

2 Corinthians 2:1-17

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When Paul wrote to the Corinthians—he wrote the first epistle of Corinthians, he wrote the second epistle we're looking at—there was an issue that was going on in the church where there were still false teachers. Instead of me giving you the whole background of the epistle and why he wrote it, we're going to develop it as we go through each week. The first thing that we saw was that the false teachers were accusing Paul of not being an apostle. That was the big kind of accusation, "He's not an apostle." As ludicrous as it sounds, they were saying, "He's not an apostle because he's suffering. He's going through times of difficulty. He's being persecuted and he's sick and he's weak and he's suffering." They were attacking him personally saying, "He's not really an apostle."

Paul spent the first chapter, and we looked at it last Wednesday and Sunday, dealing with why God allows suffering in our lives and how we respond to that suffering—that He is the God of all comfort, the Father of mercies—and that God comforts us in our sorrow so that we're able to comfort others. Up to this point, Paul has been dealing with that one issue of why he was so battered and beaten and persecuted and suffered so greatly.

Well, it shifts a little bit tonight to another accusation the false teachers were giving to the people in Corinth that Paul was fickle—he was not a man of his word, that he said one thing and did another thing, that he said he would come visit you but didn't come visit you. It sounds kind of bizarre but he deals in great depth with this issue of why he didn't pay them a visit. Again, the chronology of it all is a little bit complicated to lay out and there's some that we don't quite understand how it fits in, but evidently between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians Paul paid them a visit. It was called the "painful visit." He also wrote them a letter that we don't have called the "painful letter." He had to go there and deal with these individuals that were coming against his apostolic authority and his integrity. They were attacking his integrity and his authority. Paul goes into great depth dealing with the subject of why he didn't come to them for his visit.

We touched on that last week, but he goes into more depth about it tonight. That's why you may read these verses...and I'm always preaching from the King James translation but you might want to consult a more modern translation to make it a little easier to grasp and understand what Paul is saying. Paul goes into great detail about why he didn't come visit them and that it wasn't that he was being wishy-washy or two-faced or insincere. He wasn't saying one thing and doing another. Again, he kind of speaks about his integrity and his sincerity and his consistency and his ministry.

Back up with me to get a running start into 2 Corinthians 1:23. If you're going to start chapter two, it backs up to 2 Corinthians 1:23 where Paul says, "Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." He said he would come but he didn't come, so they were saying, "He's a flake. He's not sincere. He says one thing, he does another thing," and he's actually saying, "I call God for a record upon my soul." He's actually saying, basically, "I have a clear conscience. I have a clear conscience before God," and "God knows

my heart, and I'm calling God to record this, my heart."

Look at verse 23 again, ". . . that to spare you"—here he makes it very clear why he did not come to them—" . . . to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." Now, he's going to make it more clear what he means by that, but what he's saying is, "If I would've come to you, I would've had to have been very stern, very disciplinary, very harsh, very hard. It wouldn't have been a very pleasant visit." He's going to argue that he wanted to show them love. Because of his love for them he waited until they corrected some of the errors. They also dealt with some of the sin in the church and also dealt with some of the false teachers so that when he did come to them it could be a pleasant visit. He didn't want to come to them with heaviness, and he wanted to be able to have joy in their fellowship. He kind of in one quick statement, 2 Corinthians 1:23, says, "God knows my heart. God knows my motive. I wanted, ' . . . to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.'" We see Paul's clear conscience and loving heart.

Notice 2 Corinthians 1:24, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith"—he says, 'It's not because I want to have dominion over you or control your faith'—"but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand"—or some translations have that in faith you stand. Notice even though Paul was a great apostle and one of the founding pastors of the church, he says, "I don't want to have dominion over your faith," I don't want to be dominating over your faith. He knew that they were standing in faith, and it wasn't really so much of an issue of their faith in the Lord or their faith in believing the Word of God, but they were being influenced against him by these false teachers that were probably indeed legalists.

Without skipping a beat, 2 Corinthians 2:1. Let me give you the outline tonight. We're going to see three things about Paul's heart. First of all we see Paul's tears over the church, so Paul's loving heart, verses 1-4. If you're taking notes, this is Paul's loving heart and the emotion he felt, the love he showed them. He says, "But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness." He says, "I didn't come because I wanted to spare you," and then says, "I made a determination in my own self that I would not come again," notice that little word "again" which indicates that he did come to them. So, he wrote 1 Corinthians, he came in a visit, and he needed to go back again and deal with some problems. He said, "I'm not going to come again in heaviness," I don't want to be heavy-handed.

Verse 2, "For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?" When you read that, sometimes you think, Run that by me again? What is he talking about? Paul said, "If I come to you in heaviness, then I'm going to make you sorry," you're going to be sorry that I showed up because I'm going to have to deal very harshly with you. Then he says, "The problem is I want you to be glad so that you can make me glad. I want to have a happy visit." If I were to paraphrase this, he's basically saying, "I wanted our visit to be pleasant. I wanted it to be positive. I wanted to enjoy our time together." He says, "For if I make you sorry"—with my visit—"who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?" So, if I make you sorry, you can't make me glad; and I want to have a great time with you, so I didn't come.

Verse 3, he says, “And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice”—I didn’t want to have sorrow from those that should bring me joy and rejoicing—“having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.” Paul says, “I love you. I want to have a great visit, that’s why I did not come.” In other words, basically it wasn’t that he was uncaring for them or flaky in what he was saying, it actually is a demonstration of his love for them, “I love you and I don’t want to have to deal...”

If you’re a parent and have children, you don’t take pleasure in disciplining them, do you. Now, if you do, we’ll pray for you after service. But you need to discipline your kids. Remember when your parent would spank you and say, “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” I don’t think so. But now that you’re a parent, that’s true. You don’t want to spank them. It’s like, “Come on kids, don’t make me spank you. I know we’re at Disneyland, but you’ve got to mind me.” Now, when I’m at Disneyland looking at other people’s kids, I’m thinking, Please spank them. Happiest place on earth, but I’m not very happy right now because your kids are freaking me out. Spank ‘em. I probably shouldn’t say that, this is live on the internet right now. They may come and arrest me after service.

Paul, as a father of the faith, Paul’s pastor’s heart, says, “I don’t want to come and have to chastise you. I don’t want to show up and rebuke you. I don’t want to show up and spank you, so to speak, I want to have a pleasant visit. Let’s not go that direction.”

Paul says in verse 4, and this is good, “For out of much affliction”—this is one of the classic statements Paul makes where he’s going to describe that letter that he wrote to them. Now, it’s either 1 Corinthians, some believe, or more likely it’s that stern letter that he wrote after 1 Corinthians, before 2 Corinthians, that has been lost and we don’t have. If God wanted us to have it, we would have it. But in verse 4 he’s going to be describing his emotional attitude, his heart, his feelings, when he penned that stern letter. He says, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart”—it wasn’t a pleasant thing for Paul—“I wrote unto you”—so indeed he did write, but again we’re not sure if it’s 1 Corinthians or that stern letter—“with many tears; not that ye should be grieved,”—I wasn’t trying to grieve you—“but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.” Praise God for the heart of Paul, a pastor who loves his people. Amen? He was like a spiritual father that didn’t want to deal with the disciplinary stuff, he wanted to come and have a loving visit.

Notice Paul’s emotion, Paul’s heart. Paul wasn’t above sharing his feelings. He says, “For out of much affliction”—again, any pastor knows the heavy heart you can have for the congregation that you pastor. When Paul, later on in this book, lists all of the suffering—beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, a night and a day in the deep, all the lashes—he comes to the end and says, “Besides all these, the care of all the churches.” He’s almost saying it’s worse than all the physical suffering that I have to endure to carry the burden of all the churches, not just one local church, but all the churches he started. Any pastor knows you have to roll your burden upon the Lord that He will sustain you. I have to remind myself that it’s not my church, it’s His church, and that you cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you. In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul speaks about the weight of all the cares of all the churches. He says, “For out of much affliction and

anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears” Paul shed tears. You can read many times in the New Testament where Paul wept.

I love when Paul met with the elders at Ephesus. I think it's Acts 20, one of my favorite scenes in the Bible because you have a pastor meeting with other pastors on the beach. That's my favorite thing to do, meet on the beach with other pastors. We call them “board meetings,” prayer meetings as well. It says that they wept and hugged each other. They wept most of all because they would never see his face again. How difficult that must've been for Paul to say good-bye to those pastors on the beach there at Ephesus.

Paul says, “. . . with many tears; not that ye should be grieved”—I didn't want to grieve you with my emotion—“but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”

Do you know I believe that as Christians and God's people we should love the church. We should love God's people. We should be committed to a local church. We should pray for one another, but Paul's heart.

The second division we see in this chapter is verses 5-11, and it's Paul's testimony to the offender. Now, there's a little bit of a shifting of gears here, and then he comes back to the theme of why he didn't visit them at the end. But in verses 5-11 is Paul's testimony about possibly the story we read about in 1 Corinthians 5. I say “possibly” because we can't be dogmatic or sure where there was a man in the church that was living a sexually immoral life with his father's wife, which is probably a stepmother, and the church was not disciplining him, and they were letting it go. They were saying, “Well, we're a loving church. We're a warm, loving fellowship, so we're not going to kick him out. We're not going to chastise him, we're going to let him kind of live in sin.” Paul had to deal with that. That was back in 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul says, “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit”—you need to discipline—“. . . deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

Or, the other option is that it's actually the ringleader of the opposition to Paul in his ministry, so that's a very real possibility as well. Needless to say, it was somebody that was sinning in the church, and the church was not disciplining him or dealing with that. So, finally they did respond and did discipline this rebel in the church, and now he's repented. Instead of accepting him back into the fellowship, they were not forgiving him. They were not accepting him, so Paul has some words to say to them about that.

Beginning in verse 5 Paul says, “But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.” He's beginning to speak about either this immoral man that has now repented and should be accepted back into fellowship or the ringleader that maybe has repented and needs to be accepted back as well.

Verse 6, “Sufficient to such a man”—he doesn't name him, just uses the kind of passing reference ‘to such a man’ that's why we can't be sure who it's a reference to—“is this

punishment, which was inflicted of many.” A majority of the believers there in Corinth were party to disciplining this individual, but now they’re not forgiving him and having him accepted back into the fellowship.

Verse 7, “So that contrariwise”—you’ve punished them, verse 6, but now what you need to do the opposite—“ye ought rather to forgive him” Now, if you want to underline something in your Bible, underline the word “forgive him.” “ . . . and comfort him”—two things they needed to do. They needed to be forgiving and comforting to him, encourage him. “ . . . lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” I’ll talk about that more in a minute, but if he’s repented, if he’s gotten right, if he showed genuine repentance, God has forgiven him, you should forgive him as well and accept him back into the fellowship.

Verse 8, “Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.” When someone sins and they have to be disciplined, if they repent and get right with God, then they should be lovingly accepted back into fellowship.

Now, I want to break away from the text and refer to something that’s somewhat on my heart; that is, there’s a lot of controversy in the church today as to when a minister or a pastor falls into sin and has to be removed from the pulpit and from the pastorate and loses his place and position as to whether he can be accepted back as the pastor of that church. There’s a division among Christians over how that ought to be handled.

My conviction is that a man who is in a position or in the office of a pastor—an elder, bishop, pastor, overseer—that falls into sexual immorality or sin or disqualifies himself not only needs to be taken out of ministry but not let back into pastoral ministry, I believe, because they have then been disqualified and are not above reproach. Now, some would disagree with me, and that’s perfectly fine, but I believe that we’ve swung from one extreme to the other where years ago there was just a real hard line drawn, today in the church we have pastors that after multiple failures and stumbles and falls, they’re let right back into the pulpit, right back into pastoral ministry, put right back into their position; and I believe that they lose that position because they do not qualify themselves anymore because they are no longer above reproach and that God will raise someone else up in that spot and in that position.

This text does not apply, I don’t personally believe, to someone that’s in a position as a pastor, which is an office in the church, or a deacon, which is also known as an elder. Pastors, elders, bishops are one office; deacon is another office.

It goes on from verse 8 into verse 9, “For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.” So, this brother in the church, he wasn’t a pastor, he wasn’t an elder, he didn’t have a spiritual office, he was one of the members of the congregation, had repented and got right with God, should be accepted back into fellowship.

Verse 10, “To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ”—Paul says, ‘I’ve forgiven them, you

should forgive them; you should accept them back into fellowship,' and then gives one of the reasons why, verse 11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices,"—or of his schemes.

We need to be careful. We need to learn to forgive one another. If someone repents, someone gets right with God, they should be allowed back into fellowship. The problem is today in the church, very few churches practice discipline in that way. It's just not practiced in churches today. A lot of times today when someone sins, and if they are confronted or challenged with their sin in the church, they just basically move to another church; and if it happens again, they move to another church, and they move to another church. That's not healthy. There's no accountability there.

Paul's basically saying, "I forgive them, you should forgive them." Now, that lack of forgiveness or that unforgiveness, verse 11, leads to the danger of "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." He doesn't specify in what way Satan gets an advantage, but he earlier mentioned the fact that if we don't forgive somebody, they can be "... swallowed up with overmuch sorrow"—overmuch grief. You know, when you sin and you repent of your sins, the Bible in 1 John 1:9 says God, "... is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I'm glad that's the case, right? I'm glad that God forgives my sins. But when our brothers and sisters in Christ won't forgive us, then it gives Satan an opportunity to come in with condemnation and condemn that person, and many times people struggle with, "I don't know if God's forgiven me," and "These people won't forgive me," or "They won't forgive me." The Bible tells us in Ephesians that we should "... be ye kind ... tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Tonight as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, how can we come to church, partake of the bread, a picture of the body of Christ, and drink the cup, a picture of the blood of Christ, and have unforgiveness in our heart toward another brother or sister in Christ? We need to come to the cross to be forgiven, we need to stay at the foot of the cross to be forgiving. We need to "... be ye kind ... tenderhearted, forgiving one another" That's what Communion is about, that "... God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

We don't want Satan to come in and condemn somebody or drive them away, so we don't want to give Satan a foothold. One of the greatest weapons that Satan can use in your life and in the church is unforgiveness, being unwilling to forgive. There's so much in the Bible about how can you say that God's forgiven you but turn around and not forgive someone else? How is it that God can forgive you of so much sin and then you turn right around and be unforgiving towards someone else? Those who have been forgiven should be forgiving toward others, and we need to learn that lesson—God, make me compassionate, kind, tenderhearted, forgiving others, even as You have forgiven me—and don't let Satan have a foothold in any of your lives or in the church. Satan wants to come in and divide people rather than unite people.

By the way, when we take Communion tonight, "... if ye have ought against any"—you need to get it right with God before you take communion. This is why it's so good to be here on a night

when we have communion because you need to say, “Lord, forgive me for my bitterness, my anger, and my unforgiveness,” or do your best to go to someone and ask them to forgive you but make sure you’re right with God tonight in your heart that you don’t partake in an unworthy manner.

The third and last section we’re going to look at is verses 12-17. In this section we see Paul’s triumph in Christ. So, we see Paul’s loving heart, we see Paul’s forgiving heart, now we see Paul’s victorious and triumphant heart. He says, “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel”—he’s going to be describing kind of what went on between the first epistle and the second one and the issue that was going on with his visit—“and a door was opened unto me of the Lord”—here he is in Troas, he promised to come to Corinth, God’s opened a door and he’s ministering the Word—“I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.”

Titus was supposed to come back from Corinth and give Paul a report, and when he didn’t show up, Paul was upset and kind of worried. He couldn’t get on the phone and call him up, he couldn’t FaceTime with him, he couldn’t send him an e-mail. It would take days, weeks, or months of walking to be able to connect with somebody. He says, “I had no rest . . . but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.”

Then, all of the sudden, Paul just celebrates the victory that’s in Christ. Verse 14, “Now thanks be unto God,”—Paul just begins to leap for joy, give praise to God, in spite of all the problems with the church at Corinth, in spite of all the worries and concerns that he couldn’t connect with Titus, didn’t know what was going on, didn’t know if his letter had been received or not. He says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. 15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 16 To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God”—we’re going to come back to this, he’s referring and alluding to the false teachers—“but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” So, we don’t pervert the Word of God, we don’t twist it, we don’t use it to our own profit or gain, but these false teachers are doing that. We know that we’re doing our ministry before God, verse 17, and we’re speaking the Word of Christ.

Go back with me to this section and look at verse 14. When Paul says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to”—uses the phrase—“triumph in Christ . . .” We’re not talking about motorcycles here, but he’s doing something very fascinating. He’s painting a word picture of what was a common thing in that time in Rome known as a “triumph parade,” not a motorcycle parade but a “triumph celebratory parade,” like a ticker-tape parade today. When in Rome what would happen was when a general or a warrior would go out with his army to fight against the enemy and were victorious, they would come back into Rome with the prisoners all chained up, all under lock and key. Sometimes they actually chained them to the chariot wheels and had them walking in procession. They would come right through the main street there in Rome, and the street would be lined with priests with censers and incense—sweet-smelling

incense—and would have all this incense ascending into the air. It would just have a sweet smell, so it was a triumph parade, a celebratory triumphant parade, over their victory in battle.

The imagery or picture is that Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, through His burial and through His resurrection, has triumphed over sin, death, Satan, and the grave, and that we as believers are triumphant with Him celebrating the victory over the enemy. Now, the incense and the “savour” or smell was to those who were victorious—life; but to those who were the defeated enemy it spoke of death.

Look at verse 15, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 16 To the one we are the savour of death”—so the prisoners would smell the incense and it would remind them they’re headed to the Coliseum, they’re going to be fed to the beasts, they’re going to die or be prisoners for life. It was the “. . . savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

Paul’s painting a picture of the Roman triumph parade, and the picture is a picture of how Christ in the cross, in the resurrection, conquered over Satan, sin, death, and the grave, and that we’re all celebrating that victory which is ours in Christ. There’s also those who are defeated—the enemy—are headed for death. When we go out as God’s ambassadors and God’s messengers and we preach the gospel, those who believe are saved. It’s the “savour of life.” Those who reject are condemned to death, they’re going to die. But we are celebrating the triumph of Christ, the victory of Christ. What a marvelous thing that is that Paul says that we are conquering and triumphing, verse 14, “. . . and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” When we go out as believers and spread the gospel, it’s like spreading that sweet aroma of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul then says, verse 16, “And who is sufficient for these things?” If you peek ahead to 2 Corinthians 3:5 you see Paul says, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” Back to 2 Corinthians 2:16, “And who is sufficient for these things?” Not us, but God. We preach the gospel, we see people come to Christ.

In verse 17 Paul says, “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God,”—this is kind of the wrap up and he’s talking about the false teachers. Notice what they do. There are many of them and what they’re doing is “. . . corrupt the word of God.” Again, Satan always attacks the Word of God, always attacks the preacher of the Word of God, and the Word of God itself.

In my King James translation “corrupt the word of God,” the Greek word translated “corrupt” there actually means those who peddle as hucksters the Word of God. They had a mercenary motive. It’s actually a reference to those who were selling items and ripping people off and trying to make money off others. So, they take the Scriptures and use it for their own selfish gain. This is so common, even today. There are those who peddle the Word of God. A huckster would be a good phrase to use for them. They’re using the preaching of the Word to make money. No minister should ever preach the gospel in order to make money. Should he be supported and taken care of? Yes, but that’s not why he preaches. You preach the Word of God

because you've been called by God to preach, and you don't charge for your preaching. These guys are using the preaching of the Word to get rich.

So many times when I turn on—I don't know why I do it, but I do—I turn Christian television on, and they're not all crazy, just a lot of them are, and some are semi-crazy, some are super crazy. So many times I see the way they handle the Scriptures, the way they twist the Scriptures, the way they rip it out of the context, the way they misinterpret, misapply the Scriptures to make people feel good and give money so that they can get rich. That's what Paul's talking about here. They “. . . corrupt the word of God . . .” Their motives are mercenary. They peddle things.

The word was actually used for those who adulterated wine. They would take wine, and in order to get it to go farther they would sell wine that was diluted with water, weighted down with water. They also were described as people when they sold pottery, the pottery would have a crack or a fissure crack in it, they would fill it with some kind of wax and then paint it and sell it as being good, and it was really cracked or broken.

Have you ever bought a little basket of strawberries and the strawberries that are on the top... this is not just an illustration, this is what the actual word was used for. They put all the beautiful strawberries on top and the minute you take those off the top, all the ones underneath are all brown, smooshed, and ugly, fungus growing, and blue hair growing on them. They're all messed up. They put the good fruit on the top and the bad on the bottom. You know what I'm talking about, right?

That's what these preachers do. They try to put the palatable good stuff on the top so that you'll take it in and receive it, and then when you digest it you realize, “I've just taken in poison.” They make it look so good and so appealing. There are entire ministries that are based on the health-wealth, positive confession, word-faith doctrine and people are taking it hook, line, and sinker, and it's contrary to the Word of God. It's a perversion of the Word of God. It's not just watered down, it's actually diluted and destroys. They are corrupting the Word of God, verse 17, but Paul's ministry was ministering the Word in sincerity. That means that there was no duplicity, there was no hypocrisy, but it was done in integrity. There was no phoniness in Paul's ministry. “. . . but as of God,”—he realized that he was responsible to God and would answer to God, and he was doing it as—“in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” He was preaching Christ and speaking Christ.

Paul was sincere, verse 17, in his method, in his message, and in his motive. Paul was a man who was sincere. Do you know what the word “sincere” means? By the way, it literally means without wax, which means there's no phony filler, there's no putty, no fake, phony filler. It's pure. It's sincere. He says, “I'm doing it as unto God, in the sight of God; I'm speaking in sincerity.” His method of preaching—his message, the content, and his motive—were all God-centered and sought to glorify and honor God. Paul, again, is dealing with the false teachers and encouraging the believers in Corinth to not listen to the false teachers and to win back their heart and their devotion and their love. Let's pray.