

The Second Time Is Not the Charm

2 Corinthians Overview

(preached Pine Grove 4/10/16; Sunday PM)

Introduction

My family loved to sit on the porch.

My grandparents lived in a mill house in Whitmire but it had a large porch, and my grandmother spent most of her time on the porch..

It was complete with wrought iron rails and sun shades, but what I remember most is the porch furniture.

They had 3 or 4 metal chairs and two metal glider benches.

As a kid, I didn't think too much about it, but now as an adult, I totally understand their choice of metal porch furniture.

Unlike wooden rockers and benches, metal furniture requires a lot less upkeep and maintenance.

We have been looking for some chairs and furniture for the porch and deck at the church...

And I got on the internet and found some outdoor furniture that is described as “nearly” maintenance free...

Or this is my favorite description, - “virtually” maintenance free...

So, guess what I have started to look for?

Some of those old metal benches, chairs and rockers...

My grandparents had it right all along..

Now, I say that to say this...

We all prefer maintenance free items...

The less upkeep we have to do, they better we like it.

Well, people also need maintenance.

Some more than others...

Unfortunately for Paul, the Corinthians were in the more category...

We learned last week that Paul had founded the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey probably around 50-51 AD..

After he started the church there, Paul stayed there for 18 months teaching the Corinthians..

Corinth was a sinful and vile city, so Paul had much to teach the church about holy living in a sinful world.

So, he took some time there to teach the people and encourage them to holy living...

But as so often the case, when Paul left the church after 18 months, the church began to have problems...

And when word got back to Paul about divisions that were beginning in the Corinthian church, Paul sat down and God inspired him to write them a letter.

He loved that church and though the Lord had led him away from them to do more mission work, Paul wanted the church at Corinth to stay on track...

That letter of correction was the book of the Bible known as 1 Corinthians that we looked at last week...

And though that letter was probably very helpful to the church there, it didn't solve every problem...

Because word got back to Paul that false teachers has also found a home at the church at Corinth...

Now, we are learning about false teaching in the book of Colossians on Sunday morning...

The church at Colossae also had false teachers who came in trying to lead that church astray...

And we make a great mistake if we think that false teachers are not around today...

They are, and they are everywhere.

We certainly understand the false teachings of the other major religions...

Islam and Buddhism are all led by false teachers; we understand that.

They don't even claim to be Christian.

Then you have Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses are led by people who claim to be Christians but are false teachers..

Then you have false teachers even within the church who are men empowered by Satan to lead those in the church away from the gospel.

And the early was full of them.

Paul dealt with false teachers throughout his ministry, and they came to Corinthian church as well..

Now the false teacher has a couple options to gain a following in a church...

He either comes in as the nice guy and makes friends and then uses the friendships to spread his false teaching...

Or the false teacher can come in and attack the leadership on petty issues and gain a following that way.

In Corinth, false teachers chose the second option.

They came and began attacking Paul and his ministry in Corinth...

Paul had left for Ephesus and the false teachers came in and began to attack Paul's teaching and Paul's character.

This is how people with no argument based in fact usually attack...

Since the don't have the fact to back up their claim, they simply make their argument a personal attack..

And that is what these teachers did in Corinth.

Instead of arguing against Paul with biblical support, they simply try to go after him on a personal level...

So when Paul got word of what was happening, Paul left to go to Corinth, and according to chapter 2, he didn't get a very warm welcome when he came.

Someone opposed him to his face, possibly a false teacher.

Instead of hanging around and causing a bigger scene and upsetting many young believers in the process, Paul left the situation alone..

While he was away giving the situation some time to calm down, he got word that the Corinthians had repented and were no longer listening to the false teachers...

Though Paul was relieved to hear that, he knew that the church could not take another attack on him...

So he sat down inspired by God and wrote a very personal letter to them in hopes of preventing another future attack...

That letter became known as 2 Corinthians..

And it is the book that we will look at tonight...

The majority of the book is a defense of Paul's ministry...

He defending how he does ministry, and he defend the fact that God has called him into ministry...

For Paul, ministry was not a choice, it was God's calling upon his life.

And how he did ministry and who he was spoke for themselves..

Therefore, Paul wrote a very heartfelt letter just to remind the Corinthian church of his personal side..

You cannot separate the personal side of a man from the ministry that he does.

If your personal life is a wreck, you have no business representing the Lord to the world...

And Paul's point in the letter is that his personal life should give credibility to his message...

In other words, a man who lives what he teaches deserves your attention...

But on the other hand, if you can't live it, you better not teach it.

So, let's dig into 2 Corinthians tonight...

I have divided it into 3 sections..

I. The Character of Paul's Ministry (1-7)

II. The Collection for Paul's Friends (8-9)

III. The Credentials of Paul's Authority (10-13)

Let's begin in chapter 1 looking at the character of Paul's ministry.

For the majority of the first 7 chapters, Paul simply reminds the Corinthians of the nature of his ministry and teaching to them..

I. The Character of Paul's Ministry (1-7)

Look with me at verse 12 of chapter 1...

12 For our [g]proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

As Paul seeks to defend himself against his critics and the false teachers in Corinth, he starts with the 2 very important C's...

First of all, he had a clean conscience in how he had taught and acted among the church at Corinth...

And second of all, he asked the Corinthians to remember his conduct before them while he was there...

I could spend all night talking about this, but these two are so important as we seek to respond to attacks in our life....

Face it, if you are a true Christian actively living out your faith, you are going to be criticized...

It is coming and it will continue to come as you continue to try and live out your faith for the glory of God.

But there are two things that are great comfort when attacks come.

Number 1 is your conscience...

As God put you together, he equipped you with a warning system that serves to alert you to alert you to right and wrong...

Now the conscience is a tricky thing.

If it is constantly exposed to sin, it gets weaker and weaker...

Therefore, the conscience needs to be exposed to the Word of God over and over to keep it functioning properly...

Paul had a conscience that was informed by God, and it was also a clear conscience with regard to how he had acted in Corinth.

And it was great comfort to him when he was attacked...

Though I have only done ministry here for a short time, there has been criticism at times...

And the thing I turn to is this...

Have I acted contrary to the Word of God and is my conscience clear in how I handled things...

If those two things are checked, I sleep well at night even when others attack.

While his conscience testified to Paul, his conduct testified to the Corinthians...

In verse 12, he simply says, you know how we acted among you...

Did my conduct lead you to believe that I was trying to deceive you like my critics are saying?

That is why our actions are so important.

Everything you do speaks to who you are...

The old question is this...

What takes years to build and seconds to destroy?

Your character.

And the truth is that Paul's conduct gave credibility to his ministry to the Corinthians...

Long story short....

You cannot criticism from coming to you, but you can keep a clean conscience and have godly conduct.

Those will be your best friends when the enemy attacks...

In chapter 2, Paul begins to describe his ministry...

Here is what he says in 1 Cor 2:17...

17 For we are not like many, [d]peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

Here, Paul refers to the false teachers as peddlers of the Word of God...

To peddle meant to corrupt, similar to the idea of a con man...

And that is what these false teachers were...

They were con men and they were in it for their own gain...

Most sought to get wealthy in their false teaching; other sought to take advantage of single women with their false teaching.

And Paul says here...

“Hey, we aren’t peddlers of the Word of God.”

We haven’t conned you into believing our message.

We haven’t peddled the word of God to you.

The things we taught you, we taught in the sight of God.

And that is so important to remember.

So often, false teachers do their work in dark places, behind the scenes...

Never willing to make their teaching public but keep it in their little groups and out of the light.

The word of God is never peddled in back alleys, it is taught publicly for all to see in the light of the world and in the sight of God...

If you can’t preach it in public, you can’t preach it at all.

Paul then defended the content of his ministry in chapter 4...

By writing this...

2 Cor 4:5...

5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants [d]for Jesus' sake.

One element of false teaching is that it often points to the people doing the teaching...

They may not come out and say, "worship me" but the underlying truth is that they want people to follow them...

They want the glory of their teaching.

They want to keep people coming to them and listening to them and serving them...

Paul defends his ministry by saying, "I and the men with me didn't preach ourselves. We preached Christ."

And on top of that, we didn't even build ourselves up at all.

We simply described ourselves as slaves of Christ.

The in chapter 5, Paul talks about the focus of his messages that was preached to the Corinthians...

Paul had not to them looking for money or fame or popularity, he had come to them with a message of how the Corinthians could be reconciled to God...

He then wrote one of the clearest descriptions of the gospel in 2 Cor 5:20-21...

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The bottom line is this...

Paul came to the Corinthians for their benefit, not for his own benefit.

He came telling them how they could be right with God...

He came to proclaim the name of Christ and not the name of Paul..

In chapter 6, verse 14, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to separate themselves from false teachers by saying...

What partnership does light have with darkness?

What business do the righteous have with the wicked?

What harmony does those of Christ have with those of Satan...

And the point of the verses is to remind the Corinthians that false teachers are not their friends..

They are enemies because they are enemies of God.

Then in chapter 7, Paul ends up defending the character of his ministry by saying that he continues to love the Corinthians.

His ministry to them was based on his love for them and his ministry to the has continued because he continues to love them...

Though Paul doesn't say it, the idea is this...

False teachers and phony teachers don't teach out of a heart of love for the people.

They are motivated by a love of self and a promotion of self.

Now, that Paul has defended the character of his ministry, he turns to an interesting subject in chapters 8-9...

II. The Collection for Paul's Friends (8-9)

At the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had urged them to take up a collection of money for the saints in Jerusalem...

And now in chapters 8-9, Paul reminds the Corinthians to continue to take up a collection...

However in Paul's instruction to them, we learn much about the New Testament concept of giving...

Let's look at verses 2 Cor 8:1-5

8 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor [a]of participation in the [b]support of the [c]saints, 5 and this, not as we had [d]expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Let me offer a quick summary of these verses that pertain to our giving to the church as believers in this age...

#1 - Giving should according to what God puts in a person's heart...

When people give out of obligation or intimidation or under threat, they are not giving according to the NT standards of giving...

Giving should always give based on their own accord, which simply means what God puts in their heart to give...

#2 - Giving is based on ability.

Giving should be based on what a person can give.

Giving that follows a set formula may limit Gods blessing to you...

Though God expects no one to give beyond their ability, we also see principle #3...

The people gave according to their ability but they also gave beyond their ability at times...

#3 - Giving should be sacrificial.

We need to give as we able but also as we aren't able at times...

Then Paul lays out a few more principles of giving in chapter 9 that go along with these...

2 Cor 9:6

6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows [e]bountifully will also reap [f]bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness [g]endures forever." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Couple more principles of NT giving...

#4 - Sow Sparingly Reap Sparingly. Sow Bountifully, Reap Bountifully.

#5 - God blesses those who give liberally...

Liberal is usually never a good term...

Whether that is in politics or religion...

But Liberal givers are blessed by God.

#6 - Giving is motivated by thanksgiving to God.

When all is said is done, a person's giving comes from a heart that is filled with gratitude to God for all of his blessings.

The question is this...

Why would Paul include two chapters encouraging the Corinthians in their giving when the purpose of the letter is to defend his ministry...

And I would offer this...

Paul encouraging the Corinthians to give to support the poor saints in Jerusalem gets back to who Paul is...

He doesn't want their money for himself to satisfy his greed...

He wants them to give to help others...

This is who Paul is...

A minister of God who cares not for his own well-being but for the well-being of others in the church...

He is not in ministry to make himself rich, he is in ministry to meets the needs of those around them..

And that stands in sharp contrast to the false prophets who have been attacking him..

And are only in ministry to satisfy their greedy desires...

Therefore a section encouraging them the Corinthians to give to others fits nicely with what Paul's ministry is all about...

The final section of this letter ends with Paul reminding the Corinthians of the authority that was given to Him by God.

III. The Credentials of Paul's Authority (10-13)

Paul was the opposite of someone who threw his weight around, even though he could...

Paul didn't boast of himself based on who he was, he only boasted of himself in who God had made him...

And the truth is that God had made him an apostle of Jesus Christ.

In order to be a true apostle, you need to personally seen the Lord Jesus Christ...

And the truth is that Paul had seen the Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrected Lord appeared Paul on the road to Damascus..

But not only appeared to Paul, but Jesus personally taught Paul...

I had a friend who was a pretty good golfer...

He would try to tell me how to improve my swing, and he would always say, well my uncle met Jack Nicklaus once so I know what I'm talking about..

That is how far will go to drop names and try to build their own authority..

If anyone in the world could boast of his authority to teach and preach the gospel, it would be Paul...

He didn't have an uncle who met Jesus once.

Instead, Paul was taught directly by Jesus.

His authority came from THE Authority.

And Paul simply spend the closing chapters of this letter reminding the Corinthians that God had given him authority.

The false teachers created their own authority.

The false teachers had no one to boast in but their own cleverness.

Paul also something else that pointed to the fact that he was a teacher of the true gospel...

Not only had his conduct been superior...

Not only was his conscience clean..

Not only had he been appointed by Christ...

Paul had also suffered like Christ...

In chapter 11, verse 24, Paul begins to list all the sufferings and persecution that had come to him because of his ministry...

And though the fact that he had been beaten for his faith is not evidence alone that his ministry is true...

When you add his sufferings to the other evidence of his life, it points to the fact that he must have been doing something right...

Listen to this list beginning in verse 24...

24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, [k]through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and [l]exposure

False teachers run for the hills when the going gets tough...

Those committed to the Word of God see suffering as an opportunity to grow and identify with Christ..

I would even say this...

If you haven't suffered for your faith in Christ, you better make sure you possess saving faith in Him..

Suffering is a part of the call to serve the Lord, and no one beside the Lord Jesus Himself suffered as much as the apostle Paul for doing the work of ministry...

Paul goes on to say in chapter 12 that he was also given a thorn in flesh as a continuous torment to his ministry...

Many people have debated what this was...

Was it a physical ailment or a person who was a constant source of criticism to Paul?

I then to think it was the latter...

Some people are allowed to come into your life as a constant source of criticism to keep your humble and dependent on God..

I simply see that being the case for Paul...

It may have been a false teacher who was always attacking Paul at every turn...

All we know is that the throne caused Paul to rely on the Lord even more day after day..

When we are made weak, God is our strength and HE was for Paul...

Paul then ends the letter in chapter 13 saying that his authority given to Him by God was for the good of the Corinthians...

And he prays that they would remain loyal to the true gospel that Paul preached to them...

Conclusion

Where's the value in this letter for us today?

I will leave you with a few thoughts..

#1 - False teachers are real threats to the church.

They lead people astray and they often do it by attacking the biblical leaders of the church...

Satan's pattern is to weasel his way in through persuasive argument spoken behind others backs...

And then go after biblical leaders with personal attacks..

The aim of Satan is the destroy churches that prospering in the world..

So we are to be on the alert...

#2 - The best defense of your life is a clean conscience and clean living.

The best way to prevent attacks on your character is to live in such a way that the critics have to make up the charges against you...

And they will do that at times...

But make it a priority to live right so that phony charges would be laughed off by the people who know you best.

#3 - Biblical giving reminds us that our worth doesn't come from our bank account.

When you give to God with liberally and with a cheerful heart, you make a couple statements...

First, you say loud and clear...

This isn't my money anyway.

What I have is due to God's generosity to me...

If you work hard for it, it is only because God gives you the good health to do it.

If you have been smart with it, it is only because God has given you the wisdom to do it.

If you have inherited it, it is only because God has allowed him to have rich relatives...

No one can claim that they were responsible for their wealth...

And when you give it God, you are acknowledging that it came from Him anyway.

Second, when you give you are going beyond saying thank you to God to actually displaying your thankfulness to him...

Anybody can say it "thank you God," fewer show it.

And third, biblical giving reminds us that the world doesn't revolve around us...

There are people that can be saved through your giving...

There are people that can be helped through your giving...

And there are people who can be reached with the gospel through your giving...

God commands us to think of others as greater than ourselves, and giving is a real way to show your truly believe that...

Let us pray.