

The Commendable Christian

Servants of God can be commended for enduring suffering with patience and love.

GROUP
DEVOTION

01

Are You Hungry?

Which celebrities do you admire? Why do you admire them?

Celebrities are often admired for their appearance, intelligence, or talent. They might be complimented and commended by millions, and some people may even try to emulate their success so that they too can be admired. The Corinthians, however, did not respond to the apostle Paul in this manner. They had a different view of what a commendable Christian looked like. In this passage, Paul addresses the hardened hearts and worldly attitude of the Corinthians and provides a different picture of why a servant of God might be commended.

Taste and See

Why does the apostle Paul commend himself (vv. 4–8)?

The apostle Paul commends himself because he has endured hardship, beatings, and hunger as a servant of God.

Unlike the self-serving false apostles of the time, Paul is a servant of God who is not concerned with being flashy and eloquent. He is careful not to do anything that would discredit his ministry, and he chooses to be patient, kind, and loving. While some people may think the mark of a good servant of God is whether they experience victories or God's favor and blessings, Paul is commendable because of his great endurance despite his suffering. He is beaten, imprisoned, and rejected, and he works hard even through hunger and sleepless nights. He is motivated by his love for God and his desire for people to receive the grace of salvation.

Who do you commend in your church?

Christians sometimes commend one another because of their impressive behavior and work. People may seem talented or servant-hearted, but we should be careful of how we commend others based on external actions without considering their motives or the condition of their hearts. More than victories, how Christians respond in tough situations often reveals the condition of their hearts. Grumbling, resentment, and bitterness in the midst of struggles is an indication that our hearts treasure something other than God: perhaps reputation, material goods, or security. Those who endure through pain and suffering with righteousness, patience, and love, however, are commendable as devoted servants of God.

What does Paul want the Corinthians to do (v. 13)?

Paul desires the Corinthians to open wide their hearts.

The Corinthians are Paul's spiritual children, but they have closed their hearts to him. Influenced by worldly unbelievers and false apostles, they do not speak freely and withhold their affections. Paul asks that they open their hearts wide to him just as he has done for them. He wants a fair exchange of love and support because this is what Christians are called to do. We are to love God and one another. If believers do not have the love and support of other believers, then it is harder to endure the struggles that we face in the world. Paul, therefore, exhorts the Corinthians to share their love and affection, just as he has done for them.

To whom do you open wide your heart?

It can be hard to open wide our hearts to God and to our fellow brothers and sisters. We do not like being vulnerable with others because we are afraid of being rejected or hurt. We would prefer to be self-preserving and live independently. In front of God, however, we can be completely vulnerable without being afraid because we know that we are unconditionally loved by Him. God is for us and not against us. Under His grace and love, we as His children can open wide our hearts to Him as well as our brothers and sisters. As we abandon our self-preserving tendencies and love one another better, we will resemble more of the love of Christ and foster strong relationships within the church.

Chew on This

How can you increase your affection for Christ and His people this week?

When we intentionally put ourselves in a place where we can encounter God we will naturally find our affection and love increase. These encounters do not have to involve a grand gesture or a seemingly spiritual setting like a revival service or a retreat. You can spend a little extra time reading the Word, praying through Scripture, fellowshiping with other believers and conversing about God, or evangelizing to non-believers in your neighborhood. As you do these things, God will move in your heart and stir up a greater affection for Him and for His people.