

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11 – “Walking in Truth and Love”

Paul is contending with the false apostles who have been seeking to slander Paul and his reputation, thus making him appear unfit as an apostle. Paul never liked having to prop himself up, but in this letter to the Corinthians he does so more than other times because of the way he was being unjustly maligned. The one issue that had come up in the first chapter was Paul's statement that he was going to pay them a visit. And when that never happened, those opposed to Paul claimed he was untrustworthy and not a man of integrity.

Integrity is an important thing, isn't it? Especially for the Christian. We should be people with a high moral compass, honest and consistent in living a Christ like life. Because the world is watching. And they're looking for reasons to dismiss God, and they will use your lack of godly character as a reason to reject God.

- When I was a kid my mom would send me down to the corner store with \$1.00.
I'd come back with 5 potatoes, 2 loaves of bread, a jug of milk, a hunk of cheese, and a dozen eggs.
You can't do that now... on account of all the security cameras.
- People are watching, and we should be living upright lives of truth. Paul is revealing that he has not been flaky or dishonest, but he's been directed by God's will and has maintained his integrity.

1:23-24 - *Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*

Again, Paul comes back to the complaints and criticism he received for not coming to them in a timely manner. But Paul says, it was to **spare you**. It wasn't because Paul changed his mind or lost interest. It was because he didn't want to have another heavy and sorrowful meet up with them. That's what happened last time. He was redirected so that they could continue to work on getting things right. Rather than having a sorrowful visit, he wrote another letter to instruct and lead them to keep walking in the truth.

Paul didn't want to be the big boss man over them; he's a fellow worker and his desire is their joy.

- Some leaders have no problem coming down on you, it allows them to flex their muscles of authority over you. They feel that fear will be the best motivator to do a good job.
- But that certainly wasn't Paul's heart. He knew he didn't have **dominion** over them or their faith. Most definitely not over their faith. He couldn't force them into a decision for the Lord.
- "Authoritarian domination is often the manner of false apostles and the kingdom they serve (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13–15), but it was not the way of Christ (Luke 22:25–27) nor of those who stand in His stead (1 Peter 5:3)." ¹
- **Luke 22:25–27**, *"And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' ²⁶ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves."*
- **1 Peter 5:2–3**, *"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;"*

This is truly how every Christian leader should function. We're **fellow workers**. And the desire of a leader should not be force and fear of their flock, but joy from their flock. And as fellow workers, when others are experiencing joy, then we'll experience joy!

Let us walk in joy and be a joy giver to others. We can do so when we reflect on all that we've experienced in and through Jesus, just as we've been seeing in 2 Corinthians so far (i.e. He comfort us, strength us, and His promises are dependable).

2:1-2 - But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. ² For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

¹ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 2 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 557). Victor Books.

Remember, Paul has had some ongoing correspondence with this church at Corinth. This is the 4th letter he's writing to them (2 of them have been lost). And he alludes here to a previous visit he had with them. This most likely was not his first trip to Corinth where the church was founded (Acts 18); that was much more pleasant in nature. This visit he alludes to was a secondary one and it was a painful one; it brought much sorrow.

- [1. The church founded; first visit (Acts 18).
- 2. The first letter (referred to in 1 Cor 5:9).
- 3. The second letter: 1 Corinthians. This is in response to those from Chloe's household that brought word to Paul in Ephesus of concerns in the church. It also addressed various questions others brought to Paul.
- 4. The painful visit (cf. 2 Cor 2:1).
- 5. The third letter: severe in tone (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8).
- 6. The fourth letter: 2 Corinthians.
- 7. The third visit.]

So Paul's already had a difficult confrontation with them and he doesn't want another painful visit. His reason is that it just would not be helpful. He'll become sorrowful and his go to 'pick me up' for encouragement (the Corinthians) would be unable to make him **glad**. They were a source of joy for him, but if he comes in rebuking and correcting and they become sorrowful, it's only going to make him sorrowful too.

2:3-4 - *And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.*

Instead of making another sorrowful visit, Paul wrote a tough letter. There was correction and rebuke that was needed. But he wrote these things that they could see their need to bring their lives in line with God and experience His peace and blessing. He sought for their repentance but that they could experience the restoration of God. Then when Paul did come to them, they could rejoice together.

It certainly seemed that it had the intended effect.

- **2 Corinthians 7:8**, *"For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while."*

...**my joy is the joy of you all**. Paul didn't like to be harsh and it wasn't really even his heart. That again is the trouble with writing. You never really know the tone behind it. Paul loved these people deeply, and if they were sad, he didn't just say *'deal with it'* or *'don't be such a baby!'* He was genuinely concerned for them and cared for them. If they were sad, he was sad. If they were joyful, he too could be joyful.

- Isn't that the way the body should be operating?

We should be grieved when people are being affected by sin, so much so that we're willing to speak into their lives and seek to have them walk in obedience to God's Word. It's easy to just ignore things and not want to be confrontational. But ultimately, love should win out in these things. Our love for people should motivate us to speak into people's lives, no matter how hard that is.

Paul had many tears over what he had to say to them in his letter. I can't recall Paul crying over trials discomforts he's had to face. But it was having to write with correction that broke him. This word **affliction** is the Greek word *thlipsis* = pressing.

- Paul wasn't writing half-heartedly or loosely. He wasn't calloused. He loved these people. His heart was pressed with concern for them. This is the heart of a shepherd. And because of his love, he needed to speak the hard things; the truthful things.
- **Ephesians 4:15**, *"but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—"*
- We've forsaken much speaking of truth today and overcompensated with just speaking in love. And this has happened often because we've had too many people speaking truth without love. But the Word of God has always balanced these two with speaking truth in love – so that people may grow and mature.
- Speaking truth without love is harsh, but speaking love without truth is hypocritical.
- We need to love people enough to say what's needed, but to say it in a way where it will help and not hurt. And we need to be willing to receive those words of correction or help when others are speaking into our lives.

- “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” We should not resent it if we are counseled or warned in a godly manner. Rather, we should realize that any person who would do this really has an interest in us. Righteous rebuke should be taken as from the Lord, and we should be grateful for it.” ²

2:5-8 - *But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. ⁶ This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, ⁷ so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.*

Paul begins to deal with the brother involved in sin. Most likely he’s speaking of the one that he addressed in 1 Corinthians 5 (the man who was in a relationship with his father’s wife (stepmom)). And the church didn’t take too much issue with it. In fact, they kind of celebrated it as though they were a church accepting of all! Instead of purging out the sin, they said we’re walking in grace, we have liberty to be who we want to be. But this would become a cancer that would infect the whole body if not dealt with.

And it seemed they followed Paul’s counsel. Paul’s course of action was to deliver him over to Satan. This wasn’t to bring about separation but restoration. The point was to have this man see the blessing of walking with the Lord and being protected through the fellowship of the church.

But it seems the church went a little overboard. They’ve left him out when he’s repented and desired to come back into the fold. This wasn’t just a personal thing for Paul as though he were the only one hurt by this, but he says, ***all of you to some extent***. They were too severe and the church was hurt as a whole.

- Church discipline should always be for the purpose of repentance and reconciliation. Anything that leaves this out is not truly Christian.
- **Galatians 6:1**, *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."*

Paul is revealing that this man has suffered enough, he’s seen his error and now it’s time to respond in love; to ***reaffirm your love to him***. Notice, it’s not affirm

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1824). Thomas Nelson.

his sin, but affirm your love for him because he's a repentant man. It's time to forgive, comfort and restore.

For motivation in these things, we only need to look at what God has done for us. We deserved to be cast aside. We didn't deserve reconciliation with our Heavenly Father, yet out of His great love, He has forgiven those who turn to Him with a repentant heart and He's graciously restored our relationship with Him.

- **Ephesians 4:32**, *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."*

2:9-11 - ***For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.***

This church obediently followed Paul's direction in 1 Corinthians 5. They put the sinning brother out. But now they were put to the test whether they would let him back in!

- We can find it easier to dismiss people and show them the door, but are we equally ready to welcome them back in when they are humbled and broken?
- It's been said that Christians are the only army in the world that shoot their own wounded. That's a sad reality.

Paul lets them know that when they forgive such a person who's broken and repentant, he forgives him too. And this particular brother is certainly forgiven by Paul, ***in the presence of Christ***. This means that this is the Lord's heart too.

Paul knows that Satan is ready to pounce on situations like this and bring about discord in the church. Satan's schemes are to divide and conquer.

So we need to be aware of ***his devices***.

- **Ephesians 6:12**, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*

Satan is looking to stir up the pot. He'll do this by getting us to think sin is tolerable; it's no big deal. Or if we won't do that, he'll get us to come down to heavy on sin and be condemning and unforgiving of others.

None of these are the characteristics of Christ.

Listen, we need to confront sin. This is becoming more and more an unfavorable practice in the church. We don't want people to feel judged, so we'll walk alongside them in love and trust love will lead them to the truth. **Love leads them to feeling loved, but truth is needed to lead them to truth!**

Then on the other side of the coin, we can be too judgmental and harsh and we think we need to make a person suffer for their wrong doing. That's not our role either. We confront and correct, but we do so in love and grace. And we be ready to forgive and restore so that the body of Christ can be united and at peace.

Don't give the devil any room in these things. We're not ignorant of his devices.

"Commenting on the expression **"we are not ignorant of his devices"**, J. Sidlow Baxter says:

Satan uses all manner of stratagems to turn souls from the truth: a sieve to "sift" them (Luke 22:31), "devices" to trick (as in our text), "weeds" to "choke" (Matt. 13:22), "wiles" to intrigue (Eph. 6:11), the roaring of a lion to terrify (1 Pet. 5:8), the disguise of an angel to deceive (2 Cor. 11:14) and "snares" to entangle them (2 Tim. 2:26)."⁴³

Defeating Satan:

God has prepared the true believer to not be defeated by Satan. Here are eleven means by which the spiritual battle can be won.

1. The Savior's victory at Calvary (John 12:31; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:11).
2. The overcomer promise (1 John 2:13; 5:4, 5).
3. The intercessory ministry of Christ (John 17:15).
4. The protection of Christ (1 John 5:18).
5. The knowledge of Satan's tactics (2 Cor. 2:11).
6. The believer's spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10–17).
7. The Holy Spirit's indwelling power (1 John 4:4).
8. The believer's prayers (Matt. 6:13; Eph. 6:18–20).
9. Biblical instructions for defeating Satan (James 4:7, 8).
10. Shepherds who strengthen and encourage (1 Thess. 3:2, 5).
11. The encouragement of ultimate victory (Rev. 20:10)."⁴

⁴³ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Awake My Heart*, taken from the Nov. 10 reading, "Intoxication with Error."

³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1825). Thomas Nelson.

⁴ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2005). *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (2 Co 1:24). Thomas Nelson.