

2 Cor 1:12-2:11  
Proverbs 9  
Psalm 111

“Paul and the Troubles in Corinth”

March 6, 2016

Do you *love* those who rebuke you?  
“Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”

I doubt that anyone really *enjoys* being rebuked.  
But you *should* love those who rebuke you.  
If someone takes the time to point out to you where you have gone wrong,  
you should love them for it –  
because it means that they love you enough to say something.

Don't worry about whether they are self-serving in their own motives!  
If they have *rightly* shown you something that you needed to correct,  
then you should love them for their pains.

Proverbs 9 also speaks of how the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom –  
a line echoed in our Psalm of response, Psalm 111,  
a song that reminds us of the great and mighty deeds of God.  
When you remember who God is – and what he has done to fulfill his promises –  
you will be a little less full of yourself,  
and hopefully a little more ready to heed to reproof of your friend!

Sing Psalm 111  
Read 1 Cor 1:12-2:11

Why did God give us this letter?  
An epistle like Romans makes sense to us –  
as Paul lays out the doctrines of grace – the message of the gospel;  
or Ephesians – with its simple structure of what God has done in Jesus,  
and what that means for our lives.

But with 2 Corinthians we are really getting into the personal details  
of Paul's relationships with a particular church.  
At times we may even feel a little uncomfortable with *how personal* Paul gets.

But God gave us this letter  
so that might see *how* to conduct our relationships in the Christian church.

### **1. Paul's Boast: Straight Talk about Jesus (1:12-22)**

**a. “Our Conscience” – Living with Simplicity and Godly Sincerity (v12-14)**  
<sup>12</sup> *For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity<sup>[c]</sup> and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.*

What do you hear when you hear Paul relying on “the testimony of our conscience”?!

You’ve heard many people say, “My conscience is clear” –  
when, in fact, they are plainly guilty!

But that is a more modern understanding of conscience than Paul is using.

We tend to think of conscience as a faculty of the individual,  
whereby the individual conscience judges right and wrong.

But Paul speaks in the *plural* – *our conscience* – “we behaved” –  
and then shifts in verse 15 to the singular, “Because I was sure of this...”

So Paul is not saying “my conscience is clear.”

He is saying “the testimony of *our* conscience” –  
the conscience (singular) of us (plural) –  
the corporate conscience of Paul’s traveling presbytery –  
certainly including “Silvanus and Timothy and I” (v19) –  
is that *we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity...*

I want you to think about this.

We live in a day where “conscience” is king.

“I must follow my conscience!”

But how do you know that your conscience is right?!

Paul’s approach to conscience provides a check on rampant individualism.

I am *not* bound to follow *my* conscience!

What if my conscience is mistaken?

There is also a corporate conscience –

that we who are in fellowship with Christ and with one another –  
must share a common mind – a way of knowing and doing and loving.

Even though he is an apostle,

Paul does not hold himself up as the sole arbiter of right doctrine and behavior.

How does he know that he has conducted himself rightly?

Because of *the testimony of our conscience*.

Last time we saw the importance of Paul’s traveling presbytery –

and how Paul sees our union with Christ as precisely *our* union with Christ.

We are not just united to him individually.

We are also united to one another.

And here in verse 12, Paul highlights one implication of this –

that he relies not on his own individual conscience,  
but on the corporate conscience of his brethren.

This is *hard* to do in the modern world.

(I suspect that it was hard in the ancient world as well – but I *know* that it’s hard today!)

When you live in a day when *everyone* lives according to their individual conscience,  
how do you develop a corporate conscience?  
It means that you have to develop a common way of living and knowing,  
of loving and doing –  
a common pattern of thought and practice.

That's *hard*.

People sometimes think

“Oh, well, you're the pastor, so MCPC does what you want!”

You will very rarely hear me disagree with a session decision.

It's not because the session always does what I want!

It's because when the session makes a decision, it is *our* decision!

This is now our common way of doing things.

If we are going to have a corporate conscience,

then that will entail submission to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The same thing happens in marriage.

When you get married, you have to develop a common way of life.

Sometimes that common way is *not* the way you wanted.

But if you cling inwardly to the way you *wanted* it to be –

then you will not truly be developing that common way *together*.

My question for you is this:

where in your life do you participate in a corporate conscience?

Where can you say, “the testimony of our conscience...”?

We (plural) have a singular conscience

so that we are entirely united in this common way of thinking and knowing and doing?

Remember that last time, in verses 3-7, Paul demonstrated the pattern:

From God to us to others.

Paul models the corporate conscience for the Corinthians,

so that they might more and more have that same mind in themselves

that was also in Christ Jesus.

I hope that you are seeing this growing and increasing in your relationships.

I hope that our shepherding groups are developing this more and more –

that as we get more and more plugged in to each others' lives,

we can develop this common way of knowing and loving and doing.

Not my way – not your way – but the way of our Lord Jesus Christ,

which *he*, by his Holy Spirit, more and more is working in us.

And what is this way all about?

Paul says that the testimony of “our conscience” is

*that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity,*

*not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.*

Simplicity and godly sincerity.

What is it that has the masses rising up to follow Donald Trump?  
Simplicity and sincerity [the problem with Trump is the lack of godliness!].  
I hate to use Donald Trump as a positive example,  
but the reason why people are following him is because they are sick and tired  
of politicians who are playing games!

Paul is saying “We didn’t play games with you.”

Before all the world –  
our behavior was characterized by simplicity and godly sincerity.  
We didn’t say one thing and then do another.

This is something that concerns me about the church today.

And the churches I know best are the OPC and the PCA –  
so I’ll limit myself to these two!  
The OPC and the PCA are increasingly characterized by a party spirit.  
People line up in factions and groupings – and only listen to those with whom they agree.  
Substantive debate – where people actually listen to each other – is growing rare.  
And so the way you get things done is through back room politicking.

If Paul had that approach to the church,

then we would not have the second epistle to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians would have been replaced by a private note to Paul’s supporters in Corinth  
suggesting a strategy for how to work the politics in his favor.

But instead, Paul writes this straightforward – almost shocking – epistle

defending himself (and his traveling presbytery) quite openly –  
with the same simplicity and godly sincerity that he boasts of here.

And this is hard to do!

It is *so tempting* to give in to self-aggrandizement!  
It is so easy to use the claim “I’m just being real” – “I’m just a straight-shooter” –  
as a weapon or a tool of manipulation.

So, how does Paul avoid becoming like Donald Trump?

“not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.”

“By the grace of God” is not a slogan.

Indeed, Paul offers the Corinthians a chance to *disprove* what he is saying!

You can disprove Paul’s claim!

All you have to do is demonstrate

that what Paul is now saying is contrary to what he has said before.

If you fact-check any modern politician you get all sorts of malarkey.

But when Paul says “we behaved...with simplicity and godly sincerity” –

this is a falsifiable claim.  
Because the grace of God has real, verifiable effects.  
Just look at Paul's life and conduct.  
Look at Timothy – look at Silas.  
Does what he says now line up with what you have seen in Paul and Silas and Timothy  
over the last few months and years?

I have a friend who used to be a gang-banger and a drug dealer.  
The grace of God has changed him.  
If someone says “God showed me grace” –  
and uses that as an excuse for sin –  
that's *not* grace!

Grace changes lives.  
And Paul wants this message of grace to change you still more!

<sup>13</sup> *For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—<sup>14</sup> just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.*

The same message that we preached is the same message that we live by.  
The Corinthians have *partially* understood the message of grace.  
But they need to understand it even more!

Paul then switches over to the first person singular for verses 15-17,  
in order to explain his personal actions:

**b. The “Yes” of God's Promises – Our Proclamation of the Triune God (v15-22)**  
<sup>15</sup> *Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace.*

When Paul talks about a second experience of grace,  
he is not talking about a “second blessing” – or a second work of God's grace.  
He simply means that he wanted his visit to Corinth to be a *gracious* visit.  
His *first* visit to Corinth had been the occasion God had used in bringing salvation.  
Now he wants his second visit also to be an occasion of grace.

As he says in verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> *I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea.* <sup>17</sup> *Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time?*

Paul says that he is not a worldly politician in how he makes plans.  
He doesn't make promises and then go back on them.  
And then in verse 18 Paul shifts back to the plural to show how his individual actions

are connected to the corporate conscience of his traveling presbytery.

His actions are rooted in the proclamation of the gospel of the Triune God:

*<sup>18</sup>As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. <sup>19</sup>For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. <sup>20</sup>For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. <sup>21</sup>And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, <sup>22</sup>and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

Even as Paul is talking about his travel plans,  
he cannot help but ground everything in their proclamation of the gospel!

Everything that Paul and his traveling presbytery does  
is oriented around the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God.

Yes, we wanted to visit you.  
But we do not make our plans according to the flesh –  
we do not make our plans according to worldly wisdom,  
in order to manipulate and control.  
No, we have renounced all these worldly ways  
so that we might preach Jesus as the Son of God.

And Jesus does not say “yes and no” –  
“all the promises of God find their yes in him”!

That’s not an exaggeration.  
When Paul says that *all* of God’s promises find their “yes” in Jesus,  
that’s just the way it is.  
Think of any of God’s promises in the whole Bible.  
God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head.  
Yes, Jesus!  
God promised Abraham that his descendents  
would be more than the stars of the sky.  
In Jesus, Yes!  
God promised David that his son would sit forever on his throne.  
In Jesus, yes!  
God promised that he would forever be the God of his people –  
In Jesus, yes!

Jesus the Messiah is the Son of God.  
He is the only way to God –  
which is why it is through him  
that we utter our “Amen” to God for his glory.  
Why do we say “Amen” – so be it – at the end of our prayers?

If you think about it,  
we ask for some pretty remarkable things in prayer!  
We ask God to forgive us for our sins.  
Why should God forgive us?  
We *sinned* – we did stuff that we shouldn't have done –  
and we *didn't do* the stuff that we should have done!  
Why should God put up with that?  
Well, he shouldn't "put up with that"!  
But he *forgives* sin – *because of Jesus*.  
Whether it is confession of sin, or intercession, or thanksgiving –  
our prayers come before the throne of God  
because *Jesus* intercedes for us.

So we say *Amen* at the end of our prayers  
because whoever may be saying the words out loud –  
the rest of us are joining in –  
and are testifying that *we also* want to be included in this prayer.  
We are sharing in the corporate conscience of the church when we say Amen,  
*through Jesus*.

Jesus unites us to himself – to his Father – and to one another.  
And so because Jesus is the "Yes" of God –  
because Jesus is the resounding "yes" of God's promises –  
therefore *we* join our voices together through Jesus when we say our "Amen."

"*And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us,  
and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*"

I want you to relish verses 21-22.

This glorious sentence focuses our gaze on God himself.  
There are four participles in this sentence that all turn our eyes to him.

It is God who establishes us with you in Christ.  
It is God who has anointed us.  
It is God who seals us – who places his seal upon us and claims us as his own!  
It is God who gives us his Spirit as a guarantee in our hearts.

Notice how Paul completes the Trinitarian proclamation of the gospel  
by highlighting the Holy Spirit's work in anointing us and sealing us  
as the *guarantee* – the downpayment – of the inheritance of Jesus.

Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the Father – he has received the full inheritance.  
And he has poured out the Holy Spirit upon us that we might receive the *guarantee*  
of the rest of the inheritance.

Here you see Paul's straight talk about Jesus.

Even when he is talking about travel plans – he is still talking about Jesus!

Why did I come to you the first time?

To preach Jesus.

Why did I not come to you this time (after suggesting that I would)?

If I boast so much in being a straight shooter –

living a life of simplicity and godly sincerity –

why didn't I come?

And this is where we turn to Paul's second point:

## **2. “It Was to Spare You” – Why Paul Did Not Come to Corinth (1:23-2:4)**

<sup>23</sup> *But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth.* <sup>24</sup> *Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.*

Paul is sensitive to the claim that he is engaging in power politics.

Notice – *even an apostle* does not have the right to lord it over others!

In the Old Testament the term translated “lordship” is used 84 times –

but only once of God's rule!

This is why the ESV translates it “lording it over.”

Not even *God* lords it over your faith!

‘Lording it over you’ is not a godly way of exercising authority.

After all, how did *God* exercise authority over you?

He established us with you in Christ.

He anointed us.

He sealed us.

He gave us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee!

“People want to be lightly governed...by strong governments.”

As one commentator puts it, as a child

“You wanted your dad to be big and strong and able to do anything you could think of – except that, when he dealt with you, it had to be with gentleness and tenderness...

Lots of muscle; lots of restraint.

There's an innate yearning in almost all of us for that rare combination.

When evil people rise up we want a government with the clout to back them down.

Yet we never want that clout turned on us.

In the final analysis, people want to be lightly governed by strong governments because that's how God governs.” (quoted in Guthrie, 129)

Interestingly, that's *exactly* how Pope Gregory I (in the 6<sup>th</sup> century) urged pastors to rule!

And therefore, Paul says in v24, that *we work together for your joy*.

The ESV says “work with you” – but it would be better to translate it,

“we work together for your joy.”



The verb “to work together” is commonly used by Paul in talking about fellow laborers. Paul and Silas and Timothy are all together are working for your joy –  
for you stand firm in your faith.

And Paul says that if he had come to Corinth, he would have had to make *another* painful visit.

*2:1 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.*

Apparently Paul *had* made a visit after writing 1 Corinthians,  
and it did not go well!

Paul did not want to show up *again* in Corinth and have to exert his apostolic authority.

But apostolic authority is *not* lordship.

Yes, Paul claims to have authority from Jesus to bind and loose –  
even to “hand [the sinner] over to Satan” (1 Corinthians 5:5) –  
but he insists this is not *lording it* over their faith,  
but working with them for their joy.

And Paul recognizes that the use of this authority requires a delicate balance:

on the one hand, he must boldly proclaim Jesus –  
and he must boldly teach them *to observe* all that Jesus has commanded!

But on the other hand, Paul is not Jesus.

He is a *minister* – a servant – an ambassador – of Christ.

And his task is *always* to point people *to Jesus*.

And so even here, in verses 2-4, Paul lays out his heart for the Corinthians:

*<sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? <sup>3</sup> And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. <sup>4</sup> For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*

I think that George Guthrie paraphrases verse 4 really well:

“The experience was gut-wrenching and heartbreaking, as I wrote my last letter to you,  
accomplished through a flood of tears.” (p125)

There is nothing more gut-wrenching than working through  
a complicated set of relational issues.

Nothing tears you apart inside like dealing with relational conflict.

I want you to see Paul’s heart on display for the Corinthians –

because Paul does not pretend that he has everything figured out.

He doesn’t say, “I’ve had the right answer the whole time!”

He lays his heart on the line and says, “I’ve been in anguish over how to handle all this!”

This isn’t easy for me.

If we are going to be the family of Jesus –  
then there will be anguish and affliction and many tears!  
Someone was once gushing to me about how much she loved the community at MCPC.  
I cautioned her that she needed to be ready for the hard part!  
If we are going to be the family of Jesus – then we will bump into each other!  
There will be moments when you don't like other people – and they don't like you!  
Just like family!

But this is why Jesus came!  
The is what Paul means when he says,  
“we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity  
*not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.*”

Here, once more, you see the simplicity and the godly sincerity of Paul.  
Sometimes a wise physician may need to cause pain in order to heal his patient!  
Paul, as a wise pastor, must seek to *cure* the souls of the Corinthians.  
And sometimes the cure of souls requires pain.  
Paul insists that he did not do this “to cause [them] pain” –  
that was *not* the goal and purpose of what he has done.

Rather, he has done this ultimately for their joy –  
and because of “the abundant love that I have for you.”

Okay – but what has he done?  
In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, we hear the background:  
“a man has his father's wife” –  
in other words, he is sleeping with his step-mother  
And Paul insists “let him who has done this be removed from among you.”

So in 1 Corinthians, Paul had told them “to deliver this man to Satan  
for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (5:5)

Now in 2 Corinthians Paul explains what should be done with this man  
now that he has expressed sorrow and repented.

(Some people have wondered whether Paul is dealing with the same man.  
After all, there is a missing letter – and another visit of Paul to Corinth –  
so it is certainly possible that Paul is speaking of someone else –  
but if it *is* someone else, the way Paul deals with the second man  
lines up so perfectly with 1 Corinthians 5,  
that it still remains an excellent (and divinely inspired)  
case study for teaching us how to conduct church discipline!)

### **3. “This Punishment by the Majority” – The Purpose of Church Discipline (2:5-11)**

<sup>5</sup> Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you

*should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*  
<sup>8</sup> *So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.* <sup>9</sup> *For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.* <sup>10</sup> *Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,*  
<sup>11</sup> *so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul will return to the theme of sorrow and repentance (chapter 7).  
There is a difference between simply saying “I’m sorry” and godly repentance.

Our shorter catechism says it well:

“repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner  
out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,  
does, with grief and hatred of his sin,  
turn from it, unto God,  
with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

That’s a far cry from “I’m sorry”!  
I’m sorry might just mean “I’m sorry that I got caught!”  
I’m sorry might mean “I’m sorry that you feel that way.”  
I’m sorry simply means that *I have sorrow.*

Paul says that the Corinthians were *right* to impose some sort of punishment.  
If they actually did what Paul said that they should do in 1 Corinthians 5:5,  
then they handed him over to Satan –  
in other words, they excommunicated him –  
they put him out of the church.  
“Expel the wicked man from among you.”

It has now been several months – perhaps a year or more.  
At some point in this process, the man came to be sorry for his sin.

Notice that Paul does *not* say that he should be restored *simply* because he is sorry.  
Paul does not want him to be overwhelmed by *excessive sorrow.*  
Serious sin demands serious consequences.

Let me give an example:  
a session dealt with two cases of fornication –  
in one case, a woman slept with her boyfriend,  
immediately was sorry,  
and came to the elders the following week to confess her sin.  
The elders admonished her, forgave her, and the case was closed.  
In the other case, a man met a woman in a chat room online,  
arranged to meet her at a hotel,  
and continued to sleep with her for four months,  
before he was caught –  
and only when he was caught did he say that he was sorry.

The elders suspended him from the Lord's Table for four months –  
because he had been taking communion for 4 months,  
while he was engaged in this sin!

And after four months, because he was penitent,  
and had endured the public rebuke of the church,  
he was restored –  
and *great* was the joy in that congregation  
when he was restored!

Public sin needs to be dealt with publicly –  
so that the restoration can also be public!

What sins should be dealt with in this way?

Well, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 –

“do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters,  
nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves,  
nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers  
will inherit the kingdom of God.”

There is a reason why sex has played such a large role in church discipline.

Scripture says that it should!

But we should also include thieves and swindlers.

The “greedy” does not refer merely to an inward disposition.

The “greedy” are those who put their greed into practice.

Likewise, idolaters are those who are outwardly idolatrous.

Drunkards are those who regularly get drunk!

Revilers are those who regularly use words to tear down and destroy others.

People who do such things should be excommunicated –  
cut off from the fellowship of the church.

But – as Paul makes clear here in 2 Corinthians 2 –

the *goal* of this discipline is for their salvation – that they might repent.

We must *always* be ready to forgive.

But forgiveness *doesn't* mean that the one who repents is *immediately* restored.

The one who repents must bear fruit in keeping with repentance!

The reviler who has been verbally abusing his wife

should not be restored on the same day that he says he is sorry!

No, he needs to bear fruit in keeping with repentance!

He needs to learn to use his tongue to build up and encourage.

When Paul speaks of the “punishment by the majority” –

he does not give details,

which means that we need to apply the whole of biblical teaching here!

Church discipline needs to be done openly and with simplicity –  
with the same godly sincerity that Paul displays here –  
using the medicine of the Word of God,  
applying one bit of scripture to one bit of life.

Does this person want to follow Jesus?

If so, they need to put to death this pattern of sin.

Are they willing to submit to their brethren in the Lord?

Are they willing to accept the pattern of the corporate conscience  
that Jesus is building into his church?

And this is why Paul insists that we must *forgive* the offernder.

“Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything,  
has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,  
so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

Satan would use sin as an opportunity to destroy the church.

The sinner has been handed over to Satan –  
but *not* permanently!

We want to see the sinner restored!

The goal of discipline is to bring back the sinner from his ways.

If we get vindictive and we refuse to let the sinner repent,  
then Satan wins – both because he gets to keep the sinner,  
and because he gains a part of *our* heart!

Think about that!

If your heart becomes hard – and you refuse to forgive –  
then Satan has outwitted you!

C. S. Lewis said it well:

“Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom  
the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery.  
We ought to hate them....

But [Christianity] want[s] us to hate them  
in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves:  
being sorry that the man should have done such things,  
and hoping, if it is in anyway possible,  
that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again.”  
(Mere Christianity, quoted in Guthrie, 138)

Church discipline must always be carried out in love –  
seeking the restoration and renewal of the one who is disciplined –  
praying and hoping for the grace of God to work in this life as well.