

2 Corinthians 11 pt. 2 v. 4-15

Paul writes this second letter to the Corinthians as a follow up to a previous letter and visit that he had with them.

Paul in fact planted the Corinthian church. In one instance he actually calls them, "beloved children," and goes on to say, "in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 COR 4:15)

Well things didn't go perfectly for Paul's spiritual children, they seldom do, and he is brought word while he is in Ephesus that the Corinthian church is having quite a difficult time.

By his letters we can infer that he is told or perhaps even seen among them some significant strife.

The Corinthians are fractured as a congregation, divided, they have fallen in love with the personality of some of their teachers - even those who arrogantly speak ill of their spiritual father - Paul.

There is such sexual immorality going on inside the church that it is even considered taboo among non-Christians; people are dragging one another into court from the same church; people are going to literal demonic temples to partake in their shared meals; marriages are crumbling; people are wondering if it wouldn't be better to get divorced; they have elected not

to support Paul in his ministry financially and then hold it against him as if he is somehow less than others because he doesn't take money from them; they have a hard time understanding how to worship without being confused and confusing - there's a lot of distraction, self-promotion and unrest; people are literally getting drunk at church; they misunderstand the reality and importance of the resurrection; and....in all of this they are attempting to establish a hierarchy of spiritual gifts and a hierarchy of people within the church. That's all in First Corinthians!

Things are not great....and yet these are the saints. Covered in unmatched sin because of their own desire for power, and self-gratification. BUT they are also covered in unmatched grace by a loving savior - Jesus Christ. AND they are ministered to by a loving servant, their spiritual father - Paul.

Jesus knew exactly who to give to the Corinthian church to shepherd them on their way.

So Paul, as a loving father, must step in to correct his spiritual children. A trying task indeed.

In his letters to them we hear the anguish in his heart. His deep concern for their well being.

In Paul's second letter he recognizes how sorrowful they were about their past conduct so he does offer comfort and instruction on forgiveness.

BUT, he continues to correct them and to set things right in Corinth because that is what is needed for the Body. And it is the nature of Christ.

Christ encountered many many people in various stages of disrepair and wretchedness - but he never minced words with them on their condition. His purpose was to bring them into a right relationship with the Father, through Himself.

We find that there was a contingent of rogue actors who were intent on defaming Paul. They really wanted to chip away at his ministry and his reputation.

Perhaps this was to elevate themselves - this is often the case in life. Perhaps they wanted to be "in charge" or "rule over the Corinthians." Paul sets out to ensure that the church sees these people for who they really are.

That is where we pick up our text this morning in verse 4 - with an accurate description of these devious wolves, dressed as sheep.

V.4 - The Corinthian church is prone to being swindled and to endure being swindled by false apostles.

Somebody would come and preach an extra-biblical Jesus, or an extra-biblical Holy Spirit, or an extra-biblical “good news” and the church PUT UP WITH IT. Sharing in that falsehood.

This was happening in the Corinthian church. Could you imagine?

They really put him in an awkward position to where Paul is compelled to set the record straight.

We get the sense in Paul’s writings that this makes him feel incredibly foolish as he has to defend himself, and defend his ministry, and defend his “credentials,” and all the while the Corinthian Christians, lacking discernment, put up with and respect false teachers, false apostles, people whose only aim is to take advantage of them either for personal empowerment or to make money.

V.5-6 - Paul’s claim to legitimate Apostleship - “by the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He says in very clear terms that he is an Apostle - v. extra-super Apostles.

Well, who makes Apostles? Jesus Christ does.

Eph 4 - [Eph 4:11-12 NKJV] 11 And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Jesus Christ appoints diverse workers intentionally for the equipping of His church that He is building.

This continues today. No seminary, no church, no board, no person can make Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. They are GIVEN by the Lord Jesus Christ and the will of God.

That's a heavy saying -- and we are tempted to gloss over it because we are in the pastor making business in America. We are used to the pipelines so we don't even give a second thought to the reality of HOW and WHY Christ is building His church in the particular way that he has been for the past 2000 years.

[1Co 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, called [to be] an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...

[2Co 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...

[Eph 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...

[Rom 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

[Gal 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

[1Ti 1:1 NKJV] 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope,

Addressing some potential criticisms - not being eloquent. BUT, being trained in knowledge - he had quite an academic pedigree. (compare with the other apostles).

The problem the Corinthian church was facing was a relational problem with Paul. And it was partially due to the fact that some of the people in the Corinthians church did not see Paul as Jesus saw Paul. They viewed him as the world viewed him - not very eloquent, contemptible, weak in stature, physically afflicted. A guy who worked a job. Perhaps, just a regular old dude.

But how did Jesus view Paul? Jesus saw Paul as His chosen vessel - [Act 9:15-16 NKJV] As the Lord speaks to a man by the name of Ananias regarding Paul -- 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of

Israel. 16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Since Paul didn't necessarily fit the bill for what the Corinthians DESIRED in an apostle, some had a difficult time embracing him as called by Jesus. But in the same manner, Jesus gets all of the credit for any fruit that is brought about in Paul's ministry especially because of his perceived shortcomings. As it should be.

V.7-10 - By careful inference we can learn a lot about the Corinthian affection for the trappings of legitimacy and authority, or - what they thought made a ministry person, an apostle, legitimate.

They weren't so much concerned with the God-given calling.

Paul challenges them on their value system. In verse 7 we see that Paul makes a strong indictment against them.

In an act of humility he refused to be supported by them financially. For his own bread and to care for himself, and no doubt to offer his support to the churches, Paul worked with his own hands. He had a full-time job. He had two full time jobs! Caring for the church and also laboring to support himself.

As Paul demonstrated the character of Christ in this act - humility - he is potentially regarded as an amateur or illegitimate.

This is painful to view because humility is one of those characteristics that we espouse as so tightly intertwined in Jesus Christ.

Since he was humble among them they viewed him as weak. Since he exalted them, rather than condescending, they viewed him as less than others. (Incidentally, what a sad state of affairs when the church expects their leaders to be condescending).

Since he preached the gospel to them without passing the offering plate they viewed him as potentially unprofessional or as a “part-time apostle.”

The anguish of his next words - I ROBBED (plunder, despoil) other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. This is of course figurative - there is no documented account of Paul actually robbing other churches.

His point is that others provided for his needs without receiving a benefit and he felt really bad about it. So we see here that Paul didn't necessarily refuse support from the churches - but for some reason some weirdness was going on with the Corinthian church.

Is it biblical to pay people in ministry? Perhaps you've never thought about that question before. Perhaps you've thought about it a lot. The Bible

[1Ti 5:17-18 NKJV] 17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer [is] worthy of his wages."

Paul actually uses that same reference from Deuteronomy 25:4 - the ox treading out the grain - with the Corinthian church. AND, we must remember that God included it in the law BECAUSE people do such cruel things like forbidding an animal to eat while he is working so they won't lose any of their potential profit.

[1Co 9:9-10, 14-15 NKJV] 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say [it] altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, [this] is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. ... 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it [would be] better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

Paul teaches to the Corinthians and to Timothy (who was instructing other Pastors) and even the Galation church that supporting the men who shepherd the Body is right and Biblical - they ought not starve.

BUT we also see that he is very conflicted about the whole thing.

We can get prideful either way WHEN we ought to adopt the nature of Christ and approach this subject with humility and much prayer.

This conversation certainly continues today - and many people have abused the generosity of God's people - to their own detriment.

V.11 - The false accusation that Paul didn't love them - their relationship certainly was rocky.

We sometimes think this when things don't go our way. Perhaps as children we have said to our parents, "you don't love me."

V.12-15 the faithful laborer - the challenge, the gauntlet for false ministers, "extra-super apostles," whoever - will you plough if you are not paid? Will you plough wholeheartedly as unto the Lord or with divided interests and one eye on a paycheck?

Paul knows that in this way these wolves will be exposed for what they really are.

I wonder how many people would abandon their posts today if their income were shut off.

Looks can be deceiving. Some of hell's fiercest fighters have come wrapped in ministerial robes.

We don't judge each other on the size of your church building, or congregation, or anything like that. After the resurrection Jesus' disciples knew Him by his scars, We will judge you by your scars...

Here is the heart of Jesus Christ -- Throughout Paul's service he continues to serve and love the people even as he is spoken ill of, wounded, accused, ridiculed, and viewed as a second class citizen. Like Jesus he continues to teach - sometimes hard truths to those whom the Lord loves and gave him to care for.

Paul picked up some serious scar tissue along the way.

[Gal 6:17 NKJV] 17 From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Paul understood faithfulness no matter the circumstances. He realized the gravity of the cross and being called one of Christ's apostles.

[1Co 15:9-10 NKJV] 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me.