

Path to Power

Relational Security

2 Corinthians 1:12-24

I'm going to talk today about how to experience security in your close relationships, how to cultivate complete, comprehensive security. I think the main application of the text is relational, but certainly the truths that are here can apply in a number of areas. If you're feeling insecure about your health or about your circumstances or certain areas of your life, certainly these truths will serve you and help you to find security in Jesus Christ.

I made a silly little reference to the active shooter training, but it's the world we live in. This is not anything I was prepared for while at seminary. Tragically, it is the reality of the world that we live in. How do I live securely in an insecure world? That's what we're going to talk about today.

We go to the text, 2 Corinthians 1:12-24. Let me call your attention to how Paul in this section is really defending his integrity. He has been accused of being just a bad leader and we'll get more into the content of it. Let's look at the text. Verse 12:

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand— just as you did partially understand us —that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of

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God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

As we approach this topic, I don't want you to think exclusively of insecurity as a feeling. Certainly, it is a feeling. It's an emotion that can be very powerful for us. I personally know what it is to deal with insecurity. But I want you to think in terms of a pattern of thinking that leads to that feeling, to those feelings – the fear, the anxiety, the insecurity and all that travels from that way of thinking. Allow the Spirit of God today, through the ministry of the Word, to reform, to renew, to recast your thoughts according to what God gives us in this passage.

The Apostle Paul addresses two criticisms in this particular section of scripture. In the first, Paul's own words are being used against him. In verses 12-14 his writings have been misinterpreted. They've been abused and used to attack him. In one sense Paul gives a very straightforward defense.

If you've poured yourself relationally into anyone, even in good relationships you probably know what it is to have your words used against you -- your best things, your best attitudes, the way you've served your children, your mate, whoever it might be, and for those things to then, in a moment of weakness be turned around and used to accuse you. Well, this is on an entirely different level with Paul. He is being attacked here.

Then the second area is that Paul changed his travel plans. In verses 15 through the end of the chapter he is addressing the accusation that he has flip-flopped, he's not dependable, he lacks integrity, he says yes today and no tomorrow, that he's all over the place.

What's interesting to me is that when you read 2 Corinthians, toward the end Paul gives a catalog of some of his sufferings, like a highlight reel, at the end of chapter 11. Here are just a few of the things Paul says he went through:

...great labors, more imprisonments, countless beatings (countless beatings!), and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one (39 lashes

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with a whip five times!). Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

If I'm Paul, I lead with this. This is not chapter 11, this is chapter 1. "Yeah, I changed my plans -- in between beatings that I took for you!" This is Mom talking to her adult child: "I wiped your bottom. You will not speak to me like that," on a whole new level. Right? There is this place that Paul has every right to be indignant, yet he's not. That's what is amazing. In fact, when we get to this passage, what we'll discover is he doesn't use these realities to lord it over them, but he teaches deep theological truth. He's very purposeful when he brings these up before them later.

In a lot of ways what we discover here in chapter 1 is that Paul models security for us. That's a dangerous thing to say, because we don't like to look at human models and idealize them without really being careful. But he models security because he finds his security in Christ.

And I want to share this message friends: No matter how deep and profound and palatable your insecurity may be, there is a sure foundation in Jesus Christ. He is greater than the fragmentation of your own soul. He is greater than your greatest fears. So we discover that we look at relational security in three parts. Paul begins with:

1. I keep my talk simple.

Remember he is dealing here with the accusation where his letters are being misinterpreted and they are being used against him. He basically is saying, "Listen, my letters were just straightforward. They are clearly what you read. They are what you understand them to be, although evidently you don't fully understand them."

Look at just this one verse: "For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with (notice these three descriptions of his communication) simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you." Paul is

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saying, “Listen, I didn’t try to manipulate you. I wasn’t clever. My conversation with you was characterized by simplicity, godly sincerity, and the grace of God.”

If I go back just a second, he is saying here, “This is the testimony of my conscience.” Now, our consciences are this part of our souls – they’re not perfect, they’re not flawless, but they judge our own actions and attitudes and words. The danger with the conscience is that if you ignore your conscience and disobey your conscience enough, you begin to damage it. And to some degree, all of us have damaged consciences. But Paul is making an appeal here to say, “Listen, this is my testimony, and my conscience bears witness to you, that this is how my communication with you is characterized.”

Now, I think it’s helpful to look at this verse in this regard. Think of this as a diagnosis of insecurity in your own life. When there are a lot of words and you’re just seeking to maneuver people and manipulate people and gather people, it’s often an indication of insecurity. Paul is saying, “My communication with you really was about the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ. I didn’t want to fill you up with my grandeur and how impressive I am because I want you to see Jesus.”

Now, this is spiritual leadership at its greatest. If I could just say to you, friends, if Riverside is your home, I want to encourage you and say, “Beware of spiritual leaders who are always telling you about their gifts, about their revelations, about their abilities. Beware of that spirit that’s always trying to draw, like a rake; it only extends itself to bring it back to itself. “We desire to make Christ known.” That’s what Paul is saying. We want you to know the grace of God, so we keep it simple and we do it with great sincerity. So, simple speech.

2. Everything I need is found in Christ.

In these verses, 15 through 20, Paul deals head on with the accusation that, “Hey, you changed your plans. You were coming, then you weren’t coming. You were coming, you’re not coming.” He does something here that’s really masterful. He basically says, “There were good reasons for what I did. I made the right choice. I was really thinking of you. I wanted to bless you and extend God’s grace. I didn’t want to come to you severely and be harsh. He’ll make clear before the letter is over, “I wanted to make some space for God to work. There were good reasons for what I did as well as for what God was using me to do right where I was at the time. But in the end, you know what

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matters? God never vacillates with you. God is never yes and no with you. God is always faithful. I want you to get your eyes off me. I want to look to God.”

I would say it like this as a dad or as a pastor or as a friend, “Even if I have failed you, don’t get overly preoccupied with me. Keep your eyes on Christ. People are going to disappoint you.” Sometimes people are going to hurt you very, very deeply. That doesn’t make it okay. If you’re here and you’ve been hurt by a pastor or a leader or a parent or a Christian or anyone, I’m not making excuses for that. As a leader I apologize. We make many mistakes. We commit many errors. But our hope is in Christ.

Paul teaches us something here. These last two points are so glorious, this point and the next, where Paul is saying, “Everything, absolutely everything you need for life and eternity is found in Jesus Christ.” God is reclaiming all that is his! This world, this universe was made by God and it belongs to him. We have a broken relationship with God and God is restoring it, and he’s restoring it in Christ.

So Paul can say, “Jesus is your wisdom. Jesus is your sanctification. Jesus is your righteousness. Jesus is everything you need.” The knowledge of that moves us to a place where in relationships we are not saying, “Do you like me? Do you approve of me? Because I have to have your approval. If you don’t like me I won’t be okay. What are people thinking about me? How are they judging me?”

I understand there’s a measure of this that’s normal, and that we want to love people. We want to be aware, but I’m suggesting to you that we need to be more Christ-aware and find our security in his acceptance of us and our acceptance, because we are trusting in Jesus Christ. And he takes care of it. He takes care of everything.

The slave trader John Newton was converted, saved, and powerfully transformed. He was the author of “Amazing Grace,” an amazing leader, mentor to Wilberforce. He was used of God to help undo slavery, which he at one time had participated in. His greatest legacy is thousands...we literally have hundreds, thousands of pastoral letters that he wrote to people. It’s from a day when that communication was frequently used. Thank God those letters were preserved. In his lifetime some of them were published, but now we have them. When you read these letters – letter after letter after letter is pointing people to Christ, to Christ, to Christ, to Jesus.

There is an element of how to relate, how to get along, how to deal with stuff. All of that’s helpful, but it’s all just built on this platform of: Every promise God has made is all you need and Jesus

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fulfills every one of them. All of the promises of God are Yes and Amen. So Paul says Jesus makes it possible for us to say Amen, for us to say Yes.

Let me ask you, have you said Amen in Christ? Have you said Yes? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone? Scripture is very clear. It says we start by repenting of trusting in ourselves, repenting of doing our own thing, repenting of going our own way. We come back to God and say, “God, I’m trusting in Jesus. Jesus lived for me, he died for me, he paid the price for my sin. He rose and conquered the grave. My hope is in Jesus.”

What’s interesting to me is that if you get technical, there are three things scripture tells us to do to become a Christian: 1) Repent – that’s turn from doing our own thing and turn to God, 2) Confess your sin, trust in Christ, and the third thing really is 3) Baptism.

Baptism doesn’t save you. You can “be a Christian” without being baptized. But when you read the scripture, when you say, “Okay, I want to repent and trust in Christ. How do I express that?”

Baptism is the way you express it. It builds into you this very understanding: I do that in the presence of the people of God because I need to be a part of the church, of the community of God to follow Jesus. So it’s not really a third thing. You say, “Brian, how many things really are there? Well, repent and believe. Then hopefully you’re going to say, “How do I do that?” Well, you express it publicly by following him in baptism.

Now, sometimes in our Western circles we’ve replaced baptism with an altar call or a sinner’s prayer. I’m not against an altar call. I’m not against a sinner’s prayer. But if you’ve trusted in Jesus, I want to ask you: Have you expressed it in baptism? Unless you hold to a doctrinally different view (which we can talk about separately), unless you have an abiding conviction, a difference in doctrine, we’ll talk about that.

I have some Christian brothers we don’t agree with on baptism. Some of them are members of this church. In heaven, for all of eternity, one of us is going to be able to tell the other one: “I told you so!” On most days I feel good about my odds, but I have been wrong before. Why?

This is very difficult to express to you without being misunderstood. I want to challenge you. If you say you’re not going to be the lord of your own life anymore, but you’re going to follow Jesus, and the first thing he tells you to do is be baptized, but you tell him no, do you understand that all the promises are Yes and Amen in Jesus Christ? And it’s not about baptism, it’s about Christ! It’s about

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him! It's about a life that says, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" to Jesus. Sorry, I just got carried away and preached for a moment.

I do believe, friends, that sometimes I do a disservice to you as a pastor. I so much don't want to be legalistic and manipulate you and lay legalism on you, but because I love you I want to tell you: Stop negotiating with Christ. He is Lord of all. Follow him! Say yes to him. Stop playing games. Follow Jesus Christ. Everything God has for you is in Jesus.

The reason you have to guard against legalism is because as soon as you say, "You have to do this," someone literally can't, or they're trying to get healed and there are circumstances, so I really don't want to go that route. But I do want to say to you: Follow Jesus Christ.

The verse for #2 is: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." There's a little something there, just a little tidbit before we leave. We fail to say Yes to Christ as we should. That's why we say our Yes in him. It's grace. From grace to grace he helps us. We don't earn it. Alright, #3 – are you ready?

3. God establishes me.

This is a glorious truth. This is foundational for security. He says, "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Holy Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Listen guys, God establishes us in this journey together. God has called me. God establishes me. That is an expression of deep security. Your approval, Paul is saying, is not what makes this work. It's found in God.

You can hear Paul thinking out loud. "Do you think I wanted to be beaten with rods and whipped with lashes and put in prison and go through shipwreck and do all of this? Do you think that I wanted to start a church where people are getting drunk at the Lord's Supper and suing one another and doing all these kinds of things, to have them reject me? God called me to this and God will establish me."

There's something that happens in a parent when a parent says, "Listen, I'm the best dad you could have. I'm not the best dad in the world, but I'm the best dad for you." "I'm the best mom for you. You will go out and do some things and I won't be proud of those sometimes, but I'm always going

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to be that parent for you. Always. You know why? God did this. And God tells me that as your child growing up, you actually express your faith to him by honoring and obeying me.”

Now, that’s culturally radical. I know, but it’s true! It’s so true that Paul emphasizes in the New Testament that the fifth commandment, the commandment to honor and obey parents, is the first commandment with a promise, and that promise is by faith because God only works by faith. It’s not works. In their little world, a child knows: “I’m trusting God by honoring Mom and Dad, even though they’re flawed.” Faith begins at that moment.

That’s why a parent who teaches that and lovingly, consistently lives it out in training, instructing, disciplining in love is actually serving that child. Why? It’s the security that comes from: “It’s not that I deserve it. It’s not that I’ve earned it. God established me in this place.”

Look at how God establishes us. Look at this verse: “It is God who establishes us...” Where? “...with you in Christ.” Remember the second point? Everything you need is found in Christ. God establishes you, in Christ, by the Spirit -- Father, Son, Holy Spirit, in Christ. These three things are all works of the Holy Spirit, who has anointed us, who has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

You can go to Ephesians 1:13, Ephesians 4:30, there are various verses that will talk to you about the sealing work of the Holy Spirit and the fact that the Spirit is given to us as a guarantee. Throughout the gospels of Luke and John the anointing of the Spirit is emphasized. Let me unpack those three for you quickly so you understand the work of the Holy Spirit.

When you anoint someone with oil, and that oil covers them, the Spirit of God covers you. He empowers you to do what he has called you to do. There is a strength that God gives you, an anointing of the Spirit of God. God seals you with his Spirit. The Spirit comes into your life. It’s like a stamp that proves authenticity and identity, like a royal putting his stamp on an envelope, sealing it and protecting the contents.

It is the character of God that seals you as the Spirit of God fills you. Then the Spirit is given to you as a guarantee, like a down payment. The full payment is to come in all of eternity. You trust in Christ, you are given the promise of eternal life, but the Holy Spirit anoints you to live for him now, seals you, and guarantees your future inheritance. God establishes us in Christ by the Spirit, anoints us, seals us, gives us the Spirit as a guarantee.

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Okay, look at how Paul finishes. He ends with another diagnosis. After he says all of this he says, “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.” Here’s what he’s saying. In some ways you know that you’re not walking in security when you lord over other people what you have – your authority, your position, your influence, your power.

Paul is a dangerous man to mess with in many ways. He walks in the supernatural power of God. His influence in spiritual things is staggering, but he never goes there to try to intimidate or dominate or overpower people in that regard. Paul is saying that’s not our relationship. Since I’ve talked a little bit about parenting, that’s what happens in parenting; parenting has to emerge.

I have a 22-year-old son visiting today, just visiting for Memorial Day weekend. If I say, “You’ll do this! I’m your dad and that settles it!” He’s 22! “That settles it in your mind.” He’s a respectful son so he might not say that, but there is a point where we work with our emerging children for their joy, and that should characterize adult relationships.

When you look at Jesus’ teaching on leadership to his apostles, friends, he says we do not lead the way the world leads. We do not promote self, we do not lord authority. We serve. We take the last place. We don’t insist on titles. Come on! Help me! Is not much of what we see in the church a blatant disregard for the teaching of Jesus? I’m going to put it on you. I’m going to admonish you. Don’t follow people, even me. Follow Jesus. You’ll find security in Christ. You’ll find security in him.

I’m sorry, I made a mistake. I preached on affliction last week, then I’ve gotten to experience it. So just be careful about preaching on affliction. Friends, that was supposed to be a little joke to tell you I want your permission to be a little bit irritable today. Stay with me for 45 more seconds. I’ve known what it is to be an insecure teenager, an insecure man, an insecure husband, an insecure father, an insecure leader, and I thank God that he invites us into a different reality. I want to say to you husband, wife, father, mother, employer, employee: God establishes you. Everything you need is in Christ. Trust him, and look for these indicators of a multiplicity of words and lording my authority over others. Let’s pray.

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