

***11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,
we persuade others.
But what we are is known to God,
and I hope it is known also to your conscience.***

***12 We are not commending ourselves to you again
but giving you cause to boast about us,
so that you may be able to answer those
who boast about outward appearance
not about what is in the heart.***

***13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God;
if we are in our right mind, it is for you.***

***14 For the love of Christ controls us,
because we have concluded this:
that one has died for all, therefore all have died;
15 and he died for all,
that those who live might no longer live for themselves
but for him who for their sake died and was raised.***

INTRODUCTION

In last week’s sermon, we concluded with Paul’s statement about our appearing before the judgement seat of Christ and being revealed for all that we really are. For the believer, this will be an event like no other. Jude, in his little letter, puts it this way.

*24 Now to him who is able to **keep you** from stumbling and to present you **blameless** before the presence of his glory with **great joy**...*

But for others, the Scriptures tell us that it will be a very different experience. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians,

1:9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...

Connected with this dual reality, and as we come to our text for this week, Paul reveals that he is working with a specific agenda as a messenger of Jesus Christ.

A FEAR-MOTIVATED AGENDA (v.11a)

He states it this way:

***11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,
we persuade others.***

Because he believes in the resurrection and coming again of Jesus for this great and terrible day of judgment, he is on a mission to persuade others to respond to God’s grace offered in Jesus. This grace is the opportunity of escape from wrath and just punishment through the work of Jesus Christ.

This word translation “persuade” means to convince by all legitimate means the truth of this good news; that people should turn from trusting in their own works, and instead trust in God’s offer of rescue in Jesus.

So he admits to having an agenda, to see people rescued from coming destruction through the mercy of Christ. But he make it clear that he will only use the truth of God’s Word to attempt this persuasion, not gimmicks, nor 1/2 truths, nor manipulative tricks. Earlier in 2 Corinthians he writes,

2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

AN APPEAL TO GOD AND THE CORINTHIAN CONSCIENCE (v.11b)

Even though he has been called to this ministry as his life mission as an Apostle, he has been accused of having ulterior motives, making much of himself and using others for his own purposes. In answer to this he writes,

***11b But what we are is known to God,
and I hope it is known also to your conscience.***

Accusers will accuse, haters will hate. But Paul lives with the reality that the all-knowing, perfectly righteous, and holy God knows him inside and out.

Those who accuse Christians and Christian leaders of only using religion for money, power, and status will always exist (and in many cases, have proven to be accurate). But Paul’s life itself is a demonstration that he is not that, but rather a self-sacrificing servant, living with incredible voluntary suffering, not in the lap of luxury. But this isn’t enough for some.

So how does Paul keep on with such accusers constantly nipping at his heels? He strives on knowing that he ultimately stands before the God who judges all, and is

known by Him. What he is doing he is doing for God, and stands accountable before him for all he does in his name.

Which brings him to his testimony before the Corinthian congregation. He writes that he has hope, based on their past knowledge of him, that their consciences will affirm the truth of his ministry despite the accusers and naysayers who have come among them. He is telling them to stop listening to the critical voices, and search their consciences for what they already know about him from their own experience.

A HEART-BASED BOAST (v.12)

He is so desirous that they look into what their consciences say about him as opposed to his accusers, that he writes,

***12 We are not commending ourselves to you again
but giving you cause to boast about us,
so that you may be able to answer those
who boast about outward appearance
not about what is in the heart.***

The word “commending” here means literally “to set together”, how we might say “put the pieces together” to see the whole picture. The idea is a presentation of various evidence to prove something. It is to build a case something. What are the pieces he wants them to put together?

At the beginning of Paul’s ministry, for him to be established as an Apostle, he would need to speak of his special call by Jesus (seeing the other 12 Apostles actually walked with Jesus). He would tell of the fact that he had gone to Jerusalem to meet with the other Apostles, he told them of his seeing the resurrected Jesus, his commission by Jesus, and what he was teaching and preaching about Jesus. As we read in Galatians, he received their commendation.

On top of this, there was the evidence of what God had done through him through miracles, seeing people come to Jesus, and establishing churches. They would have seen his scars, his unwillingness to receive money from the Corinthian church (showing that he wasn’t covetous), plus his repeated unwillingness to make his message more popular by changing it to fit the taste of his hearers. And they know that none of that has changed for Paul

So Paul isn’t going to start from scratch, ground zero, in establishing his apostleship and seeking by further new evidence of his place as an Apostle. Despite the accusations of his opposers, his previous commendation by these evidences should

paint the appropriate picture of him, and should stand in their own consciences if they will but pay attention to them.

Paul goes so far as to say, that instead of his re-examination or re-presentation, the church instead ought to have reason to boast about him and his companions. We typically think of boasting with a negative connotation, something that should not be done. Certainly pride and arrogant boasting should be avoided, but rightful praise and boasting of other’s for commendable attributes is found throughout Scripture, and here in Paul.

Given Paul’s call, life, and ministry, the Corinthians have reason to boast of God’s servant to them rather than willy-nilly believing the accusations of those who oppose him. Instead, they have reason to boast about him to the face of his accusers that a true, Christ-like servant of God has been among them.

What they are really dealing with comes at the end of this verse by way of contrast. There are those who boast about outward appearance versus boasting about what is in the heart.

These hucksters, these peddlers of God’s word, are essentially arguing this way against Paul: “Look at us! Now look at him. Look at our influence, power, abilities, persuasiveness, success, speaking abilities, and accomplishments. Now look at him. Beaten, chased around, homeless, criticized, not particularly gifted in speaking (by their worldly standards).

His churches (including your own) have all these problems, disagreements. He is trying to stifle the freedom of the Spirit in your worship services (1 Corinthians), is confrontational, critical, and even writes angry letters. He boasts of what he will do when he writes, but then shows up and is a demonstration of frailty, weakness, and even leaves when things get heated. He can’t defend himself in person, but instead writes letters because he is a coward.”

Paul says they are judging by the appearance of these false teachers compared to his, but are neglecting what he has demonstrated from his heart. Paul is possibly thinking of 1 Samuel 16, and the comparison of Jesse’s son Eliab (the oldest) and David (who was not even included in the meeting because he was keeping sheep, and was the youngest).

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

A CRAZY OR RATIONAL APOSTLESHIP? (v.13)

***13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God;
if we are in our right mind, it is for you.***

Another accusation that seems to have surfaced is that Paul at times is out of his mind. Various attempts have been made to identify what is meant by this. Three common guesses are (1) his unusual spiritual experiences (referenced in ch.12), (2) the previous letter where he is accused of writing like a madman, or (3) his radical way of suffering (he must be crazy to live that kind of life).

Paul doesn’t disagree that he may very well be beside himself at times, especially in human terms. His relationship with God, His experience of the resurrected Jesus, and His love for the Kingdom of God is by most standards out of the ordinary, thus easily labeled as crazy. The word translated “beside ourselves” means something astonishing, amazing, thrown out of position, or displaced. It means something out of the ordinary from what is the norm. In the eyes of some it looks insane.

In whatever way this is true that he is out of his mind, he says it is for God. His beliefs and way of life in relation to God, and Jesus’ call for him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to travel about, and to suffer to such a degree are all definitely out of step with the ancient world’s (and our world’s) prime directive to take care of #1, to be self-serving and self-preserving.

The way of Paul’s radical life is for God, but in relation to them he says that he is very well in right mind. He is (as the Greek word means) sober-minded. With God his passions are let loose, but for them his passions are self-controlled and moderated for their sake.

Which raises this question: What is it that drives a person like Paul to be out of their mind for God and sober-minded in dealing with people?

THE ALL-CONTROLLING INFLUENCE (v.14a)

14 For the love of Christ controls us,

It is the love of Christ that controls Paul. The word translated “control” can mean “to hold together, compress, arrest, compel, preoccupy, be taken with.” Control makes it sound involuntary, so I think a better translation is compulsion or influence.

Then, the translation “the love of Christ” is structured in the Greek in such a way that can either mean Christ’s love toward him or his love for Christ. So He could be saying that Jesus’ love for him compels him, or his love for Jesus compels him. I’m going to split the difference and say that what he means is that it is Jesus’ love for him, which then invokes his love for Christ, and that is what motivates him to live this kind of radical and sober-minded life.

So what we have is the picture of a man so taken into what Jesus has done for him in love that it awakens his own love, admiration, and praise, and thus energizes him to live.

Paul knows (and we should know) that this is the only thing that will really empower the us to live a life worthy of the Gospel. Not guilt, not shame, not law, but love.

In one of Paul’s primary prayers in another of his letters, we see that this was a large part of what he prayed for believers.

Colossians 3:16 [I pray that] according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The love of Christ for us is the only thing that can generate in us a love for Christ. And in this way we are strengthened and filled with all the fullness of God, another way of describing being full of the Holy Spirit. Then being full, we are able to produce His fruit. This is some of what it means to abide in Christ, deriving our energy from Him.

Is there a particular facet of God’s love that Paul has in mind here? God’s love is expressed in many different ways to us. For instance, His love is displayed in that He has created us, He sustains our life, He gives us good gifts, that though our world is fallen there are still many blessings to be found in it, that He has opened our eyes to see and know Him, that He is a God worthy of our worship. All these are expressions of His love.

But Paul tells something in particular that he has in mind.

THE LIFE-AFTER-DEATH CONCLUSION (v.14b-15)

***because we have concluded this:
that one has died for all, therefore all have died;***

***15 and he died for all,
that those who live might no longer live for themselves
but for him who for their sake died and was raised.***

His conclusion about the love of Christ is this: that Christ died in our place as a substitution for our death, for our sins and just condemnation for them. This display of love, that Christ died for us, is what particularly empowers him and us.

But it doesn’t stop there. Not only did He die so we would not have to die eternally, but lives so that we would live eternally. And this life has a new quality to it. It is not, as is our natural fallen disposition, to live for ourselves. But He died so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the only one who has perfectly loved us and actually died for us. Jesus.

This is one of the greatest summaries of the Christian faith. To be converted, born-again, spiritually raised from the dead is to have a revolution of purpose in our orienting purpose in life. This is what it means to be a part of the new-creation people of God, to live under God’s rule and reign now and forever. It is to die to our self-will, and live for His will, which is infinitely better for us and for others. And only such a love-empowered life is the life which brings Him glory.

APPLICATION

While we are not in Paul’s position as an Apostle trying to defend ourselves from false accusers, there are some things here which we can learn from and apply as modern Christians.

First, a legitimate motive for evangelism, telling others about the good news of Jesus, is the fear of the Lord and the coming judgement. We are told in John 3 that Jesus didn’t come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world could be saved through Him. It is His offer for rescue from coming judgment that forms the good news that we have to share with others. Our primary responsibility is not to go around condemning people, but to announce to them the good news of Jesus’ merciful love.

Second, before we believe the accusations against fellow believers or leaders, we should search our consciences and ask what they tell us about them. A major part of the devil’s work is accusation. But accusation does not necessarily equal guilt. This doesn’t mean that we live naively or ignore accusations completely, but it does mean that our personal experience and conscience should be considered very seriously before we assume that accusations are legitimate.

Third, what matters most in our evaluation of churches, pastors, and influential ministries is not the world’s standards of success, flash, and impressiveness, but the matters of the heart. Is there, from what we can tell, the fruit of the Spirit? Arguably most of the world of God has been sustained by the ordinary, humble, faithful service of God’s people in our fallen world.

Fourth, it is not for us ultimately to judge the apparently “crazy” things that people say they experience in their relationship with the Lord, but whether they deal with God’s people in the rational love. If someone’s “craziness” alienates people, is bombastic, and displays a “my way or the highway” mentality, then something is indeed wrong.

Fifth, we need more than anything else to live a life that is aimed at pleasing the Lord, an immersion in the love of Christ for us. We need our affections and actions changed by that love more than anything else. This should be our frequent prayer for one another. That our strength would come flowing to us from Christ’s love, and then our love to others.

Sixth, if you are a follower of Jesus and have been saved by His death, then you have died already. You have said already, as shown in the picture of baptism, that the old you has been buried with Him. And you now live raised in newness of life so that you and I would live for Him. For us, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

If you are not a Christian this morning, then out of the fear of the Lord I announce to you that God’s judgment is hovering over you. All the good you experience is merely out of his patient mercy. But He has sent His son on a rescue mission and offers your rescue to be brought into the realm of His everlasting love.