
Preparation for Ministry Correction

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

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Introduction

In the backdrop of Paul comparing himself to the “super-apostles”, Paul boasted in his weaknesses and suffering. Paul’s argument was that his weakness and suffering is what truly identified him as an apostle and true follower of Christ. Do we boast in our weaknesses, or are we more inclined to boast in our strengths? Do we pursue things that give us glory, or glorify Christ?

What is our attitude like when our church leaders must correct our behavior or doctrine? Do we tend to bristle against these corrections, or are we humble and recognize that it is the Lord who is the one working in us to make us more like him? What is our attitude about correction in the church? How do you think the Corinthians thought about Paul when he wrote about correction in the church? Let alone Paul coming to correct false teaching and unconfessed sin and discord? Listen to Paul’s list of the concerns he will have to correct at Corinth (verse 20),

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.

If these activities and attitudes are evident in our church body, shouldn’t we be corrected? Should these be legitimate concerns in any church today? Do you think most church leaders appropriately and biblically deal with sin and discord in the church? Do we ever hear of church leadership disciplining people in the church for sin, or correcting them for error? As you listen to this passage think about these questions:

How do we think about leaders when we disagree with them?

Are we prepared to submit with joy or do we...?

How do we as leaders prepare the church for correction or change?

How do we as leaders make correction and change in the church?

Who is the true apostle? Who has true authority? (v. 11-13)

Paul is deeply frustrated and concerned with the church at Corinth so easily questioning his apostleship and authority because of the false teachers (Paul refers to these impostors, as false teachers and "super-apostles"). The infiltration of these super apostles into the church at Corinth caused the Corinthians to question Paul's authority as a true apostle. We have learned a lot about these false teachers from earlier sermons, but he continues to have to stand up for his authority among the Corinthians compared to the way the Corinthians have accepted the erroneous authority of the false teachers.

Humility does not equal a lack of authority (v. 11)

Paul's apostolic work among the Corinthians should have led to a full commendation from the church but instead they apparently doubted his authority because of the so-called, "super-apostles" who were in fact false teachers. Because the Corinthians were so easily swayed from the truth, Paul was left to defend himself, when his work among the Corinthians should have been enough for them to recognize and accept God's true apostolic authority.

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.

At the beginning of chapter 12, Paul boasts about his weaknesses. In Paul's theology, Christ's strength shines through to the church and the world, when he is weak and fully dependent on Christ and not his own strength and giftedness. This is true, even when that weakness is not taken away! And it is because of Paul's weaknesses that the Super-apostles try to drive a wedge between Paul and the Corinthian Church. Ironically, because of Paul's humility and patience they fail to see Paul with the same authority as the false teachers!

True signs of apostleship (v. 12-13)

In addition to Paul's patience and humility, he performed signs and wonders and mighty works, as an apostle. He never sought their financial support as he did in other churches, therefore Paul seems to be viewed as a "second class" apostle by the Corinthian Church. And it's likely that Paul knew exactly what he was doing when he refused to take their financial support, although it caused frustration and angst within the church community and likely the false teachers used this information against Paul in the church.

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!

Paul does not equate accepting financial support as bestowing greater favor, and/or greater ministry towards those who did financially support Paul in his ministry, but in fact Paul insisted he chose not to be a financial burden on the church and challenges them to show him where he was showing the Corinthians less favor because he refused to accept their financial support. He sarcastically tells them, "Forgive me the wrong!"

I only want you, not your stuff! (v. 14-18)

Paul is not trying to "take" anything from the Corinthians but as their spiritual parent he feels obligated to give all he has for their spiritual growth and take nothing in return. We don't know all the reasons Paul decided not to receive financial support from the Corinthians, but it is clear his intentions and planning were based on his care for the Corinthians and what was best for them. Paul explains to the church that he is their spiritual parent, and in real life it is not the children's responsibility to sacrifice for the parent's care, but it's the parent's ultimate responsibility to save money and provide for their children.

The greater the sacrifice the less I am loved (v. 14-15)

Paul was preparing to visit the Corinthian church a third time and he had already made great sacrifices on their behalf, but he expressed feeling like the more he loved them and sacrificed for them the less they loved him and respected him in return.

We know the Corinthians felt slighted due to Paul working and providing for himself while he was with the Corinthians, and clearly Paul believed this was for the Church's own good. Paul went over and above to sacrifice for the Corinthian Church, to not be a financial burden on the church, and to give every ounce of his life for their souls. He doesn't care about their financial treasures but only the treasure of their souls, as their spiritual father. But even as he was willing to be completely spent for the spiritual growth and welfare of the Corinthians, he believed they loved him less, the more he gave.

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?

Accused of taking advantage, and for what outcome? (v. 16-18)

Paul went out of his way not to be a financial burden to the Corinthians, and yet they were accusing him of being crafty and deceitful, and even accusing Paul of taking advantage of them through sending the helpers he sent to minister to the church. And to what end would Paul have wanted to deceive the Corinthian church?

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?

What would Paul have gained in "deceiving" the Corinthian Church, or the fellow ministers of the Gospel he sent? Likely there were other motivations that influenced the Corinthian Church to suspect Paul of deceit. Paul and his companions are perhaps being accused by the false teachers within the church of taking advantage of the church members and deceiving them, even as the ministered in the Spirit of Christ!

My upcoming trip to you will likely be difficult for all (v. 19-21)

At this point in the book you can see that Paul is afraid that he will find the Corinthian church in disarray and many living in sin and immaturity, therefore he will not enjoy the discipline he will have to enact, and they will likely not appreciate his hard stance of discipline, by calling into question their commitment to Christ. Necessary correction in the church is hard for all, but correction and discipline are necessary where there is doctrinal error and unconfessed sin.

Speaking in the sight of God (v. 19)

Paul doesn't have to defend himself or his colleagues to the Corinthian church, since all they have been doing and teaching is in the sight of God, and for the building up and encouragement of the Corinthian church. And yet because of the influence of the false teachers, and

their own sin and disfunction the Corinthians are accusing Paul of being defensive and manipulative, when in fact Paul assures them that he has done and spoke everything in Christ, and everything he has done has in fact been for their upbuilding and subsequently God's glory, not his own.

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.*

Paul's concerns (v. 20-21)

Paul is fearful (and for good reason) that the Corinthians will not like this planned visit from Paul, since he is concerned that he will find many in the church living in unrepentant sin and disorder. Listen to Paul's concerns as he addresses them in this section of his letter to the Corinthians:

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.*

Paul lists sin and disorder that is going to have to be addressed when he sees them; quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder, as well as unconfessed sin of impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality. Throughout both letters to the Corinthian Church we can see Paul bringing up sin, and instruction on how to deal with it. But it appears that the Corinthians failed to deal with their sin and disorder adequately or biblically, so Paul knows his trip to the church is not going to end well! Paul sees that God will humble him as he must finally deal with church discipline concerns at Corinth.

So, what do we see in this passage concerning Clearcreek Chapel?

Conclusion

Could a church today ever need corrected and disciplined by its leadership? What about our church? As a church we are dependent on the elders to keep us from error, and to protect the church from false teachers and well-meaning teachers that teach error. The elders have one another for accountability and for raising concerns over lifestyle error or doctrinal error. This is another important reason to have a plurality of elders, as opposed to the church being dependent on a single shepherd model, where there may be little support or accountability. If you ask any of the elders, we regularly do not agree on a variety of issues and our giftedness is diverse, but we work hard at getting to the truth, and the wisest choice we can, given the variety of challenges we might face.

How easily is the church deceived by false teaching and teachers today, what do we do about it and how can we prevent error in our church? It is easy to see that in the world-wide church there are those teachers out there like in Paul's day try to deceive and take advantage of God's flock. Perhaps like Paul, we question the true discipleship of those who tend to easily follow false teachers. Perhaps like the Corinthian church those living in unconfessed sin and who allow disunity and division in their church will be in danger of missing the error that is taking place in their fellowship.

Perhaps you don't think anything like this could happen at Clearcreek, since we are not the Corinthian Church. But how do we respond to correction from our leadership? What about living with "respectable" sins? How willing are we to be disciplined by our leadership when we are in error? The sins that Paul expected to find unconfessed at Corinth were (in addition to sexual immorality), *quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder*. In our mind, and in our life perhaps we accept these sins and push them under the proverbial rug, or accept them as normal, since everyone sins, right? Have you ever stopped to consider what kind of church these sins would produce if we allow them to reign freely in our church community? Evidently Paul questioned the Church at Corinth's salvation because of their willingness to live with unconfessed sin and disorder.

How do we think about leaders when we disagree with them? God in his sovereignty has placed each one of us under the authority that we have. Even the elders are under the authority of Christ and the church.

Are we prepared to submit with joy or do we...? How do you tend to react if the church leadership does something that you disagree with? Do you submit joyfully and humbly, knowing that God in his sovereignty is working out his perfect sovereign plan for you and the church? Or do you react in conceit, maybe causing a little discord, or complaining a little here and there? Or worse, do you gossip, or slander, or quarrel? Do you get so angry you sin in your words and attitude toward church leadership? These attitudes and sinful reaction to church leadership are not what Paul expects in the Church, and you can see that in the way he mentions having to deal with them when he arrives!

What about leaving a church when you don't agree with everything that leadership does? Is that the best way to deal with sin and strife in the church? What about when the church doesn't have the programs and activities you think they should have? Do your attitude and actions reflect the sins that Paul needed to address at Corinth?

How do we as leaders prepare the church for correction or change? What is our attitude towards our people that we are shepherding during times of change within our church? How did Paul approach change with the Corinthians? What was Paul's attitude when he confronted the Corinthian Church. Now we don't know exactly what Paul was like in person, but we do know his words through this letter.

We know that Paul was dependent on Christ for his strength. God allowed Paul weakness to continue, even after Paul pleaded for its removal three times. Paul's weaknesses contributed to Paul's humility and dependence on Christ, and Christ's strength would be made clear and evident ahead of his own strengths. As leaders, we need to be dependent on Christ and not our own strength during times of change, and we are to be humble in our leadership. Paul argued that he ministered to the Corinthians with the "utmost patience" and was never a financial "burden" to the church. Paul did not seek any material advantage with the Corinthians either himself or his fellow ministers but sought the Corinthians themselves! Paul spent all of himself on the very souls of the church, like a parent pouring their whole being into growth and care of their children.

And the result for Paul, which should be the same for us in leadership here, is to do all we do in Christ, and that only for the building up of the church and for the good of church. None of what

Paul did for the Corinthians was for his benefit. It should be the same for us. Our leadership should not be for our benefit but for the building up of the body of Christ, and this should be especially true in times of correction and change within the church.

How do we as leaders make correction and change in the church? Leaders need to make changes with the proper heart attitude as corrections are often difficult. Leaders need to be direct and clear with the direction that we intend to go and explain why biblically we believe a correction is in order. Consider the sin and discord that Paul was expecting to address, *quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder and sexual immorality, sensuality, and impurity*. There is no place in Christ's body for these things to go on, and they must be addressed quickly and clearly.

Correcting sin and error is often not easy for leadership, because it is like Paul's reference to a parent taking care of children, correction is necessary but difficult because we know discipline is painful, because leadership goes through discipline too! None of us like correction, but a priority for those in leadership is being aware and concerned for the purity of the church. That is one of our most important responsibilities. Christ's church should be a light out of the sin and darkness of the world, not simply a part of it.

When leaders must correct the church, and when members of the church must be corrected, we all must examine our hearts, and our motives, and what it is we truly treasure, so that we can end up like Paul. Humbled, strengthened in our weakness through Christ, and standing and working together to defend the purity of the body of Christ. Where do you fit in this sermon?



Title
Text
Speaker

The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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Heading

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