

FIRST BAPTIST POWELL, 3-3-19 AM  
“Final Words to a Wayward Church”  
2 Corinthians 12:11 – 13:14  
# 23 in Series, “Be Encouraged”

**1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NASB)** <sup>1</sup> “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, <sup>3</sup> for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NASB)** <sup>9</sup> “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> **Such were some of you**; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

I. Words of Confrontation (12:11-21)

Relevant—Having social significance; having some bearing on or importance for real-world issues, present-day events, or the current state of society.

A. Paul Confronted Their Lack of Commendation (12:11-13)

1. They were all chosen by God the Father and personally appointed by Jesus
2. They were all eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ
3. They received the New Testament by direct revelation from Jesus
4. They were responsible for writing the New Testament
5. They were given unique power and authority

**Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)** “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

B. Paul Confronted Their Lack of Appreciation (12:14-18)

C. He Confronted Their Lack of Consecration (12:19-21)

II. Words of Caution (13:1-8)

A. They Must Prepare Themselves (13:1-4)

B. They Must Prove Themselves (13:5-8)

III. Words of Encouragement (13:9-14)

A. Strive for maturity (13:9-11a)

B. Strive for Unity (13:11b-13)

**Sermon 23: Final Words to a Wayward Church**

2 Corinthians 12:11 – 13:14

In my opinion, the clearest example of a true pastor in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul. The clearest example of Paul's pastoral heart can be found in this text. To set our minds on this passage, I want us to think about what an ideal pastor looks like. I'm not talking about physical appearance, but what should characterize a pastor that pleases God. One of the most important things a young pastor needs to learn is how to please God. If pleasing people is his goal, he is headed for trouble. Someone said, "He who seeks to please everyone pleases the Devil most of all."

I remember hearing about a church looking for a pastor and asking the congregation through a survey form what kind of expectations they had for a pastor. The survey form listed all the typical things a pastor does and asked the members to put beside the tasks the number of hours per week the pastor should spend on that activity. Some of the activities were things like: sermon preparation, visiting hospitals, visiting shut-ins, visiting unchurched people to share the Gospel with them, visiting in member's homes just to check on them, continuing education, leading programs, attending denominational meetings, community activities, and many more. What they discovered is that on some of the surveys if you added up all the time for the activities checked on the survey it came to be more than 168 hours per week. By the way, 24 hours x 7 days = 168 hours. I am not whining, but if someone is a people pleaser, being a pastor will be hard on them.

Paul loved this church at Corinth in spite of the way they treated him, in spite of all their problems, in spite of their spiritual immaturity, and in spite of their carnal self-centeredness. Paul loved them so much that he never gave up on them!

Back in 1 Corinthians, Paul said this about the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:1:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh [carnal in the NKJV], as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal in NKJV]. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly [carnal], and are you not walking like mere men?

Let me remind you of some things that we touched on when we started this study of 2 Corinthians in July of last year. The church at Corinth was started by Paul in the center of Satan's stronghold. Some call it the most ungodly immoral city in the "civilized" world. In the cesspool of Corinth, this church stood out like a flower garden. There had been some amazing conversions in the church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. *Such were some of you*; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Paul should have been their hero, their role-model, their example, but that is not the way it was. Instead of loving and following Paul, they had begun to listen to and consider following false teachers who were claiming to be apostles (v. 11). Because Paul and his message were being slandered, he had to defend himself and the Gospel he proclaimed. Paul didn't want to do this. It was like boasting to him, but there was no other way to deal with these false teachers.

I believe that the clearest passage in the New Testament about what a pastor is to focus on (not the details but the big picture) is the text that we are studying in this message. In this text we see from Paul words of confrontation, words of caution, and words of encouragement. Today, I want

you to hear a message from who I believe is the greatest pastor the church has ever known – the Apostle Paul. In the verses that follow, Paul gives some final words to a wayward Church.

## **I. Words of Confrontation (12:11-21)**

Let's talk about confrontations in church; not just confrontations in Corinth in the first century, but confrontations that need to be carried out in the church today. I am deeply troubled by some trends I now see. In forty plus years of being a pastor, I have watched the church as a whole drifting away from loving, biblically based confrontations aimed at the members. I am convinced that most of the blame for that lies at the feet of the pastors. Perhaps the most frequent message to the church is that if the church is going to survive, it must become [here comes the magic word] "relevant". What does that word mean? Here is what the dictionary says: Relevant – "having social significance; having some bearing on or importance for real-world issues, present-day events, or the current state of society." Using that definition, let me say that church leaders should be aware of what is going on in the culture around us ("the current state of society").

I read articles and books about what is going on in culture. Most every morning while I am on my bicycle that makes me sweat and breathe hard but goes nowhere, I listen to Dr. Albert Mohler's podcast called *The Briefing*. Dr. Mohler, the President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, shares a daily analysis of news, events and trends in our culture. He simply takes the latest newspapers, magazine articles and events and analyses them from a biblical worldview. It only lasts twenty-five minutes or so and it keeps me informed on what is going on in our culture. If "relevant" means "knowing what is going on in our culture, then I think every pastor and every Christian should seek to be relevant.

However, that is not what many cool pastors mean by being relevant. All too often "relevant" means "find out what people want and give it to them". That makes you relevant. Many churches are run by surveys. Services are crafted to give people what they want to hear. In other words, services are designed for the unchurched so they will see the church as relevant.

Several months ago, I was invited to a small gathering of pastors (about twenty or so) for a meal and discussion concerning how our churches could reach more people with the Gospel. There was some good discussion. Some of my friends were there – men who love Jesus, the Bible and long to see people come to know Him. But then there was another pastor there. I didn't know him. He spoke more than any of the other pastors. He spoke about how non-relevant churches are that have "Baptist" in their name. His reasoning was that the name "Baptist" turns lost people off. It was all about being "relevant". I want to be clear that I don't have a problem with Baptist churches not having the word "Baptist" on the church sign. I have no problem with different music styles. Cutting edge technology is great. What I do have a problem with is the view that the church exists for the lost and the songs and the messages are to make the lost see how relevant we are, how cool with the culture we are and how we must avoid any stance that makes us seem irrelevant to the lost.

If you are hearing me say that we don't want non-Christian followers attending our church, you don't know my heart. Yes! Bring your non-Christian friends, families, and co-workers! But the church is designed to edify, build up the believers so they are equipped to live a Christ-like life (actually Christ living His life through them), a life that loves the lost in their neighborhood, their office, their school, their golf course, or wherever else they are around people. At church, the focus is on worshipping our Savior and teaching the Bible to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. A part of the work of the ministry is sharing the Gospel with non-believers.

If you are concerned about being relevant, I have good news for you. The Bible is always relevant to every generation in every country – whether the audience is old or young, rich or poor, whatever their ethnic background, or whatever stage of life they are in.

Let's get back to the text. When the church gathers, there should be words of confrontation. Let's get more specific.

### **A. Paul Confronted Their Lack of Commendation (12:11-13)**

Paul should never have been forced to defend himself. He had loved and sacrificed for this church. They should have commended him, not accused him! Paul led them to Christ! Where was their thankfulness? When we read closely, it seems that Paul was humble and the false teachers, the Judaizers, were showy and self-promoting. Paul's personal appearance and speaking skills were not his strength. The false teachers had a great deal of worldly charisma and oratorical skills combined with intimidation and manipulation techniques (I'm seeing in my mind many of those type people in our time).

Here's what Paul had that they didn't have. Look in 2 Corinthians 12:12: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." This was really important in Paul's day, and it is vitally important as to what that means today. Before the New Testament was written down and distributed to the church, God gave the apostles supernatural powers to affirm their authority and authenticity. The word "apostle" used in a general unofficial sense simply meant "messenger". It was used of Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Andronicus, Junius, and others (Romans 16:7). However, the office of Apostle included only fourteen people: There was the original twelve, Matthias who took Judas' place (Acts 1:26) and Paul.

As we look closely at the New Testament, there are several things we know about the apostles.

1. They were all chosen by God the Father and personally appointed by Jesus. Paul was the last apostle called and it was after Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Romans 1:5).
2. They were all eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ. Paul saw the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus.
3. They received the New Testament by direct revelation from Jesus.
4. They were responsible for writing the New Testament. Every book of the New Testament was written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle who received what they wrote from an apostle. Examples would be Mark and Peter, Luke and Paul.
5. They were given unique power and authority. They were granted power to cast out demons, heal the sick and even raise the dead to affirm the truth and authority of their message.

Why did the number of miracles begin to fade away after the Scriptures were written and distributed? It was because the written word of God is our authority. It is described in Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Our authority is not evidenced by miracles; it is evidenced by the Scriptures as they are applied. Please don't hear me saying that God no longer does miracles. He does, but we cannot command them as the apostles did. Sometimes God in His sovereignty chooses to accomplish His purposes by a miraculous act that has no other explanation other than "Look what God in His mercy has chosen to do." We are so much better off than those early Christians who needed an apostle beside them. We have the authority of God in His Word with us and in us!

In verse 13 Paul uses a little sanctified sarcasm to confront them for their failure to appreciate his sacrifice for them.

## **B. Paul Confronted Their Lack of Appreciation (12:14-18)**

Paul had given them so much and they were so ungrateful. There was no expression of appreciation. It seemed like the more Paul loved them, the less they loved him. He took no advantage of them, but they responded with no appreciation toward him.

## **C. Paul Confronted Their Lack of Consecration (12:19-21)**

That is self-explanatory. In verse 19, Paul is saying, “All that we want is for you to be built up in the Lord.” He was speaking of their spiritual growth. Speaking for all of our pastors, we can really relate to what Paul is saying. He is saying that all he asks for, the thing that thrills him to see their spiritual growth (“upbuilding”).

In verses 20-21 Paul lists the sins that they needed to deal with. This is the kind of confrontation that needs to go on in the church. 2 Corinthians 12:20-21: “... strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; impurity, immorality and sensuality...” which they have practiced.

## **II. Words of Caution (13:1-8)**

### **A. They Must Prepare Themselves (13:1-4)**

These false teachers were accusing Paul of being “wimpy” in person. Paul comes back at them. When I come back, there won’t be any wimpiness; we are going to deal with sin and false doctrine in the church. When a pastor or spiritual leader speaks like that today, people get their little feelings hurt. Maybe we need more of this blunt talk.

Here is where Paul is coming from. Sin in a church is like a malignant cancer and it must be dealt with. Paul is speaking here of formal church discipline. He references the Old Testament passages in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15. This is the background of the passage Jesus spoke in Matthew 18:15-17:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Open sin that is ignored in a church is like a malignant cancer that can destroy the church. Paul is saying to the Corinthian church – You must take sin seriously.

### **B. They Must Prove Themselves (13:5-8)**

Verse 5 is a command. “Examine” means to put to the test. It was the word used to test metals as to their genuineness. It is in the present tense which means that it speaks of continuing action. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

In the New Testament, when we are told to examine ourselves, it never takes us back to an experience; it takes us to the pattern of our life.

In verse 6, Paul assures them that he passed the test in spite of what the false teachers said about him.

### **III. Words of Encouragement (13:9-14)**

Paul closes this letter that has of necessity been rather blunt and confrontive with some words of encouragement.

#### **A. Strive for Maturity (13:9-11a)**

Two times he tells them to be made complete (vv. 9, 11a). That word translated “complete” means to be restored for the intended purpose. It was used of setting broken bones. It is referring primarily to spiritual maturity. He is saying to this difficult church, “How long are you going to be satisfied with missing so much of what God has for you?” I would ask you that question.

#### **B. Strive for Unity (13:11b-13)**

As we mature, we are built up in Christ and unity is a by-product of being built up in Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Verse 14 is a beautiful benediction. He focuses on the Trinity. 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [God the Son], and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [God the Spirit], be with you all.”

**NASB** (New American Standard Bible)

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