is finally made – whether there is division or not often rests on one factor – does the church trust the character, the integrity, the godliness of those making the decision?

Character enables leaders to make difficult decisions and the church as a whole is likely to support it.

But, at the same time, this means that if there is a group who wants a different decision, a different direction – they know – the best way to push their agenda is to attack the character and integrity of those with a different viewpoint.

If you have ever been involved in church conflict you know that is *exactly* what happens – and it can become very messy and very painful.

And in those instances – the defence of the one attacked – their **only** real defence – is their character – their integrity.

If you are ever attacked in this way, you have to be sure that you have a clear conscience in regard to your motives and your life has to declare – this is someone of integrity.

Paul understood this.

We have seen that a group of super apostles – celebrity apostles – turned up in Corinth and attacked Paul's leadership.

Paul responded by writing 2 Corinthians.

In many ways this book is a defence of his Apostleship – but it also gives us a blueprint for what type of leaders to look for in every church in every age.

I have titled the series on this book – **crucified leadership**. And I want to sum up this book this way:



A saint with character shaped through adversity is a saint God can use.

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God isn't looking for gifted men and women who He can then recruit to build His church.

Nowhere in the Bible do you find God searching the world saying – I need a man who is impressive, tall, good-looking, wealthy, influential to implement My plan – then saying – yes!! – found one – this is My guy.

No! He continually chooses nobodies – like Abraham, Moses, David and then shapes them through adversity and uses them.

The rise of David is a classic example.

The people demanded a king – like all the other nations – and finally God relented.

Samuel found Saul. Saul was the son of a prominent leader and here was what caught Samuel's eye.

1 Samuel 9:2:

He was an impressive young man. There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else.

When all the tribes gathered to appoint a king – Saul stood out – young, tall, good looking – impressive.

But Saul did not work out so well.

After he had been rejected as King – God commanded Samuel to find Jesse and anoint one of his sons as the new King.

But, Samuel repeated the same mistake. He looked at the oldest son – impressive, tall, good looking and thought – he has to be the Lord's anointed.

God said to him, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart."

This is crucial. God is concerned with character not externals.

But Samuel struggled to grasp the message. He looked at the older sons who all looked the part but God said – no – no – no.

Seven sons were rejected.

Finally, the runt of the litter was found – and God said – this is the one – this is a man after My own heart.

God looks for godliness – character.

Jesus arrived and called 12 disciples. Ordinary men, rebels and outcasts. Not one wealthy, not one leader or well-educated man.

He looked for character.

Why? So, the glory would not be theirs but God's.

However, the church just keeps forgetting this lesson. The natural bent of many is to say – that just won't work today – we need impressive men – kings, generals, wealthy men, scholars, orators – or the church just can't compete with the world.

No! – picking those kind of men is what will kill the church.

Paul is adamant – the leaders of God's flock are different to the leaders of the kingdom of the world.

As He has always done, God looks first for character not natural ability and then shapes us through suffering and adversity.

And so, Paul gives the Corinthians and us a long series of:



Marks of crucified leadership.

Leadership in the church is not like leadership in the world.

The head of the church is a crucified Saviour so the leaders of His church must exhibit crucified leadership.



Last week we looked at the first mark – **suffering**.

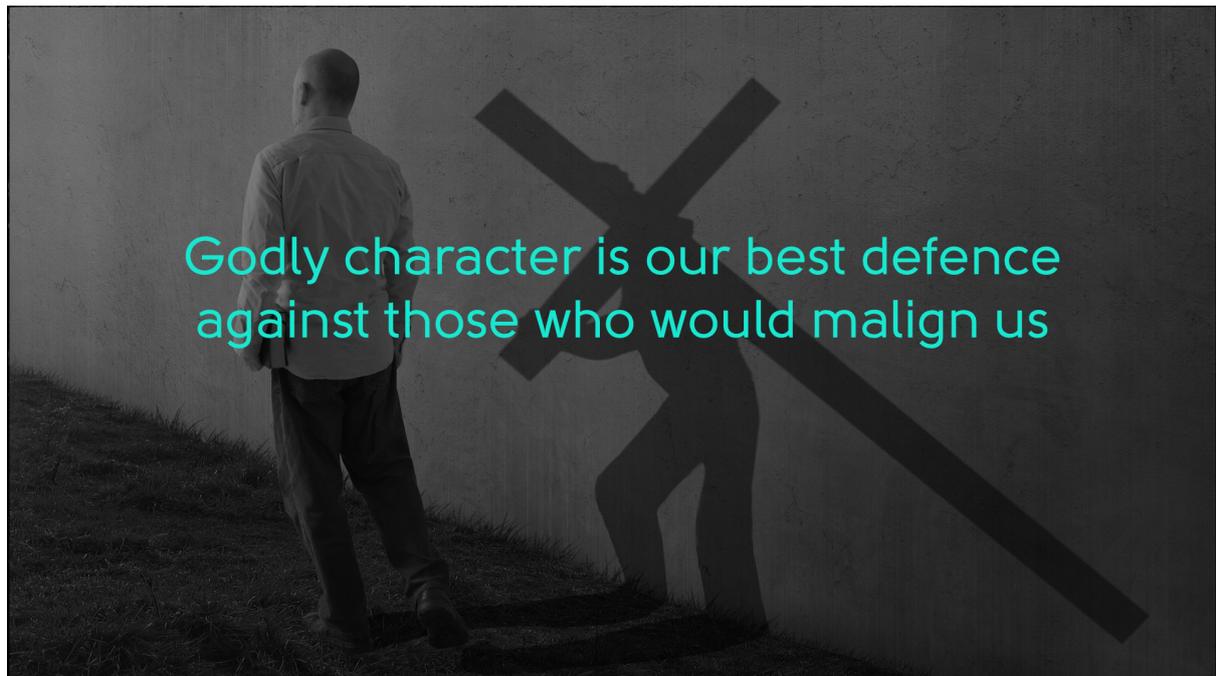
They looked at Paul and said – this guy has been imprisoned, beaten, got sick – look at him – he can't be blessed by God.

Paul said – don't you understand? – God uses suffering to shape His leaders.

This morning we come to the second mark – **godliness**.

Why is godliness so crucial to leading a church?

I want to sum up this morning's message like this:



Godly character is our best defence against those who would malign us.

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Every one of our young interns expresses surprise at just how much criticism and push back comes our way.

It just comes with leading a church.

I can't think of any of our Elders or Pastors who have served more than a couple of years who have not had accusations brought against them.

Their defence was their godly character.

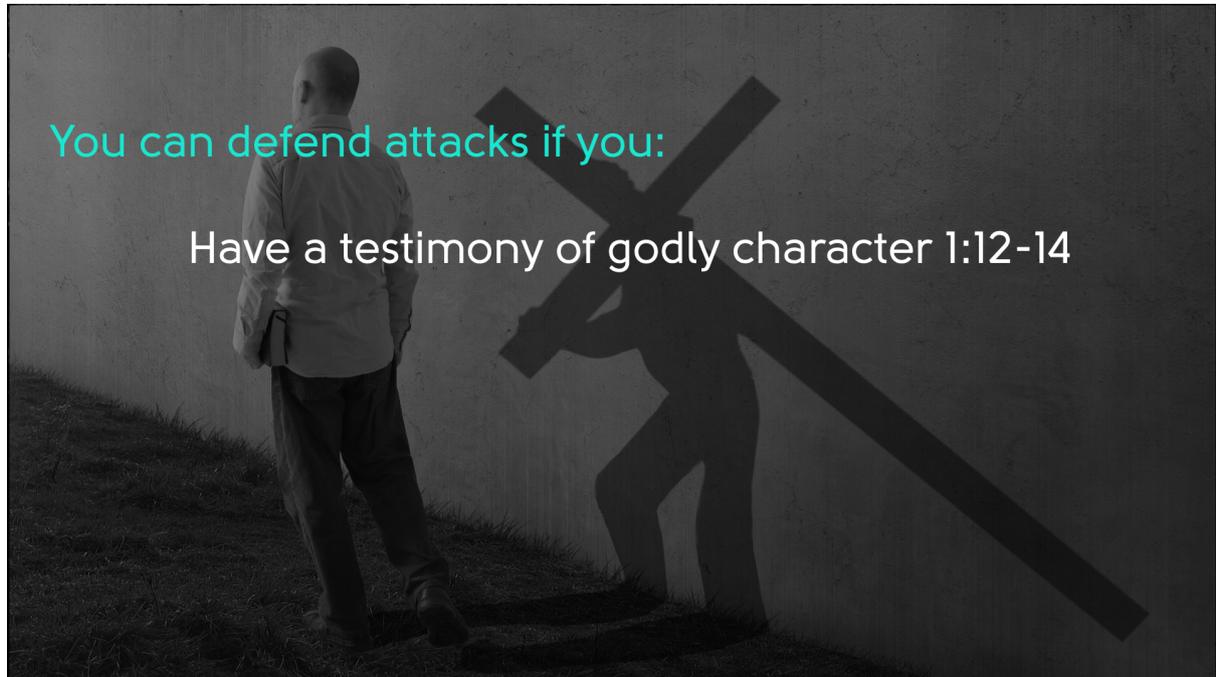
That is the way it should work. If the accusations are true they need to go. If not the accusation won't stand up.

Look, some of these marks of leadership we are going to look at are nice to have – but this one is *absolutely* non-negotiable – you simply **cannot** have a leader of God's people without godliness.

Paul knows this and so he makes a defence of his leadership based on his godly character.

He makes three points.

First, **you can defend attacks if you:**



Have a testimony of godly character 1:12-14

Godliness doesn't make your leadership bulletproof.

Too many times I have watched as churches swayed by ungodly, ambitious members have destroyed the ministry of very godly leaders.

But, if the members are well taught and understand leaders need to make some hard and unpopular decisions – ultimately, a church should rally around a leader if they are humble men of integrity – men with godly character.

Paul knows this, so he appeals to his character.

Verse 12:

The testimony of our conscience is that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with godly sincerity and purity.

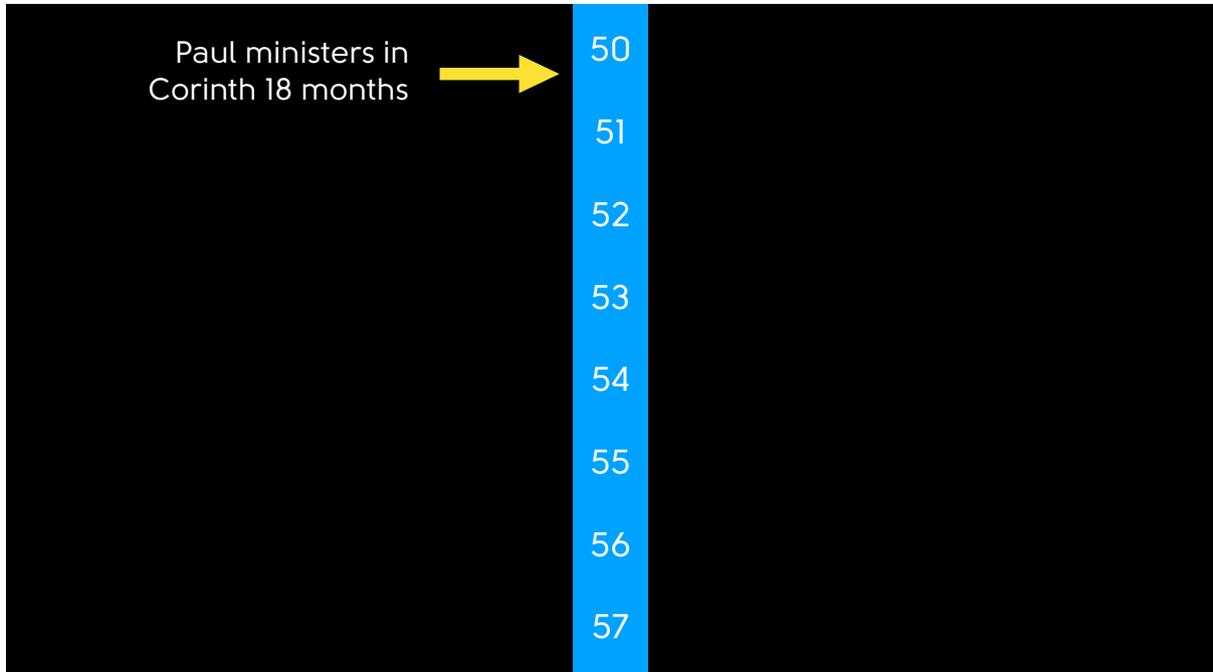
When he speaks of us – he is probably including Silas and Timothy – but the real issue is Paul.

The question we have to ask is this – what is the accusation levelled against Paul that he feels he has to defend?

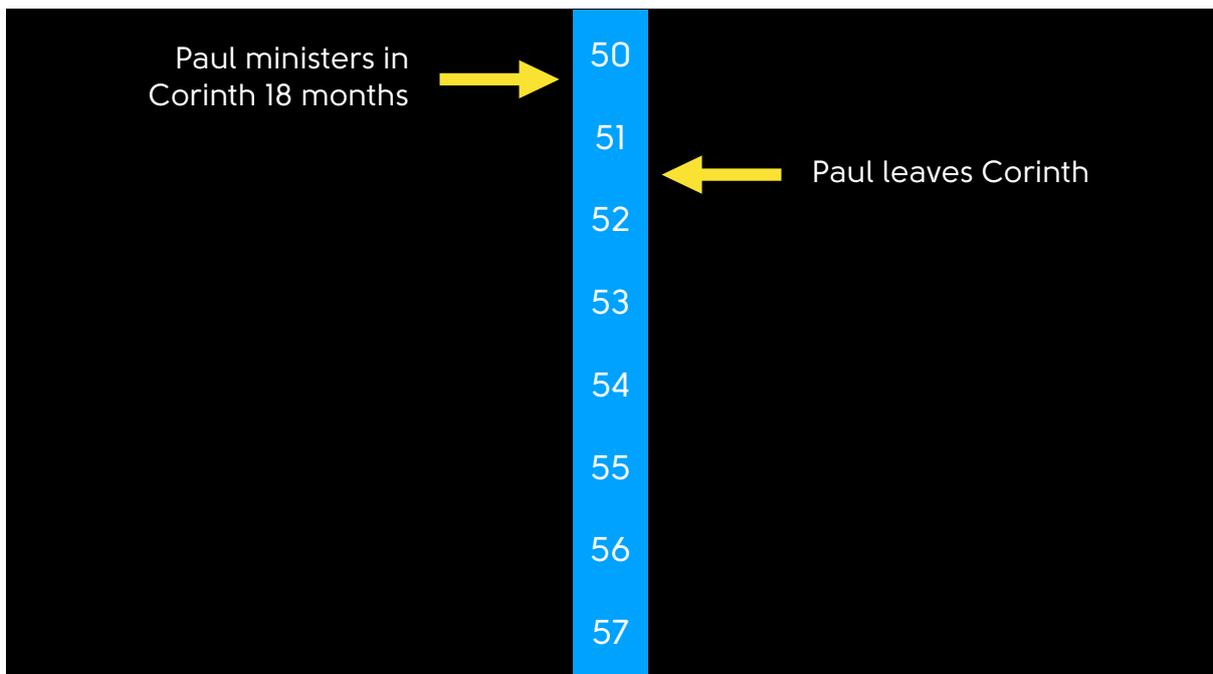
Immorality, pride, greed? No!

Paul was under attack because he changed his travel plans. What is going on?

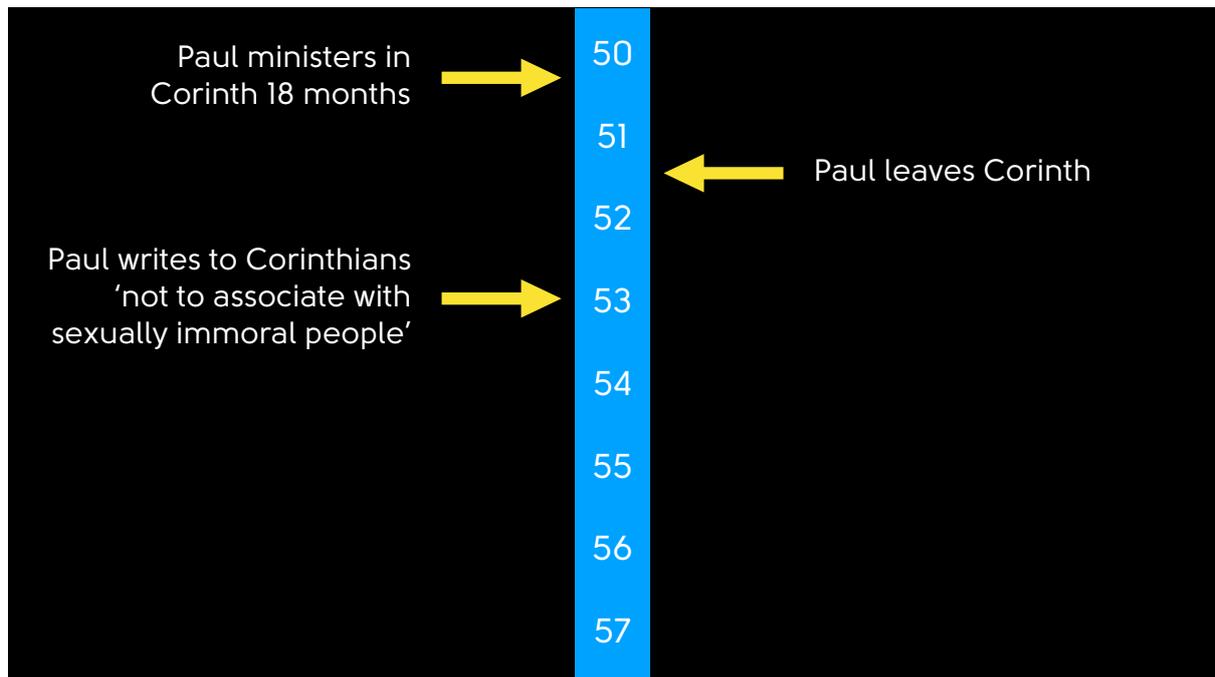
We need to remember Paul's history with this church.



On Paul's second missionary journey – he entered Corinth and against all expectation – in a place that should have rejected this message of life through the weakness of the cross – many came to salvation.



He ministered there for 18 months. The non-Christians in Corinth hated his gospel – and after 18 months they forced him out.

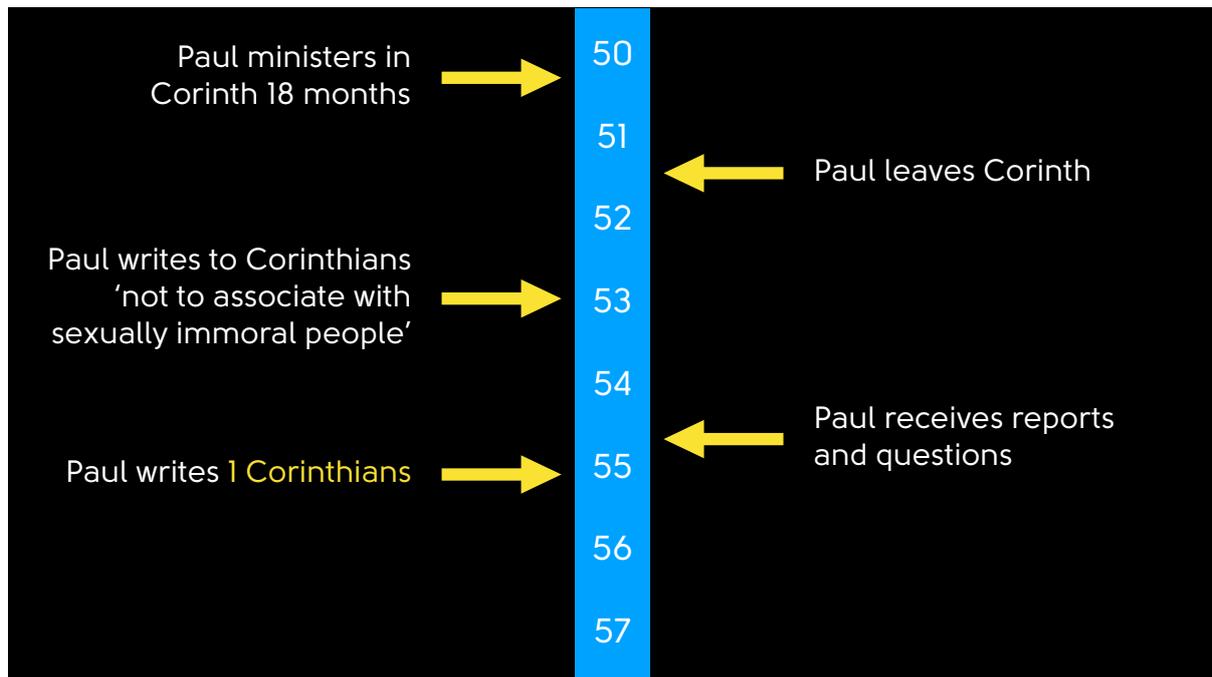


Sometime after this, word came to Paul that the church was tolerating immorality. The values of Corinth were sweeping into the church.

So, Paul wrote warning them 'not to associate with sexually immoral people' but his letter was misunderstood. These are the first hints of tensions between Paul and the church.



Then, sometime around 55AD Paul received more information – worrying information about his beloved church in Corinth.



His response to these reports and questions was to write the letter we have as **1 Corinthians**.

Soon after, Timothy was sent to the church to see how the letter had been received. Unfortunately, his report was that it was not well received – the letter caused angst and tension.

Paul cared deeply for this church. He had spent significant time there and had good relationships.

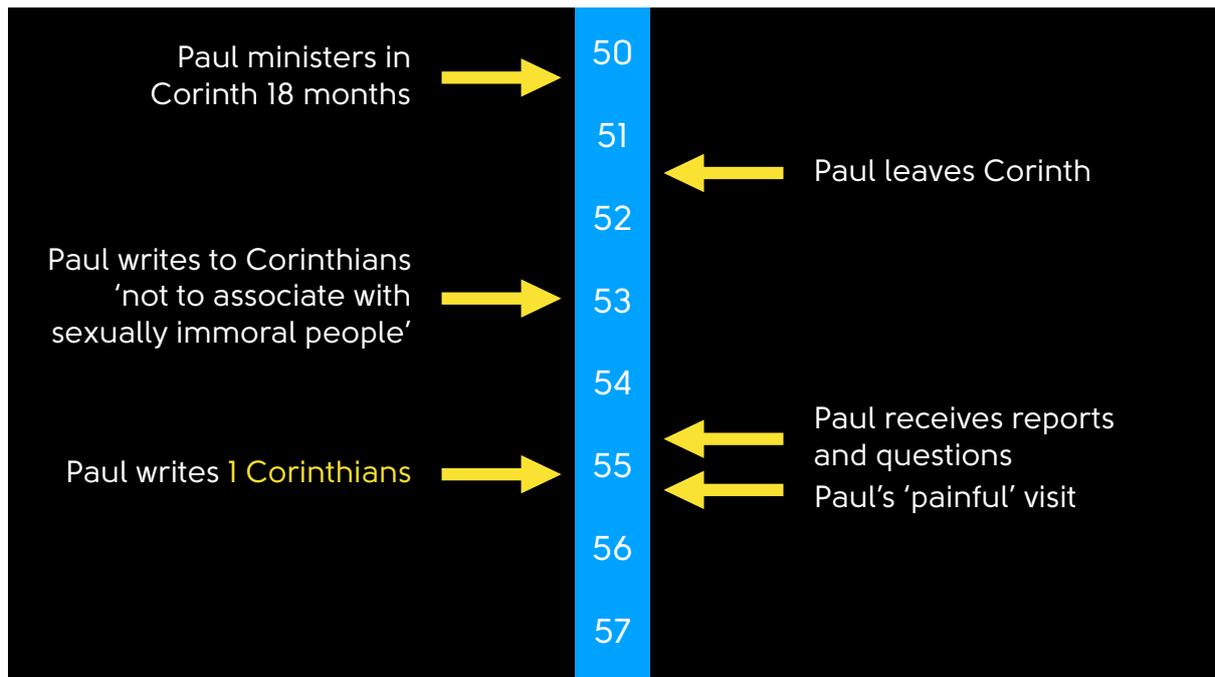
But he was aware that these celebrity apostles had arrived and were influencing the church saying we are better leaders than Paul and they were preaching a health wealth type of gospel that was tickling many ears.

What we will see in our passage is that Paul made plans to visit them – *twice*. He wanted to confront these celebrity apostles and encourage the church to live godly. He communicated those plans to the Corinthians.

Verses 15-16. Paul was in Ephesus. His plan was to travel through Macedonia straight to Corinth. Spend time there. Then travel back through the churches in Macedonia collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem.

He would then go back to Corinth spend more time there and then leave for Judea.

Clearly, his plan was to visit this church near and dear to his heart – *twice*.

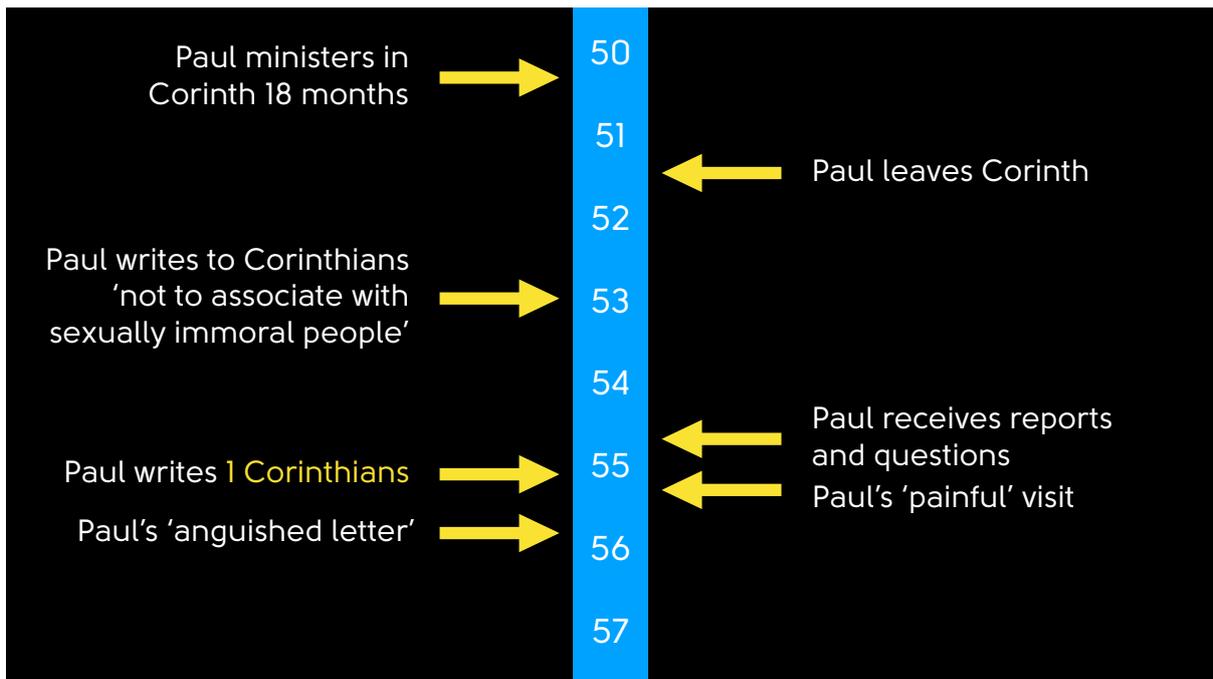


But, Paul first visit to them did not go at all well.

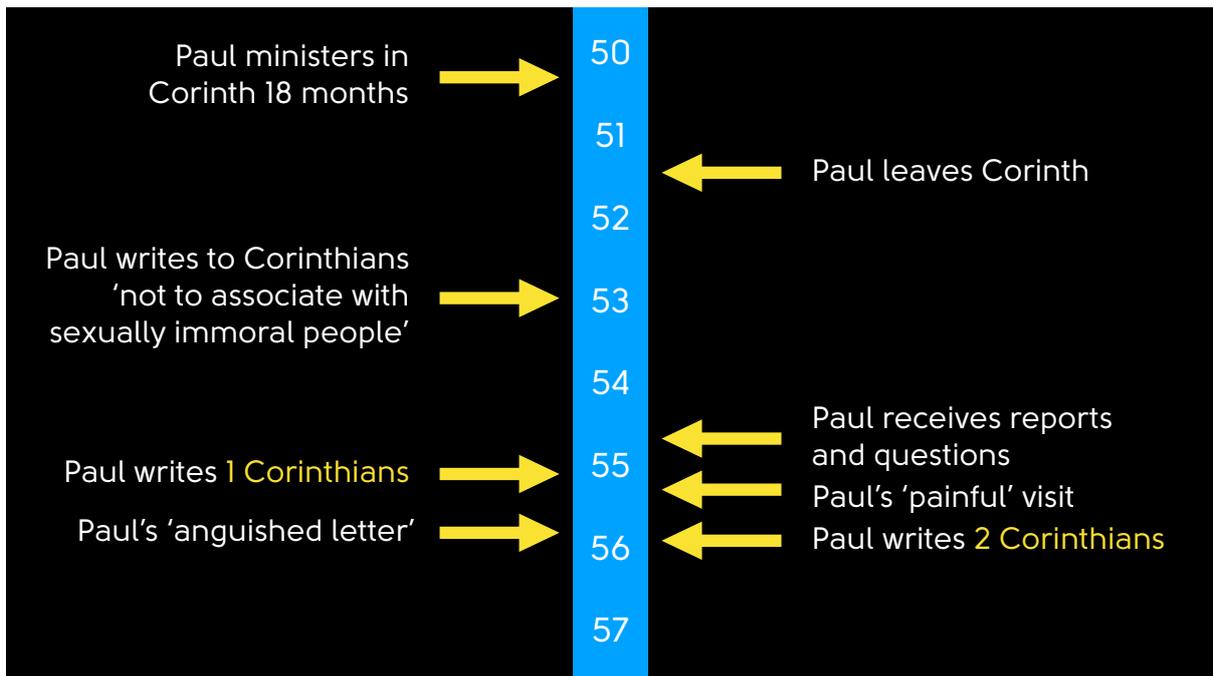
He says it was a 'painful visit' – there were clearly tensions and disagreements – with these celebrity apostles and their supporters and it seems with one person in particular.

If you look down to verse 1 of chapter 2 – the first visit was so painful – Paul made a decision to change his plans. Why? Because he loved them and did not want to inflict further pain on them.

He decided not to inflame the wound, so he wrote rather than making a second in-person visit.



If you look at chapter 2 verse 4, we find that Paul says instead of a second visit – he wrote an 'anguished letter.'



Some responded to the letter – some were further enraged.

So, soon after he followed it up with the letter we have before us as **2 Corinthians**.

Now we can understand the issue that caused this attack.

Paul had indicated that he would visit them twice. In actuality, he visited once and then decided to write a letter instead of visiting.

Well, the super apostles saw an opportunity and pounced.

Clearly, Paul is fickle. His yes is not yes. He is not a man of his word.

He is no true leader.

OK, there were words spoken – but now he won't even face us.

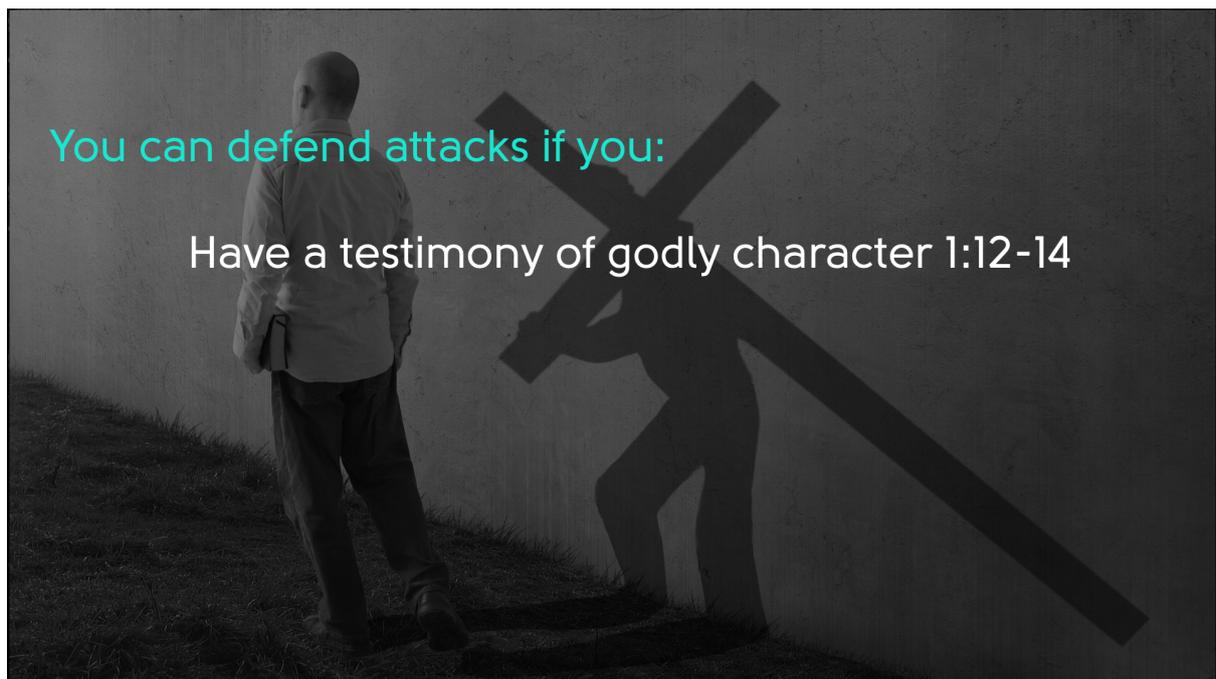
This guy has no spine – he wrote instead of sorting things out like a man.

Is this really who you want to lead you?

Maybe he loves the Macedonian churches more than us.

If you can't trust his word on something as simple as a promise to visit twice – can you trust the message he preaches?

That was the issue.



You and I might call Paul's actions wisdom.

They called them – lack of integrity – lack of courage.

Let's just pause for a minute to put this in perspective.

Here is Paul – God's appointed Apostle to the Gentiles.

The man who brought the gospel to Corinth and founded the church.

A man who lived with integrity before them. A man who would not even accept payment from them in case it gave the wrong idea about his motives.

A man who performed the miracles of a true Apostle before them.

We have 1 and 2 Corinthians. His words were not vindictive or abusive. They were godly.

But now, because Paul changed his travel plans – he is attacked, maligned and held up as a man not to be trusted.

There is a part of me almost finds this laughable. It seems such a storm in a teacup. Nothing to split a church over. Nothing to try and malign a man's character and destroy his ministry.

Except I have seen this happen again and again.

In the past 30 years I have watched very close friends in ministry pushed out when some molehill of an issue is portrayed a mountain – and then that is used to attack their character.

Right here in this church, I have seen Elders have their integrity and character questioned over decisions that are certainly not worth splitting a church over.

When we decided that we would not make one specific view of the end times the official church position – you would think we announced Jesus is no longer God – about 15-20% left – some rather noisily.

When we bought this building – some people objected to us taking a loan to buy it – strongly.

When we began to sing songs other than hymns – added a guitar and worst of all – added the demon drums – a group wrote, organised meetings and some finally left.

In decisions like these and many others – I can tell you – our wisdom, our integrity, our courage, our leadership was challenged – at times vigorously.

We learned what Paul knew – the only defence – our **only** real defence is – our godliness – our integrity – our character.

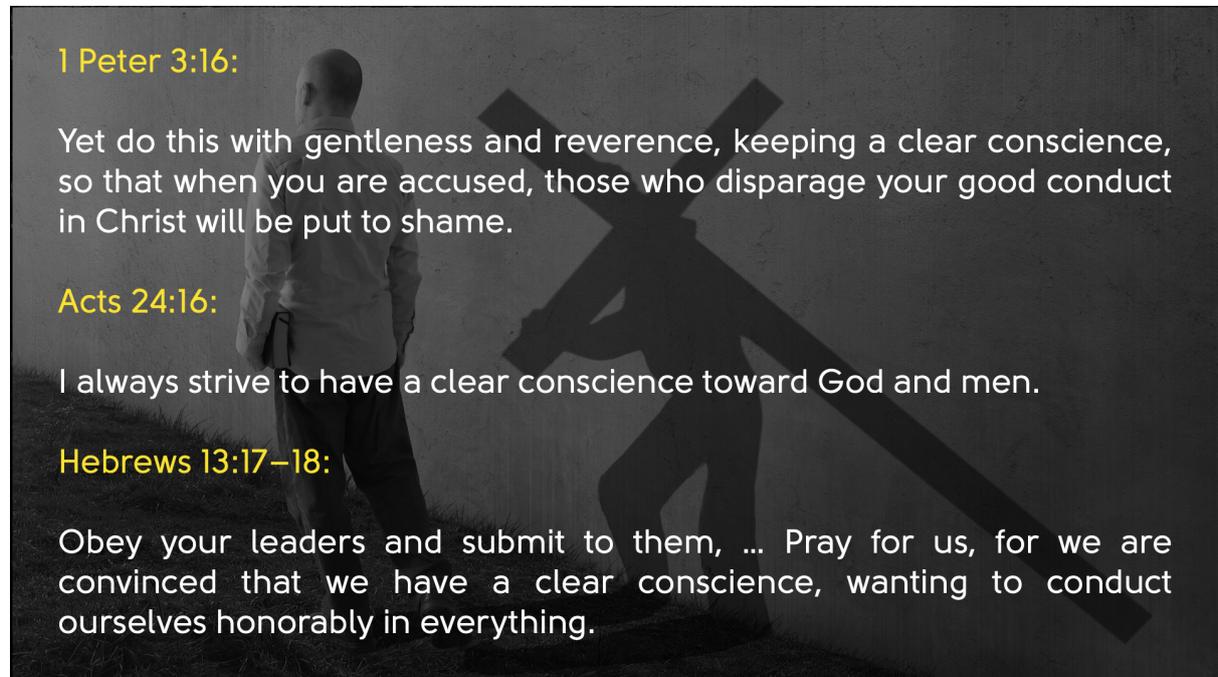
Character makes those in the church ask – does this accusation fit with what we know of this man?

Please don't mishear me. If a leader is ungodly, unwise, divisive – that needs to be brought into the light. If you have the wrong leaders it will destroy a church.

Every two years – each member is asked to affirm or not affirm the character of the men who lead the church. Guarding who becomes a leader is the most important thing you do as a member.

If this church is led by the right men – then they will weather accusations and attacks brought against them.

This is found throughout the Bible. There are a whole host of verses that talk about leaders defending their decisions and actions by an appeal to their conscience – their character – their godliness.



1 Peter 3:16:

Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

When Paul defended himself before Felix in Acts 24:16 he said:

I always strive to have a clear conscience toward God and men.

Hebrews 13:17–18:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, ... Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honourably in everything.

So here is the situation, Paul did say – my plan was to visit twice – and he did only visit once.

His only defence was – you know me – you know my character. He is adamant – I made my decision not out of spite but out of love and my integrity shows this is true.



Paul's boast – his basis for how he has acted – is I have a clear conscience, I conducted myself with godly sincerity and purity.

I made this decision for the right reasons.

Integrity is crucial for any spiritual leader.

Maybe you can think of it like this. Certain jobs require certain competencies.

If I get an MRI that shows I have a brain tumour that has to come out – I am going to see a neurosurgeon.

That means someone with certain competencies – not just a medical degree but also a fellowship in the college of surgeons in neurosurgery.

Now, all things being equal – if someone is going to be taking a chunk of my brain out – sure, I would prefer them to be a nice person with integrity – but truth is I would rather have a narcissistic, brash surgeon on his third wife that no one really likes – but who is a talented, skilled neurosurgeon and he knows it.

I want an experienced, competent surgeon drilling a hole in my head. The skills are what matters.

The question our passage poses for us is: what really matters for a shepherd of God's people who is meant to perform spiritual heart surgery on the flock week after week?

Now, all things being equal – if someone is going to perform spiritual heart surgery on me week after week – sure, I would like them to be a gifted speaker, counsel with empathy and make wise decisions – but the core competencies for ministry are not some set of skills – it is character.

Character is king.

However, today many have lost sight of that. They would say certain skills that lead to results is what matters most in ministry.

We need a powerful speaker, a visionary, a leader of men – someone who can move people with their oratory and the force of their arguments.

Someone who gets results.

We have to ask, why is character so important?

Basically, it is because godly men will make godly decisions – which are often unpopular decisions. But the church will follow men of character even when some disagree with certain decisions.

When you read the New Testament – God set up His churches to be led by a plurality of Elders. And these Elders **must** meet certain qualifications – you can look at this in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1.

The lists that Paul gives is fascinating. It is not a list of abilities and talents – it is a list of moral qualities or character traits.

Now, there is debate about whether one phrase should be translated – ‘able to teach’ – which is **a skill** or ‘lives out what he teaches’ – which would be **a character trait**.

Personally, I think everything in Timothy is a character trait but regardless, however you look at it – the main point is a leader in God’s church **has** to be a man of character – godly.

This is so different to the world. The world looks for talents and abilities – and often character, morality is an impediment to getting results.

Let me read Titus 1:6–8 but let’s imagine it as qualifications for a political leader:

A President or Prime Minister must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of his people, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled.

That just about rules out every political leader here and abroad.

As Christians, we might wish that described the leader of our nation – but it **must** describe the leaders of our churches.

Its leaders *must* be men of integrity. Skills are nice – integrity and character are not an option.

Please don’t misunderstand this. Elders are not Jesus. They are not perfect.

The best Elders are fallen men. Elders lose their temper. Elders say things they should not.

Don't think if a man has any imperfections that means he is disqualified.

No, but his overall character is to be one that loves Christ and serves his church with integrity.

Having men of character as leaders is crucial – because inevitably they will make decisions some will misunderstand or disagree with.

And so, in church leadership – character *absolutely* has to be king.

You might have a very gifted preacher and leader of men – but if people question his integrity – Oh he is in it for the power or the money – there is no doubt that divisions will become manifest.

Paul made a hard decision and verse 12 – he says I made that decision:

Not by human wisdom but by God's grace.

He says, if I used human wisdom – I would have just made a second visit and not opened myself up to attack. Two visits was the easy choice.

Many, many times church leaders face pressure to make decisions using human wisdom.

To make the popular decision – the easy decision.

Over the years we have come under pressure to make certain more popular decisions – and little lobby groups have popped up and petitioned the Elders.

The easy decision is to give in. Put some salve on the noisy group.

But if we don't honestly believe that is what is best for the church or the kingdom – we will make the hard decision.

Paul chose not to visit in person but to write a letter.

Verse 13:

For we are writing nothing to you other than what you can read and also understand.

You need to understand, if I had made the second visit in person, I would not have said anything different to what I wrote – it is just it would not have been a pleasant discussion.

Verses 13-14:

I hope you will understand completely, just as you have partially understood us—that we are your reason for pride, just as you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus.

You understood partially why I acted as I did.

I trust you will come to understand completely – that I made a decision that is best for you and for the kingdom.

I have a clear conscience, that on that day – the day of the Lord – the decisions I made will show I acted in your interests – you are my reason for pride.

And I trust you will be able to say the same concerning me.

Now, that is a sobering thought.

One day we will stand before the One who knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

If it was about our kingdom – our glory – it will be revealed.

Paul says my conscience is clear. I did what I did for your good. To protect our relationship. You are my reason for pride and I am yours.

Every leader faces this same truth. One day we have to give an account of how we led the church.

Every member faces this same truth. One day we have to give an account of how we responded to our leaders.

We must be able to say that in all integrity we made the best decisions we could.

If our decisions are truly made asking – what will best serve the church? – what will glorify Christ? – then we can stand before God and man with a clear conscience.

Brothers and sisters – in terms of spiritual leadership – character has to be king.

2000 years of church history has shown us no church escapes times of division.

Without a doubt, many times the leaders are at fault and should be held to account.

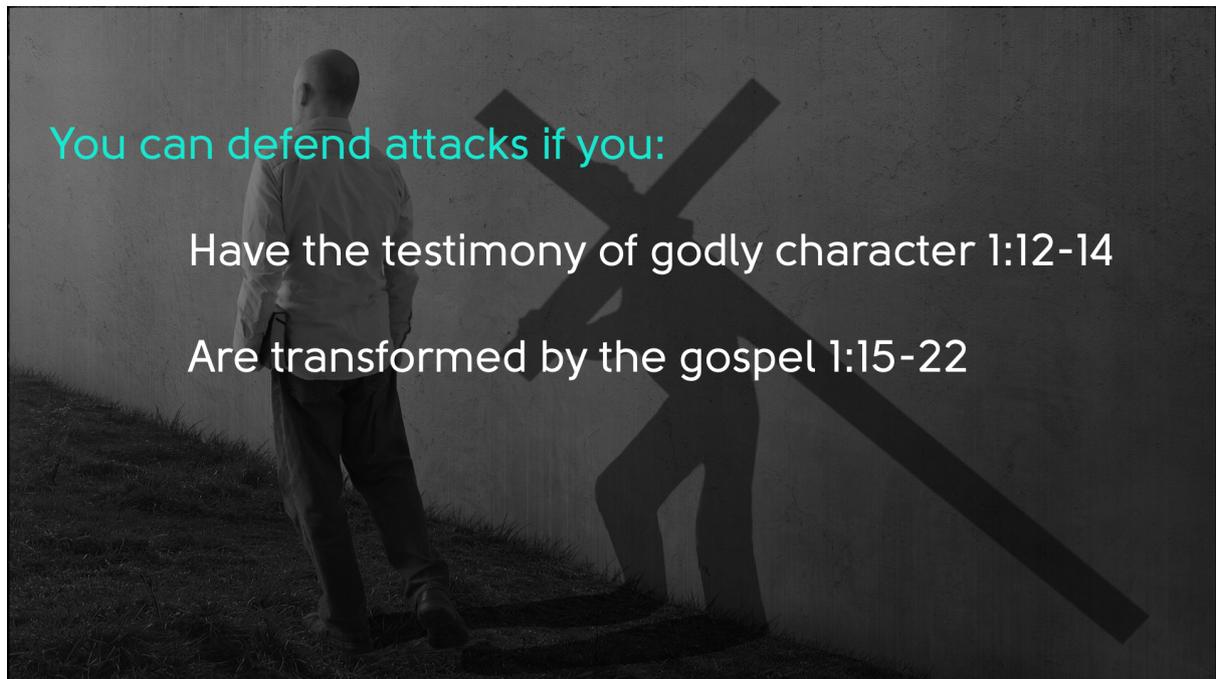
Too many church leaders have acted poorly, broken trust, abused their position and devastated members. Members then walk away because it is so painful. That is tragic.

Such men should not be Elders – and if the other Elders don't act – the members must.

But, many times the accusations are simply a way to force through ungodly decisions and promote selfish agendas.

How do you tell who to trust? Look for godly character.

Second, **you can defend attacks if you:**



Are transformed by the gospel 1:15-22

Basically, do you live a life that looks like a Christian life?

If it has a sign saying I'm a duck – but it has four legs, and barks like a dog – it is not a duck.

But, if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck – you can confirm – it is a duck.

You will know we are Christians by our love and the way we live our lives. We don't live as the world.

Christians are not perfect – but are characterised by striving to live godly.

These type of men and women are not characterised by lying and deception.

Paul's life was transformed. He went from greedy, power hungry, murderous Saul – to Paul who suffered for Christ.

You can trust that this man is not a liar.

Brothers and sisters, you can smell hypocrisy.

There is something about selfish motives that just oozes out.

There are things about someone's life that doesn't add up.

Their lives do not have the ring of integrity – so when push comes to shove – we have reason to distrust their word.

But not Paul.

He lived in Corinth for 18 months. They saw his life.

He lived what he preached.

2 Corinthians 1:15–17:

Because of this confidence, I planned to come to you first, so that you could have a second benefit, and to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and then come to you again from Macedonia and be helped by you on my journey to Judea. Now when I planned this, was I of two minds? Or what I plan, do I plan in a purely human way so that I say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time?

Is the life I lived before you such that you really think that when I planned my trip – I was deceptive – saying yes yes – two visits – all the while knowing my real intention was – *no* one visit?

Verse 18:

As God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes *and* no.”

God is faithful and does not deceive and His Apostle He sent to you is faithful and does not deceive – I did not say yes while really meaning no!

Look it is very Aussie to say – yes no. We all know this is a yes – that actually means no.

God doesn’t do that – His men and women do not do that.

Verses 19-20:

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you—Silvanus, Timothy, and I—did not become “Yes and no.” On the contrary, in him it is always “Yes.” For every one of God’s promises is “Yes” in him. Therefore, through him we also say “Amen” to the glory of God.

When Jesus transforms a man – his yes is yes. He means what he says.

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy came preaching a gospel of transformation and their lives reflected that.

And the proof is back in verse 12 – look at our lives – look at how we conducted ourselves before you – we lived in godly sincerity and purity – not lives of selfish ambition and lies.

Verses 21-22:

Now it is God who strengthens us together with you in Christ, and who has anointed us. He has also put his seal on us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a down payment.

God is at work in us.

God put His Spirit in us.

Our proof is our lives.

If we are deceivers – then God has not transformed us – but you have seen our lives.

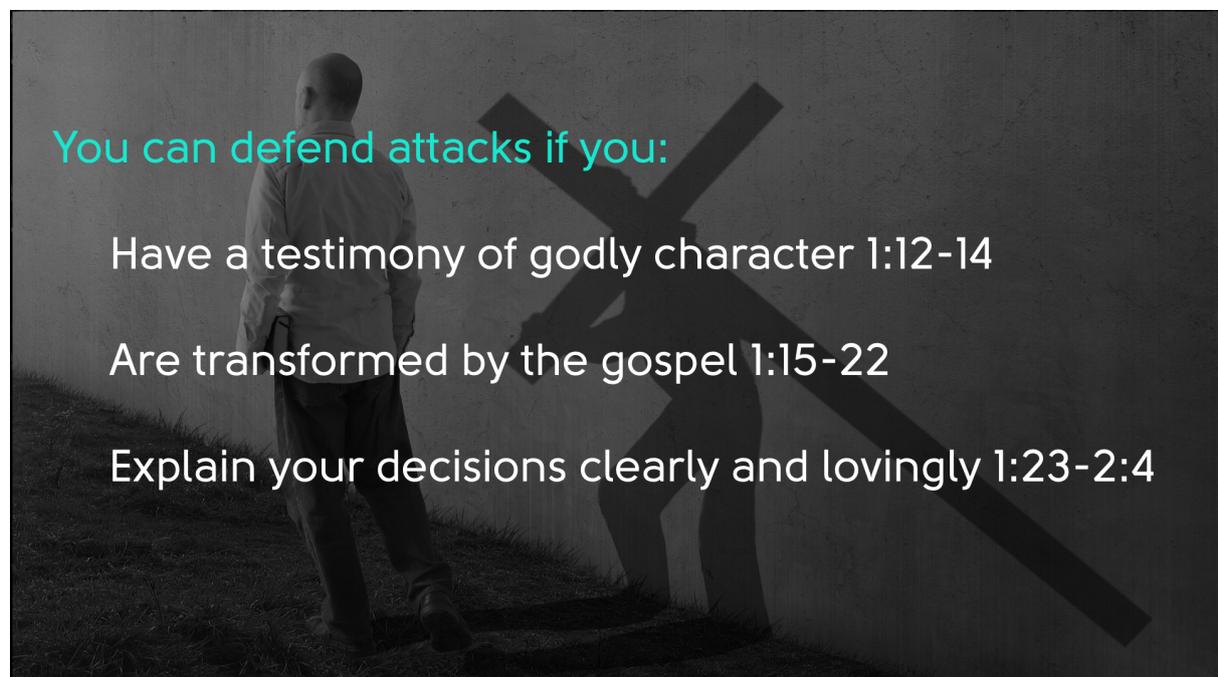
Again – it is their integrity – their godly character that is their defence.

Brothers and sisters, if you live a life of integrity – people believe you and accept your motives.

If you live lives more like the world – too selfish, too ambitious – people will wonder if your word is your bond.

The church knows the men and women who have an aroma of Christ – and you know that they are not characterised by deception and lies.

Third, **you can defend attacks if you:**



Explain your decisions clearly and lovingly 1:23-2:4

God ordains the future – so His plans do not change.

You and I – we are mere men and women – we do not know the future. Circumstances change.

So, it is **not** a mark of godliness to say – even though circumstances have changed – I can't revise my plans because that would make me fickle.

No! It makes you wise.

Wisdom dictates we amend our plans if that is necessary.

Paul did this many times. He planned to go to Spain – as far as we know he didn't make it.

Many years ago – we announced our plan to do our first church plant.

We had someone who had been in our church for years and finished a degree at Bible College.

However, things about this person, their character, their faith, their marriage came to light.

It became clear that it was not wise to keep going. We changed our decision.

That didn't make us liars or double-minded.

It would have been folly to say – oh we announced a decision – even if it would be foolish we should press on or the church will lose confidence in us.

Paul changed his mind – but for very good reasons.

But you need to explain those reasons clearly and lovingly.

Verses 23-2:1:

I call on God as a witness, on my life, that it was to spare you that I did not come to Corinth. I do not mean that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in your faith. In fact, I made up my mind about this: I would not come to you on another painful visit.

When Paul visited – things were heated and became very painful.

Words were said, relationships broken, feelings crushed.

We are imperfect. We are misunderstood. We say unwise things.

We have made unwise decisions here.

We have said things we regret.

At times there can be divisions between very godly leaders let alone others.

In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas had very sharp words over whether Mark should accompany them on their journey.

In Galatians 2 Paul had to confront Peter about his relationship with Gentile believers.

So, no surprise – Paul versus the celebrity apostles led to some fireworks and bruised egos.

Paul is a man who said what had to be said for the sake of the gospel and the church. He knew which hills he should die on and had the courage to make a stand.

But, he did not enjoy it. He hated the turmoil, the pain that such division caused.

Paul was not a man to lord it over those in the faith.

He could have. He could have said – I am God's Apostle – if I make a decision – you say I obey Apostle sir.

But that is not real leadership.

Paul wanted peace. He wanted them to know joy – because they stood firm in their faith – because they are Christians – because they are brothers and sisters – and the last thing he wanted to do is come in all guns blazing and cause them more pain.

So, yes he made a decision – a hard decision – not to make another painful visit. Things were too raw.

Verses 2-3:

For if I cause you pain, then who will cheer me other than the one being hurt by me? I wrote this very thing so that when I came I wouldn't have pain from those who ought to give me joy, because I am confident about all of you that my joy will also be yours.

The church, the body of Christ – is not meant to be a place where differences of opinion, fights over authority, misunderstandings – lead to pain, hurt and anguish.

But boy does that happen. Hard heads on both sides and no one backs down.

I could not tell you how many people I have met over the years who have told me – I am a Christian, but I won't become a member of a church – and at times – now I won't even attend a church. Why? Because I have been hurt so much by the church or its leaders in the past.

Now, that is no excuse and almost certainly there is wrong on all sides – but I get it. I really get it.

Divisions in the body can tear a church apart and it destroys its testimony in the world. Paul won't be a part of that.

Instead, churches are meant to bring joy to those in leadership – Hebrews 13 says the same thing.

And the leadership is meant to bring joy to the members – not pain.

I can tell you this – it is a fine line – it is a difficult thing for a leader to lead well – to correct – to admonish – without crushing and alienating.

When is firm – too firm? When is backing off – not wise?

Finding this line is possibly one of the hardest things we do – and too many times the leader or the member or both – get it wrong.

We back down when we should not. We press on when we should back off.

Paul realized another visit so soon would only lead to more conflict and pain.

We have all been there – in marriage, in friendships, in the church – an argument goes too far – words said that should not have been said – feelings hurt.

Someone should have said – let's take a break.

We need a little space to calm down.

That is what Paul did. So instead of visiting, Paul wrote. Verse 4:

For I wrote to you with many tears out of an extremely troubled and anguished heart—not to cause you pain, but that you should know the abundant love I have for you.

Read that verse a few times – this is the heart of a godly leader.

Clearly, even though Paul felt it best not to visit in person – his letter still pulled no punches.

He said what needed to be said. He spoke to their behaviour and to their being influenced by the super apostles.

But, he didn't write out of spite to hurt them.

He was anguished about what was happening – extremely troubled.

He wrote out of abundant love.

Love means making hard choices. In this case a choice not to visit in person yet to still write a letter that pulled no punches.

Leadership is hard.

We don't always make the right decision. We don't always avoid division. I wish.

But, godly leaders make hard decisions – explain those decisions – and trust that there is enough trust for the church to accept those decisions.

Brothers and sisters – becoming a Christian means that by faith – Christ pays for our sins and washes us clean – but then he places us in a new family – a messy family – the church.

Every family needs godly leaders with integrity.

There is no relationship in this world that does not have its misunderstandings, its tensions – times when words are said and motives questioned.

I have seen it Elder to Elder – Elder to member – spouse to spouse – Parent to child – friend to friend.

What gets you over the hump is when you stop and realise – I am dealing with someone who is not perfect – but I trust them. When all is said and done they love Christ and me and that is crucial.

But that requires godliness – integrity – character.

Take that away and you have a dictator Elder lording it over the flock.

A tyrant husband demanding obedience of a wife.

An authoritarian parent saying do as I tell you not as I do.

If the position of authority comes without earned respect, it will lead to division and pain.

Elders cannot pull the obey me card unless they are servant leaders making decisions for the benefit of the flock.

Husbands can't pull the submit to me card unless they are laying down their lives for their wives.

Parents can't pull the do what I tell you card if they have not earned respect. You can't tell your child to go to church and youth group – when church is optional for you and you never attend a Grace Group and don't live out your faith at home.

Godly character – coupled with love – gets us through the tough times and then bonds us even closer.

Leadership with godly character is essential in every sphere of life.

Every one of us should strive to have the character of an Elder even if we never become a leader in a church.

Paul knew it. The church has learned this the hard way for 2000 years. And I pray we will learn it in our church and in our homes.

Character – Our True Defence **2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 17 July 2022**

Main Point: Godly character is our best defence against those who would malign us.

General Questions:

1. What was the issue that provoked the 'super apostles' to attack Paul's credibility? Why did something so seemingly minor become such a big deal in the church?
2. Why is character an essential trait in any leader?
3. How can a church ensure that the leaders are men of character and integrity?
4. What should members do if leaders are not men of integrity?
5. Why is the character of a leader often under attack in churches?
6. What does the qualification 'above reproach' mean? What does it not mean?
7. When is it wise to change a decision you announced?
8. How should you communicate that?
9. Why are divisions in a church so painful?
10. How do you find the line between speaking the truth and not unnecessarily hurting someone?
11. When should you take time away to let things cool down?
12. What is the result if you exercise authority without godly integrity?
13. Why is character important in marriages and in parenting?

Application Questions:

1. Have you seen the integrity of church leaders attacked? Did you feel it was justified or unnecessary?
2. How should you deal with godly leaders who make a decision you personally disagree with?
3. How would you counsel someone who had been hurt by divisions in the church?