

2 Corinthians 2

2 I So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. 2 For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? 3 I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. 4 For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

Paul continues from chapter 1 with his explanation of why he wasn't coming for a second visit. Have you ever visited someone and not only were you eager to leave but anytime you thought about going back, you quickly thought, "no way". This is where Paul was.

Consider everything that Paul has written to them about in the first letter. They had messed up communion, there was division in the church, their worship service was a mess, they did not understand why they had to love each other, they were a troubled church and they didn't consider him a true apostle. How could you ever want to go back to that church unless there was proof that they had fixed their problems?

Instead of being able to celebrate that his hope and prayers had come true, he was distressed by what the Corinthian church had become. Verse 3 says that he would be distressed by the people that should have caused him to rejoice.

In his time in Corinth, when Paul preached, he taught them about his love and God's love for His church. Paul told them all through 1 Corinthians that in everything, his and their motivation should be love.

5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.

As a Christian, one of the most important things that we can do is to forgive others, especially our sisters and brothers in Christ. Read the following verses about forgiveness. Keep in mind the Bible is full of verses about forgiveness.

- a. Matthew 6:12-15 – We will be forgiven in the same way that we forgive.
- b. Ephesian 4:32 – Forgive others because Christ forgave us.
- c. Luke 6:37 – Forgive and we will be forgiven.
- d. Matthew 18:21-22 – How many times? As many as it takes.
- e. 1 John 1:9 – If we confess, God will forgive us.
- f. Psalm 103:12 – When we are forgiven, the sin is gone.

As humans, we are going to fail and most likely fail often. There was only one man that walked on this earth and did it perfectly. If we don't learn to forgive, we will be attending church alone. In verse 7, Paul says that we are to not only forgive but we are to comfort them. The normal human response is, "He wronged me, why would I need to comfort them?" It says so they don't have excessive sorrow. I don't know about you but when I have wronged somebody, I beat myself up.

When we are wronged by a fellow believer, we are to forgive, tell them to forget it and move on. We are not to hold it against them in the future. My mom always said, "I am going to forgive them but I am not going to forget." It is like the old adage, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." God and Paul say, "No, it is gone." It doesn't take long in this chapter for Paul to bring Love into it. I absolutely believe that we are a church family. If we are, then it has to be all about love. Without love, we are a social group, not a family.

9 Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

In nearly all of his letters and even in his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul has encouraged them to "stand firm". Even today with all the problems in the world, these words ring true, "stand firm", stay "obedient".

In John MacArthur's book, "The Gospel According to Jesus", he points out that what most people miss regarding the Gospel message taught by Jesus was obedience. He says, "Let me say as clearly as possible right now that salvation is by God's sovereign grace and grace alone. Nothing a lost, degenerate, spiritually dead sinner can do will in any way contribute to salvation. Saving faith, repentance, commitment, and obedience are all divine works, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of everyone who is saved."

Paul shows that he trusts their judgment. He says, "Anyone that you forgive is forgiven by me too." Remember, even if we were to go so far as treat them as a nonbeliever, we would still love them. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus says that we are to love others as ourselves. So regardless of what we do, we are still to love people that have wronged us. In our humanness, it is easier said than done.

"Take advantage or outwit us (the ancient Greek word *pleonekteo*) is used in four other verses in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 7:2, 12:17-18, and 1 Thessalonians 4:6). It has the idea of cheating someone out of something that belongs to them. When we are ignorant of Satan's strategies, he is able to take things from us that belong to us in Jesus, things like peace, joy, fellowship, a sense of forgiveness, and victory." (Guzik)

Paul speaks about Satan from time to time but there must have been deeper lessons on who Satan is and how he works in the world. Paul says in verse 11 that we are aware of his schemes.

12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, 13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

Paul was always open to God's leading. In Acts 16:6, Paul says that the Holy Spirit prevented him from speaking the Word of God in the province of Asia. God was in control of Paul's missionary journeys and He is in control of our lives. The idea of opening doors is what you would think it is. If God makes it possible or easier to do something, then the door is opened. If it doesn't happen or is made difficult the door is closed.

During the pastoral searches that I have been involved in, God's leading is truly evident when what looks straightforward is blocked by the committee or the perspective pastor. You say to yourself, how did this not happen? Everything was aligned perfectly but God says "No!" So you move on. This is what Paul is talking about.

In verse 13, Paul says that he was trying to meet up with young Titus. Sometimes you get the feeling that Paul was a one man band but he wasn't. In most of his travels, Paul traveled with numerous companions. I have said a number of times in this study that I am amazed how they can connect with each other. Here it says that Paul had no peace of mind because Titus wasn't with him. Paul's ministry was enhanced by working with others. Each one had certain assignments and they worked together to serve God.

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? 17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

In verse 14, Paul thanks God for directing our lives. Ideally, once we submit to God, we turn over control of our lives to Him. He wants full control but our humanness can be in a battle with Him for control. Paul says that God's control can appear as if we are "*captives in Christ's triumphal procession*"(NIV).

The idea of a triumphal procession - "The idea is borrowed from an ancient Roman triumph, which to the eyes of the world of that day was the most glorious spectacle which the imagination could conceive." (Meyer)

Since we don't do this today, my mind went immediately to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. "Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest!" (John 12:12-19) Paul uses the imagery that sacrifice brings to God. Leviticus 1 tells us that a sacrifice made on the altar is "*an aroma pleasing to the Lord.*" What Paul is saying here is the opposite. The sweet aroma is for believers instead of God. Imagine how "sweet" the world would be today if everyone was a believer and lived as Jesus wants us to, if love was our motivation in all things.

Years ago, Pastor Mickey used the illustration that when God looks at believers, He is looking at us through "Christ colored glasses". Paul is saying that when God smells Christians, He smells the sweet aroma of Christ. This is the same idea. Just like a burnt sacrifice, our faith in Christ makes us a sweet aroma to God.

In verse 15, it says that as believers we are perceived differently by other believers and nonbelievers. To other believers, we are an encouragement, a friend and a reminder that eternal life is our future. To a nonbeliever, we are a goodie two-shoes, a reminder that they are sinners and a reminder that death is all they believe follows this life. Paul reminds them and us at the end of verse 16 that we have chosen to put our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He says, "Who is up to the task?" Jesus said it a little differently in Matthew 5:10-12. Blessed are you that are up to the task.

Back in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul said that you have a right to get financial support for preaching the Gospel but here in verse 17, he says don't pedal the Gospel for money. He is talking about two different things. Back in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul was talking about someone that was called as a pastor but here he is saying don't share the Gospel message with others for personal gain. It speaks to your motivation. The NLT says, "*like the many hucksters.*" My mind goes to the old snake oil salesman. "I have this cure-all. My elixir can cure all your problems for just one thin dime." It goes to creditability or believability. I think of the prosperity gospel preachers. If you believe that God will answer your prayer, then don't ask for your old car to be fixed, ask for a new Lexus.

In the last line of this chapter, Paul says, "*We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.*" Can we get any greater warning that to know that God is watching us? Sometimes when we sin, we forget that God has seen us and is disappointed with us.