

Today, we come to Paul's last part of his last letter to the Corinthian church. Scholars believe that he wrote four different letters to this church, but we only have two of those which we call 1 & 2 Corinthians. Paul loved this church. He had done so much for them and now he has learned that a group moved in behind him intent to tear down what he had established. I'll summarize these books we have studied at the end of the service today, but I want to focus now where we left off last time I preached. Please open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 12 at verse 11.

What is Your Motivation for Service?

¹¹ I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. ¹³ For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! (2 Corinthians 12:11-13, ESV).

Let's pray.

Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Corinthians. He is pouring himself out for this church that he loved so much. He had stooped to the level of being a fool by boasting about his visitation to heaven and about all he had gone through in his suffering. That is what we covered last time. When he spoke of going to the third heaven and when he gave a laundry list of all of his sufferings, Paul wasn't really boasting or proud. He was just giving an answer to those divisive people that had come behind him. The Corinthian congregation had been like a once faithful wife who was now attracted to another. They were in danger of pushing their "bridegroom" Jesus to the side. He first substantiates and gives credence to his ministry. He says that his ministry was attended by "signs and wonders and mighty works." Signs are pointers, and wonders are unmistakable miracles. The signs said, "this is true," and the mighty works can be all kinds of things miraculous. When Paul was present, the Corinthian church had seen the divine power of God working in and through Paul. He continues.

¹⁴ Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? (2 Corinthians 12:14-18, ESV).

Paul tells us that this is going to be his third visit to the church in Corinth. And as usual, he will be no burden to them. I'm not sure why Paul made such a point of saying that he had not taken

any material support from the Corinthians, but it is a theme that he has repeated throughout these letters. He analogizes himself to a parent who lovingly provides for his children. He says that such support is just the obligation of a parent. Some said that he had been crafty in gathering a following and that he had somehow gotten folks into the church by being deceitful. Such was not the case. Paul had poured himself out for them. He had given to them because he loved them and felt called to do so. He didn't give to them as some kind of carrot to attract them.

I think it's good for us to frequently pause and look at the things that God has done right here among us in our church. Paul says the sweetest sentence of all in verse 15. He says, *¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?* This is indicative of the attitudes that we each should have when we serve each other. These people had been so uncooperative with Paul, yet he is focused on spending and being spent for them. Every pastor in this church understands this. We pour out of our pockets and our hearts to try to serve this congregation.

As pastors, we are each doing our best to see that God's work is done at the Grove. We as pastors certainly enjoy being admired or complimented for the good that we do, but that CANNOT be our underlying motivation. If it is, over time, our zeal will be diminished. This goes to ALL of us in the church - not just the pastors. I have heard so many times, "I have served this church in this or that area for _____ number of years, and no one came up to me and thanked me or appreciated me." That attitude reveals that appreciation was the primary motive for carrying on and for a person's involvement in ministry. That motivation will fizzle over time. If you're giving to be thanked, you'll burn out over time.

So let me ask this morning, "What is the motivation of your ministry to others?" The Apostle Paul had the right kind of motive. He was desirous to spend and to be spent for those whom he loved and served. This is especially hard when you're sometimes serving ungrateful people.

Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, AS FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR MEN, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Paul was doing just that. He was not writing to people that believed the best in him. In fact, they believed the worst in him at the slightest negative thing that was whispered about him. Remember what Paul said to the church in Colossae. Whatever we do, it must be for the Lord because men will say

nasty things and they will not appreciate you.

¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. (2 Corinthians 12:19-21, ESV).

Paul longs for this church to not be involved in quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip and disorder. He's so hopeful that the church can just be loving and operate without

division. Lastly, he longed for them to get past their sexual looseness and immorality. There are several nuggets in here. People have left our fellowship, and they have their own version of why they have done so. They catch the ears of others that spew negativity into their ears. If you hear such negativity, be careful to not be quick to hear and believe bad things about good people. If you must, get the other side of a story, and give it as much credence as you do others. And when you do for the church be careful that you do what you do for God. Otherwise, you'll never get enough "thank you's" and such to make you feel good about yourself. Do what you do because you love Jesus and want to serve him. And on the receiving side, take a minute to thank everyone you see who is serving in the church. It is such a wonderful thing to be appreciative and recognize what others are doing. Remember that Jesus Himself came to serve. On the night that He went to the cross He said: *For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.* (Luke 22:27 ESV)

Ask yourself today: "WHY AM I DOING THIS? WHY AM I DOING WHAT I DO IN THE CHURCH?"

Final Warnings

***13** This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— ³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.* (2 Corinthians 13:1-4, ESV).

Paul continues discussing this matter of his being accused of misdeeds. The "super apostles" had accused him of deceit and wrongdoing. Some time ago, folks who had left our group a long time ago, decided to write letters criticizing what I had said in sermons. They felt my stories brought attention to myself. They accused me of being all about me in the pulpit. These people had no standing to do such a thing. They had moved on way before and were supposedly serving at other churches. A few people listened to their negativity and were poisoned. I was recently questioned about the validity of those accusations and charges. I merely answered, "Do you think that if I were teaching untruths that this congregation would stand for that? There are some mature believers sitting in our pews. If my teaching and doctrine were in error do you think that Pastor Darrell, Larry, Michael, and Dr. House would not bring me to task?" I can now add Elder Buddy to that as well. If my teaching were offbase, wouldn't Judge Buddy have a word with me? Paul says every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. Paul continues.

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we

pray for. ¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. (2 Corinthians 13:5-10, ESV).

Paul reiterates that those who are criticizing him should test themselves. That's a good word for all of us. When we receive criticism (myself included), we should put our ego aside and take a hard look at the criticisms that come our way. And if you are a person that seems to see what you think no one else sees, it's probably a good thing to examine yourself as well. Paul longs for this church in Corinth to be a church filled with love, respect, and concern for one another. He ends the letter as follows:

Final Greetings

¹¹ Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you. ¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:11-14, ESV).

Paul ends the letter with five commands:

Rejoice - He tells them each that they should rejoice. He doesn't tell them to condemn, denigrate, disparage, or criticize one another. Remember that having joy comes down to a couple of things. One is leaning on the Lord and the other is being grateful for what God has done in your life. If you're not doing so well in the "joy department," stop leaning on your own understanding and lean on God to show you good and positive things. Keep your ego out of the mix. Your ego will eventually consume you, and you'll never really realize that that is what is going on. Secondly, if you are not doing so well in the "joy department" start having a heart of wonder and appreciation for all of the people in this congregation. We all have oddities about us. I am chief among those with quirks. One time a good friend of mine (another lawyer in town) told me, "you're different. You're quirky." I'll wear that. And if I am quirky, let me be so for the Christian faith and for my Jesus.

Aim for Restoration – How you treat others in this congregation should always be covered with a desire for restoration. If you get crosswise with someone in here, you do not have the right or the permission to stay mad at them. In fact, God tells you right here in verse 11 that you must "aim for restoration." When you don't, you affect the entire congregation. From time to time, one person in our group might get crosswise with another. They may have hurt one another, or they might just have strong and different opinions about a lot of things. The tension between any two people in our congregation can bring an end to our sweet fellowship. You may not like everyone in this congregation, but you'd better love them. I didn't say this. God said it. So, if you harbor ill-will toward anyone in here, you'd better love them even if you don't like them. Otherwise, you will upset the sweet fellowship. None of us has that right, and that's what Paul was telling the congregation in Corinth. Each of us has a duty to be cordial and friendly to everyone in our group. You don't have to go out to dinner with them, but you must always aim for restoration.

Comfort One Another – Isn't it strange that we must be told something so basic. If we see one another in distress or need, we must be quick to ask God, "what can I do in this situation?" How can I bring comfort instead of angst. Years ago, when I received some difficult medical news, a person in the church visited me and brought me no comfort. Instead, they broke down crying telling me how terrible my situation was and how it was so horrible for the church. I appreciated the care and concern, but I think it would have been good for the person to focus on what would have been a comfort to me. In that moment I needed someone to remind me of the promises of God and of His faithfulness to me and our church.

Agree with One Another – We should attempt as best as we are able to agree with others. We once had a lady in the church who for about two years came up to me after EVERY SINGLE SERMON, and would say to me, "I've got a problem with something you said today in the sermon." Or, she'd change it and say, "Pastor, I have a bone to pick with you about something you said today." Over time I had a knot in my stomach everytime she stood up and came my way. I finally told her one day, "I don't mind you telling me that you don't agree with me on something, but please tell me three things with which you do agree before you tell me what you disagree with." If you disagree with others in this fellowship, then learn to do so agreeably. Learn also that you don't have to agree on everything with everyone. If you like President Trump and think he's doing a great job and someone else think he's horrible and doing a disgraceful job, DON'T TALK ABOUT THE PRESIDENT. You're never going to agree with one another so choose to talk about a million other things that don't involve the president. Anyway, you hopefully get the idea.

Live in Peace – lastly, we should live in peace with one other. Give each other space. EVERY HUMAN CONTACT IS A CHANCE FOR COURTESY OR CONFLICT: CHOOSE COURTESY. I love this congregation and Paul loved the church in Corinth. He ends the letter telling them that it is God's grace that will get them where they need to be. AND IT IS GOD'S GRACE THAT WILL GET US TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE AS WELL.

DO ALL THAT YOU DO IN SERVICE FOR HIM.

THANK OTHERS FOR WHAT THEY DO.

WHEN YOU MUST DISAGREE WITH OTHERS IN THIS CHURCH, DO SO AGREEABLY.

Let us pray.

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