

“Do You Smell Like Jesus”

- 2 Corinthians 2 -

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Like Jesus?”

2 Corinthians 2

2 Corinthians 2 - *1 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? 3*

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. 5 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. 9 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. 12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to [preach] Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. 14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

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

Paul had already shared with the readers at the close of the last chapter that he, as have many pastors who have followed, struggled with the difficult role he played within the church. In any generation, the pastor who is willing to teach the Bible boldly and without prejudice is sure to receive the backlash of bruised egos and sometimes even angry, offended sheep. Some folks are just offended no matter how you approach them.

1Peter 2:7-8 *“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling ...and a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”*

Paul clearly penned the words of *this* letter while enduring a troubled heart in as much as had transpired between him and this church. He seemed to have no regret as to *what* he had said and *how* he had dealt with them, but the experience still troubled him that he had to do it to begin with and pained him to have a riff now between them. I can’t speak for all pastors, but I know personally that there are a lot of wounds and sadness involved in those corrective messages and confrontational meetings that I have to endure as a pastor. I know God often comforts me, but I also know that he seldom removes me from the angst of it all, and I would imagine that is by design. It all creates a balancing aspect and a body-life sharing between us that is clearly part of His plan. The reality is, tears are an important part of a spiritual ministry. Jesus wept; Paul ministered with tears ...Acts 20:19 and 31, and Psalms 126:5-6 states that there will be no harvest apart from tears.

By his own admission, Paul was now avoiding his visit to them for a while because he knew their hearts were not right toward him, and it could be that his was not ideally towards them either! For the language seems to

allude that Paul was not exactly looking forward to the confrontation that awaited him there. For both reasons, he decided within himself to postpone the journey.

Certainly we all know Paul's street cred. We know Paul was fierce with the message of God. But he was still a man, who also loved the flock to whom he was writing. So he wrote to them saying "...*I would not come again to you in sorrow*" or "*I decided that I would not bring you grief with another painful visit.*" With that he clearly does not sound like the agitator, nor the embodiment of the judgmental and condemning sort of person for which he was no doubt accused of being. In fact He openly did not want to unnecessarily hurt or upset them. This was for their sake as well as his own. He didn't want an angry division between they and him because he was part of them. They were all part of the same body of Christ!

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. 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.

Again, Paul evidently carried a great weight concerning the church in Corinth. He had a heaviness of soul and a desire to rescue what he saw as a sinking ship. If he ignored this weight, the church would die, either in spirit or even physically. If he pushed too hard, the sheep would scatter in an effort to avoid discomfort and guilt. Paul did not want to make the believers in Corinth sorrowful. They had been his source of joy and therefore once again, if they were in pain, then (being one in body with them) he would be in pain too!

Paul evidently decided to give the believers in Corinth some time to correct things. Paul wrote both times to this church... the first time and this time also... after apparent great prayer and seeking of God's direction. His desire was that despite all the 'water under the bridge' that they still knew that God loved them, and that *he* loved them. But if he failed to share the difficult message of correction and Biblical instruction, then how could anyone actually *believe* his professed love for them?

If you are speeding toward a blind cliff and I just stand back and let you go...how can I say I love you and how would anyone else say it about me? I could stand down from such warnings with a politically correct practice of tolerance, albeit with an incorrect definition of the word. But again, that only says that I love *me* in my desire to avoid confrontation and unpopularity. Now if you ignore me trying to intervene and you know about the cliff...well, have at it. But if I truly love, I will do all I can to "get in your way" if you do *not* know what is up ahead, even if that causes me pain. Jesus sure knew what that was all about. Paul is attempting to walk that fine line of parental love. His actions and words were disciplinary, yet immersed in love.

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. This punishment which [was inflicted] by the majority [is] sufficient for such a man, 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. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm [your] love to him."

Early on in the first letter when Paul wrote to this church, he dealt with an issue of an adulterous man in their midst. This was, no doubt, more than just a worldly seeker who happened into the fellowship one day. No, this was a individual who claimed to be a believer and a part of that church, but was unwilling to repent of his sin.

Paul was clear in his direction concerning this issue: **the man had to go**. As long as he remained, he would continue to affect the whole body like a cancer. He hadn't specifically hurt Paul in any way, but he **had** done damage to the Corinthian fellowship. He had hurt *them...not to mention bringing shame upon the reputation of the church and upon God and the definition of "Christian."*

The church tossed the man out, but now apparently were reluctant to forgive. They seemingly were not allowing the man to repent and come back into the church body. Both the removal and the subsequent forgiveness should

have been automatic, but it appears that Paul needed to strongly guide this church on both of these accounts. The righteous and holy practice of both sides of this is where true Christ love takes place. When the offender repents and seeks restoration, we as the church family (*not just the leadership*) are to receive him back into the fellowship.

Now be aware, there is however a “catch” here...one that often causes a lot of confusion on the part of all the involved individuals: Luke 17:4 says “*if he ...returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.*” And the fact is, **that is rare!** Sadly, the *usual* response from such an individual will quickly expose a heart of sin that goes much deeper than the one issue that is on the table, through retribution and attacks upon the church as “judgmental”... “hypocrites”... “unloving,” etc. Seldom is there an understanding that **one:** scripture is adamant that we *have* to do this, and **two:** it sucks for us too, and we would much rather go with our flesh tendencies and just look the other way.

The true scriptural practice of church discipline involves both steps and is extremely rare in today’s greater church. Again, both steps in this process must be obeyed: the removal **and the** restoration: **if there is repentance.** But please note: Repentance is not an *apology*. It is a clear and emphatic turning away from the sin.

Paul does not name this individual, no doubt in hopes of restoration. However he did name names in other situations where certain people were entrenched in their sinful and rebellious positions. In those situations, Paul had to consider the safety and reputation of the flock when there was a wolf in their midst.

2:9 *For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.*

Part of why Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church was to see if they would indeed be obedient in this matter with the adulterous individual. Note, though, that Paul was not just interested in their obedience in *this* matter, but in *all* things.

We often erroneously think that partial obedience makes a whole and total Christian. Christ said though, “If ye love me, keep my *commandments.*” (plural) Jn 14:15. God is interested in our *total* commitment, our *total* obedience. No one is inferring perfection here, as none of us will achieve such a level in this life. However, we cannot knowingly pick and choose to which of God’s directives we will to adhere. That may be religion, but it’s not Christianity.

2:10-11 *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, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Paul was again clearly joining himself to this body of believers. He didn’t want to be the “ax-man”: the guy who did all the hard stuff...the offending stuff... the potentially alienating stuff. He wanted them to all have skin in the game. To all be one...to be in unity...a true “body” of Christ. He says “...for **we** are not ignorant of Satan’s devices.”

If they would forgive this man, he too would forgive him and back his restoration. He was not going to rule over them in some sort of denominational hierarchy. He was asking them, *what will you do?* We know that Satan looks for any and every opening in which he can cause division and strife. Would they forgive as Christ had forgiven them? Satan already had won the first round with this guy’s sin “in the house.” Now would Satan win this round too?

“...we are not ignorant of his devices.” Can **we** say the same as we sit here today? Do we understand that Satan seeks to divide the saints, to reject holiness, and most of all, to water down the Word? For example...we see clearly that the issue of church discipline in these letters is prominent. Yet the greater evangelical church today has more than avoided this issue, they have completely ignored it! And then there is the flip side...where

churches refuse to forgive...where *individuals* refuse to forgive. Whether we want to admit it or not, to not forgive when there is repentance is to match the original sin. Satan starts with encouraging us to commit one small compromise after another until one day we are surrendering even the foundational truths of the gospel.

2:12-13 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to [preach] Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

Paul's account expresses what was clearly a restless spirit. Ministerial circumstances were certainly less than easy and comfortable. We don't like to think that God works this way, but He *can* and He *does*. He so often simultaneously both pushes and pulls. What does that mean? Well, if it is just a **push**, one should be suspect that it is not the hand of God, but rather the hand of Satan. Indeed God may nudge us out of our comfortable chair, but at the same time he always *leads* us forward into His plan too.

2:14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Many people will claim that God is leading; when all they have is an unexplainable push behind them or maybe just an uncomfortable "chair." Often the truth behind our "call from God" is simply a difficult or uncomfortable situation or maybe a problem we don't want to face. But God *leads*, and His leading will prove to be a blessed triumph. It is imperative that we can tell the difference.

How often we claim God told us to do something, and then the whole thing turns into a train wreck. The truth is that we need to be very careful saying God told me to do something. I have seen the "false calls" fully manifested, and it is always very ugly. Rarely do we repent of such because to do so we would have to "eat crow," and that level of perceived embarrassment is not palatable to most people. One has to wonder how many people are out there, entrenched in what they know to be a mistake, but will not repent out of their own pride.

Verse 14 is emphatic, saying "God who **always** leads us." The reality of such a leading is proven by the post-calling evidence of the hand of God. The bottom line in all of this today is this fact: Through us, the world is starkly aware of the "fragrance of Christ." On such a faithful journey, they will be able to "smell" the Lord's presence in our every step...whether the way is difficult or easy.

2:15-16 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one [we are] the aroma of death [leading] to death, and to the other the aroma of life [leading] to life. And who [is] sufficient for these things?

Paul understood well what was at stake. It was not mere *theory* with Paul. He had traveled the road, and he knew what was out there. He knew what *we* must know: some will embrace the gospel, God's grace and forgiveness, and therefore will embrace us as the messengers. To some, though, we are the "aroma of death." Even our very presence reminds them constantly of their sinful state, and their eventual, impending end. And they will hate us for it.

We are the "aroma of life" that some will embrace, or we are the "aroma of death" which others will defy, flee, and/or lash out against. This is why some spend their whole lives fighting against a God they say doesn't even exist. This is why they are still hanging around...perusing our web page and whispering in the darkness concerning us...even years after they have left. But no matter which way it goes, if we are filled with His Spirit, we smell of Jesus. And because we do, we are inexplicably loved in some circles, and unexplainably despised in others.

2:17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Paul was acknowledging that there were many people out there who are deceiving people. They are “talking the talk,” but they are hucksters, out for their own gain. Some are out for money, some for power, and others are simply trying to gain position. They are mercenaries, out to gather followers unto themselves. They smell alright...but they don't smell like Jesus, and you can recognize it from across the room.

I have before spoke of the airport terminal game... “pick out the Christian.” Its really not hard...almost always you can just...well, *smell them*. Have you ever hugged someone and then hours later suddenly smell them or someone else smells them even in their absence? Its because their smell got all over you with that hug. Welcome to the family of God.

Paul says “We speak in the sight of God...” Yes ...yes we do. *Always*.