

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:1-13:14

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-06-28

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I. Background to 2 Corinthians

Last week we looked at 1 Corinthians, and it was pretty clear from that book that Paul's relationship with the church of Corinth was a very tense and complicated relationship. Let me give you a little bit more background information that will help in understanding this book.

Even though this book is called 2 Corinthians by us, it was actually the fourth letter that Paul had written to them. Paul planted the church on his second missionary journey somewhere around AD 50 with the help of Silas and Timothy. Paul believed in team ministry, not the solo ministry of so many modern church planters. He almost always had a team with him.

Well, his team was there 18 months, and then Paul left the church of Corinth in the hands of its elected leaders. But he kept hearing about problems at the church. He wrote his first letter before he wrote 1 Corinthians. It may or may not have been an inspired letter, but God determined that it was only intended for that church, and not for the canon. There was obviously some misunderstanding of that previous letter, and knowing the kind of new leaders that had snuck into the church, the misunderstanding may have been deliberately created by those leaders - just to show how unreasonable Paul was. And if they didn't create it, they at least capitalized upon it and fanned the gossip and the negativity against Paul.

Paul then wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 55 to clear up quite a few misunderstandings and new questions that had arisen. Sadly, that letter was not received well by the church. Indeed, the leaders implied that Paul had no authority, and told the people that until Paul produced credentials from the mother church, no one should listen to him. So they were displaying a false humility (Paul needs to be in submission to the mother church) when they had no humility. Forget about the fact that Paul planted the church as an apostle directly commissioned by Christ. These leaders were planting slanderous accusations against Paul. So the letter of 1 Corinthians was basically ignored.

But Paul loved them, and he didn't just let this relationship die. He fought for it. So, just as he had threatened, he came to Corinth to deal with their immorality, divisiveness, and other problems that we looked at last week.

That visit did not go well either - to put it mildly. Paul doesn't quite say that he was kicked out on his ear, but it is crystal clear that they rejected him and even mocked him. He was rebuffed and insulted. Paul was not polished, was not eloquent, was definitely not good looking, was poor, and wore clothing that was out of style. Paul was not a "with-it" leader. In contrast, the leaders that Corinth respected were very polished, good looking, very wealthy, successful in the eyes of the world, wowed their audiences with their oratorical abilities, and gave people what they wanted in their preaching. They were very satisfying in their leadership style and they drew the crowds in. I believe Daryl Dash is correct when he says,

... our most common leadership model within the North American church resembles that of the Corinthians. We long for the so-called super-apostles. We want the gifted, the successful, the articulate, the men and women who get things done. Our leaders are allowed to suffer, but only in the past tense. We want winners, people who've beat the odds.¹

In contrast, Paul will speak of true leaders recognizing their weaknesses and he will speak of the suffering of true leaders and the fact that true leaders operate in the wisdom of Christ rather than the wisdom of the world. Continuing the theme of 1 Corinthians, he says that true leaders are consumed with a passion to serve the Lord of glory. Or to use his metaphor from 1 Corinthians - all else fades before the glory cloud in the temple. So there really are two kinds of leaders - the popular leadership style of what Paul sarcastically calls the superapostles and the not-quite-so-fun leadership style of Paul and his team.

So after being rejected at that visit, Paul wrote another letter to them - a letter that we do not have today. That would be the third letter to Corinth. He calls that letter his painful letter, filled with tears; a severe letter. For some reason, the Holy Spirit used that letter (and perhaps the persuasive powers of Titus, since Titus brought that letter) to bring the majority of the church to sincere, deep, sorrowful repentance. Titus is thrilled, and brings news of this repentance back to Paul. He lets Paul know that the majority had excommunicated the man who had committed fornication with his stepmother - at least, that's my interpretation of 2 Corinthians 2,² and had come to recognize Paul's authority and were willing to deal with the other problems in the way that Paul had called them to do. That repentance is described in 7:11-12.

Of course, Titus also told Paul that there was still a minority in the church

1 <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/362999-time-to-rewrite-our-leadership-playbook.html>

2 David Garland also defends the traditional view in David E. Garland, 2 Corinthians, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

that was creating havoc. These superapostles were not pleased at the actions of the majority. The majority was now siding with Paul. So Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write this letter of 2 Corinthians to wrap things up, to assure them of his love, to convince everyone of why the superapostles did not reflect Biblical leadership, and to help move things forward. It is a marvelous tribute to good leadership ministry through extremely tense and complicated times.

And I might as well tell you what happened after that. The letter of 2 Corinthians was carried to Corinth by Titus and another brother either in late AD 55 or more likely in AD 56. In the meantime, Romans 15:19 tells us that Paul visited Illyricum. Then Acts 20:2 says that he came to Greece, at which time he visited Corinth for three months and stayed as a guest of Gaius (according to Romans 16:23). I guess I assume that on that last visit Paul was successful in dealing with the remaining problems at Corinth - especially since the majority were on his side now.

When Paul left Corinth for Jerusalem, he was initially going to do so by ship through Cenchrea. But the Jews discovered those plans and hatched a plot to either kill him in Cenchrea, or if that was not possible, to throw him overboard while on the ship. So Paul (whose plans were constantly changing because of similar plots elsewhere) decided to go to Jerusalem over land rather than via ship. And the first verses of Acts 20 tell us about that. But these kinds of providentially necessitated changes in plan are the very kinds of the things that the superapostles had previously used against Paul - he's not reliable. But in this book Paul defends even this, saying that no one can predict the future. We make our plans and God has the authority to change them. So enough by way of background. But I think you can see that this is a tense and complicated situation that he is dealing with.

II. Overview of book

Thankfully, this book is really easy to outline. Chapters 1-9 constitute Paul's remarks to the majority who had repented and who loved Paul and who now sided with him, while chapters 10-13 constitute his severe words to the minority faction that still had hostility against Paul. The tone of these two sections is radically different.

A. Admonitions to the majority who has sided with Paul (2 Cor. 1-9)

Biblical leadership does not avoid suffering (1:1-11)

We will start with his admonitions to the majority in the first nine chapters. In chapter 1:1-11 we find that Paul does not believe in the health and wealth Gospel. Huh! Imagine that! He does not believe suffering disqualifies us from being a model leader. These verses (and actually, the whole book) constitute the very opposite of the teachings of the health and wealth Gospel. Indeed, without suffering it is doubtful such a leader is really following in the steps of Jesus. Verses 3-4 say,

2Cor. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

What great promises. There are two “all”s in those verses. God is the God of all comfort. All genuine comfort comes from Him. This will introduce a later theme of false comfort versus true comfort. The world has a false comfort that avoids troubles or puts a bandage on them. But God’s comfort is different - it comforts us in the midst of trouble. And we need to make sure that the comfort we give is a comfort that flows from God’s throne. He is the God of all comfort.

He also says that He comforts us in all our tribulation. There is no affliction we will ever face where we cannot also access God’s comfort. And we are doing something wrong if we don’t have that comfort in the midst of our troubles. You see, God does not promise us a tribulation free life, but He does promise comfort in the midst of absolutely every difficulty. As leaders we must learn not to despair. Instead, we need to learn to be like David, who after he lost his wife and everything else that he owned and even had his men turn against him, strengthened himself in the Lord. He found comfort in the Lord.

And why do we go through suffering? Verse 5 tells us it is because we are united with Christ. The remnant church that is suffering needs to immerse itself in the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul says,

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

Romans 8:17 says that the only way you can be an heir with Jesus is if you also suffer with him. In Philippians 3:10 Paul made it his life goal not only to know Christ and the power of His resurrection (that’s the cool part that

everybody quotes), but the rest of the sentence also says that he wants to experience the fellowship of His sufferings. Too many pastors think suffering is wrong, has nothing to do with God, is only from the devil, and they rebuke all suffering. But the Paradox of this book is that if you are a leader who seeks to avoid all suffering God will make you comfortless, whereas if you look to God's grace during your sufferings you will experience the wonder of His supernatural comfort. I know, it is an upside down leadership. But everything in this book continues the themes of 1 Corinthians that the wisdom of Christ is different than the wisdom of the world, and as we stand before the glory of God's presence in His temple, even our views of leadership must be transformed. And this is a book designed to do exactly that - to transform our views of leadership.

We find later in the book that the superapostles had tried to discredit Paul because he was poor, had bad eyesight, had physical maladies from his various beatings, stonings, and other afflictions. They thought, "Obviously God is not for him or he would not be so afflicted." But far from disqualifying Paul, he says that suffering is a necessary qualification for pastoral leadership. You have never been tested for leadership until you go through suffering. Verse 4 says that he comforts us in our tribulation so that we will be able to comfort others who are in any trouble. Suffering actually qualifies us to minister. He says the same thing in verse 6 and in many other verses of this book.

In verse 8 Paul admits that he suffered so severely he thought he was going to die. But in verse 9 he realized that it made him depend upon the God who raises the dead. We are not self-sufficient. Our sufficiency is in God's supernatural power. I don't have the time to do that section justice, but it is a great introduction to a book that overthrows modern evangelical views on leadership and ministry.

Biblical leadership is consistent and faithful (1:12-22)

In verses 12-22 Paul says that true leadership is consistent and faithful. Our yes must be yes and our no must be no - no matter how difficult that may be. This imitates the faithfulness and consistency of God. Verse 20 says, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."

We live in an era where creeds and constitutions that leaders have sworn to uphold are routinely being violated. I say creeds and constitutions because church leaders have taken their vows of office with crossed fingers just as much as civic officers have. We live in an age of leaders who are

chameleons who change with whatever pressures arise. Paul refused to do that. He is modeling for us what Biblical leadership should look like.

Biblical leadership has emotional or relational wisdom (1:23-2:11)

Another thing that I see in Paul is emotional leadership in 1:23-2:11, or what Ken Sande speaks of as relational wisdom. Paul navigates some of the extremely tough and turbulent emotions that were happening in the church with courage, care, and a godly goal. He is not intimidated by the emotions of others, and his own emotions are captivated by Christ's grace. If you just write down all the words related to emotions in that section, you will see that Paul is being very mindful of the emotions that are present. He does not overreact. But neither does he maintain a professional clinical distance - as some leadership books call us to do. He feels for what they are going through. He identifies with them in their pain. He explains his own emotions. And he helps others to get through the turbulence to a solution. If you want some fabulous handouts that can help you to do the same, I highly recommend Ken Sande's new website, rw360.com, which stands for relational wisdom 360. I think Gary said that our church has free access to the training materials on that website through the end of June. I won't have time to dig into this marvelous subject of relational wisdom.

Biblical leadership has the courage to discipline (2:3-11)

But what was it that raised so much emotion? I (with the majority of older commentators) believe it was the discipline of the man in 1 Corinthians 5 - the man who had scandalously married his stepmother. Most modern commentaries think it couldn't be that man because that sin was too heinous for Paul to lift the discipline this soon. They have a false view of discipline. David Garland goes through every argument that has been raised against this identification and shows how coming up with another unknown problem person creates more problems than it solves. But it is really a failure to understand the purpose of discipline that has made these modern commentators offended with such an idea. Let's read the text, beginning at verse 6:

6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, There is debate on whether it is the majority of the leaders or the majority of the congregation. Either way, there were still some (presumably including the superapostles) who hotly contended against this discipline. Which to me is astonishing - that these people thought it was unloving to discipline a man who was married to his stepmother. But a failure to discipline does not love

that man and it does not love the congregation. It is a fake, worldly love. In any case, the majority agreed with the discipline.

And the reason I say it doesn't matter whether it was a majority of the leaders or a majority of the members is because discipline involves both the leadership and the people. Consider the stage of discipline before excommunication that involves shunning a member. When the leaders have called the church to begin shunning a heinous sinner, the whole congregation is morally obligated to have nothing to do with the person. They can't eat with him, golf with him, talk to him. And if they do, they themselves are in rebellion against that discipline. Like Korah and the minority, they are siding with the rebels. On the other hand, those who engage in the shunning are definitely involved in making the discipline effective. So it just illustrates how the leaders and the congregation are all involved.

But the same is true of the stage this man went through of excommunication. Obviously the leaders can remove him from the membership roll all on their own. And they can keep him from the privileges of the floor all on their own, and from voting, from communion, etc. But the congregation itself is also morally obligated to treat that person as an unbeliever outside of the church. This is to make sure that the discipline has its desired effect of bringing repentance. You just don't see much of this in the modern evangelical church. It conflicts with the leadership models they have been trained in.

But verse 7 gives the goal. This man had sincerely repented, and the church did not restore him. They didn't want to invite trouble back in, so they just left him despite his begging to be restored.

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.

The man had repented, but the congregation didn't want him back. Paul told them that since the repentance and restitution was present, they needed to forgive him and welcome him back. This too is counter-intuitive to some people. If you cast a person out and he repents, why bring him back in? He was creating all kinds of trouble. He was badmouthing Paul, was supporting the superapostles, and was being divisive. But the thing is, discipline's purpose is not to get rid of a trouble maker. It is to bring repentance and holiness.

We aren't told how many weeks or months went by, but Paul was indicating that this man was almost being swallowed up by sorrow. Presumably he had divorced his stepmother since that was an unlawful marriage. And Paul indicates that his repentance was sincere. Tertullian was a perfectionist who said he would never take a repentant person like that back in, so he thought

that this was a different person who was being disciplined for a mild issue. But it's not the seriousness of the sin that matters, but the genuineness of the repentance. Verse 8:

8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

That's the goal of all discipline - to welcome a repentant lost sheep back into the arms of the church and to reaffirm our love to the person. But it takes strong leadership to help a congregation navigate those scary waters. Verse 9:

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

Just as discipline was a test, restoration of a sinner is a test. Paul, as a good leader, set a test of the sincerity of the congregation as well. In some of the anarchist groups we are seeing, people bristle when leaders do this. But it just shows the spirit of Korah. Anyway, Paul had been far more hurt by this man's actions than any of them had, so if Paul was willing to forgive, surely they should too. Verse 10:

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.

Previously Satan was taking advantage of them when they were being too lenient. Now Paul says that Satan can take advantage of them for being too strict and harsh. Lack of forgiveness always gives Satan an advantage. And good shepherds will ask you from time to time if you have any people that you need to forgive or ask forgiveness of. We do that because we don't want Satan taking advantage of you. We want your welfare.

Paul's philosophy of ministry (2:12-6:10)

Though there are a lot of other themes, chapter 2:12-6:10 definitely deals with Paul's overarching philosophy of the ministry of leaders.

A God-centered ministry that relies on His triumph, not our strength (2:12-17)

He gives his first principle in chapter 2:12-17 where we see a God-centered ministry that relies on God's power, not ours. Verse 12 says, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord..." It is Christ's Gospel, not ours. It is doors that He opens that we should go through, not doors that we pry open.

And verse 17 says that we should do it not for our own advancement, but as ambassadors for Christ. "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." The New American Commentary gives this comment on the word

“peddling.”

He does not “market” the gospel with an eye for the bottom line. To survive in the marketplace the peddler must adapt to the market either by making sure that he has what people want to buy or by tricking them into thinking that they want to buy what the peddler has to sell.³

That is the essence of the seeker-sensitive church growth movement. It is not God-centered; it is seeker-centered. It is constantly adapting the message and environment of the church to be comfortable for seekers. Paul refused to have that kind of a man-centered Gospel even when it cost him dearly. Who was he accountable to when he preached? To God. In verse 14 he says that he is a bondsman of Jesus who had conquered him and is using him to diffuse the fragrance or aroma of Christ in every place. And he knows not everyone will like his message. In verse 16 he says, “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” But it doesn’t move him that some hated his message. His vision is focused on God when he preaches. And yes, he is a servant to the people, but he is a servant of God to the people.

The true Gospel transforms lives (3:1-18)

The next principle is seen in chapter 3 - that the true Gospel transforms lives. Paul could care less about inflating the numbers, or that people rate him highly in his preaching, or getting likes on Facebook. What he cared about was whether they were being transformed by the Spirit from the inside out. If the Spirit was not accompanying his preaching, no matter how good his oratory, it would fail. So he is calling for a Spirit-empowered and Spirit-dependant leadership. I don’t care how skilled a leader is, if the Spirit of God is not blessing his leadership, it is useless.

And by the way, don’t start tuning out because 2 Corinthians is preaching to preachers. All of us are leaders in some capacity, and all of us need the Spirit’s empowering in our leadership. Even you children have an influence on your siblings and on other children, and you will be held accountable for whether that influence is good and glorifies God or whether it is manipulative and simply glorifies you. So everyone of us can still learn from these principles of Paul’s philosophy of ministry.

It’s obvious in the first verses of chapter 3 that some were questioning Paul’s right to speak. But speak he must because he was a steward of God’s mysteries. And he knew that the Word of God had power to change people into the image of Christ. When the Word of God is quickened to our hearts

3 David E. Garland, 2 Corinthians, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 152.

by the Spirit, there is an impact that it has upon us much like being in God's presence made the face of Moses glow with the radiance of God's glory. Unbelief puts a veil over that glory whereas faith removes the veil and enables us to be transformed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. I wish I had time to preach on that section. It's a marvelous section on the power of the New Covenant.

Christ must be the theme of our ministry (4:1-7)

But let's move to chapter 4, which indicates that Christ must be the central theme of our ministry. When a leader is consumed by God's glory, he is not trying to lure people to church with gimmicks, music, stories, or anything else. His goal is to bring God's Word to bear so that the Spirit will take it and transform people. Look at chapter 4:1-2.

2Cor. 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The New Covenant leader's tool is truth, not gimmicks. There is nothing seeker-friendly about the ministry Paul describes in chapters 3 and 4. It is a God-centered preaching with a God-centered goal. Even if people rejected the message, he does not change his preaching. verses 3-5:

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

There are so many principles that we preachers must embrace in these verses. We do not preach ourselves. We preach as bondservants of Christ with an eye to pleasing Him. We trust that God's sovereignty will harden some and soften others. And we preach Christ and His whole word. But anyone who has been a preacher for very long knows the reality of the power of God's sovereign grace outlined in verse 6.

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Unlike the rock-star preachers who drew attention to themselves, Paul likens himself to an ugly clay pot in verse 7 out of which is shining the treasure of Christ. When you look at that pot, you are not enamored with the pot, but with the treasures of Christ inside the pot. Paul's inadequacies gives us hope. You may see yourself as a poorly made, ugly clay pot, and be discouraged. But if your goal is to showcase the treasures of Christ, all that matters is that you truly showcase the treasures of Christ and not yourself.

Why is Paul giving all of these instructions? Because he wants the leaders in

the majority to realize where they have failed in their leadership and where their leadership needs to be transformed. I obviously don't have time to give as detailed a summary as I have been giving or we won't get through the whole book. But it is a book that deals with what kinds of leadership ministry is consistent with the glory of God in His temple.

Biblical ministry embraces trials (4:8-15)

For example, Biblical ministry doesn't quit when there are trials. Verses 8-10 say,

8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Many leaders quit when the going gets tough, but God says that if we have embraced a true Biblical leadership model, we will keep going despite overwhelming trials, the hatred of culture, and the opposition of men.

Biblical leadership is motivated by other things than worldly leadership (4:16-5:21)

And in the next section (chapter 4:16-5:21) we find what motivated Paul for leadership. How in the world could he keep going on? Well, we find that what motivated Paul is quite different than the things that motivate worldly leaders. I wish I had time to preach on all these motivations. Every one of us leaders would be strengthened if we would embrace these motivations. But let me at least list them with the odd verse or two:

Motivated by an eternal perspective (4:16-18)

First, Paul was motivated by an eternal perspective. I love verses 16-18. Let me read them.

2Cor. 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Motivated by the the resurrection (5:1-8)

Second, Paul was motivated by the resurrection in chapter 5:1-8. Yes, he groaned in this body from time to time, but he reminded himself that even his body mattered to God and would one day be raised. Though he faced constant death threats, his confidence in the afterlife made him not fear death.

Motivated by our future rewards (5:9-10)

Third, he motivated himself in chapter 5:9-10 by the thought of future rewards in heaven. If you knew that for all of eternity you would have a head start in your eternal dominion by the things you do here on earth right now, it would motivate you to strive to please God. I find it sad that so many Reformed people think our only reward is being in heaven and seeing Christ. That is a wonderful reward, but Jesus speaks of laying up treasures in heaven by the things we do right now. Your metaphorical bank account that you start with in heaven could have a balance of zero or could have a balance of millions in it. Where you start in the afterlife is determined by what you do here on earth. Knowing that motivates us to faithfulness. And when the going gets tough, we need all the motivation we can get to keep us trucking. These motivators have constantly spurred me to action despite discouragement.

Motivated by the love of Christ (5:11-18)

Next, he is motivated by the love of Christ in verses 11-18. Verse 14 says, “the love of Christ compels us...” It moves us, drives, motivates us. The more we know of Christ’s love, the more compassion and love we have for others. I preached an entire sermon just on that verse, so I won’t dwell on it, but it is one of the most powerful motivators in my leadership.

Motivated by the reconciling power of the message (5:17-21)

In verses 17-21 he says that he is also motivated by the reconciling power of the message. What could be more exciting than to see sexual abuse victims shake off their past and find full healing in Jesus? What could be more motivating than to see people in chains to pornography freed forever? What could be more motivating than to see broken marriages made whole and better than when they started? Those verses are powerful verses that motivate individuals to holiness and give them hope. But they also motivate us leaders.

Biblical leadership seeks to be clear of legitimate offense in ministry (6:1-10)

In chapter 6:1-10 we see that Biblical leadership seeks to be clear of any legitimate offense in ministry. And I say “legitimate offense” because this section certainly doesn’t indicate that people won’t be offended. The superapostles were super-offended by Paul. The man under discipline was initially very offended. But they were offended for the wrong reasons. Paul was an equal opportunity offender in that sense, but he sought to never

offend God or needlessly offend people. In other words, his goal was not to be abrasive. Instead, he himself endured all kinds of privations and slander for the sake of others. “in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings...” and he goes on to give all kinds of things that he actually said are marks of the ministry. This is not a self-absorbed leadership of the world. This is a leadership that sacrifices for the good of those it is leading. The world sometimes approximates that - especially during wars when soldiers have each other’s backs. But these are the kinds of marks that church leaders are called to. But they really should be the marks that other leaders imitate.

Biblical leaders promote honest relationships (6:11-13)

In verses 11-13 Paul promotes honest relationships. He isn’t content with a superficial niceness.

Biblical leaders are unashamed to preach antithesis (6:14-7:1)

In the rest of the chapter and the first verse of chapter 7 he is unashamed of preaching exactly what God’s Word says, even if it is hateful to the world. Now, this could lead our church to receive persecution, but God calls us to preach this kind of antithesis even if it means stepping on people’s toes. He calls them to be holy and warns them that as members of God’s temple they must separate from all wickedness. I’ll go ahead and read it, because it is fairly self-explanatory:

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” It’s an amazing call to antithesis that the modern church desperately needs to embrace.

Biblical leadership knows how to deal with conflict resolution (7:2-12)

In chapter 7:2-12 we see that Paul knows how to handle conflict resolution. And since I preached on this chapter not too long ago, I will leave that be. But it is a skill that all church leaders need to learn to master. And it is tough. If you still struggle with how to resolve conflict, I would encourage

you to re-listen to that sermon on this chapter.

Biblical leaders are connectional with other leaders (7:13-16)

In verses 13-16 we see that Biblical leaders are connectional with other leaders. We had already seen this earlier in the book. And we constantly see evidence of this in all Paul's epistles and in the book of Acts. Paul was a team leader, and he valued the gifts of others and recognized how they complemented his own weaknesses. Other than the temporary rift with Barnabas over John Mark, Paul was able to work with others - and that despite his having a gruff personality. He worked hard to be connectional.

Biblical leaders do not ignore the issues of finances (8:1-9:15)

Then in chapters 8-9 we have some amazing guidance on tithing, giving above and beyond the tithe, and asking for money for mercy ministries. With all the abuse of money that mega church preachers have sometimes engaged in with their yachts, jets, and multiple houses, other godly leaders have shied away from even talking about money. But that is an overreaction. Paul was not shy about preaching what God's Word had to say about finances in the church. He rebukes them for having mistreated him over the issue of pay. Because of the poor attitudes that they had to giving him a salary, he decided to get pay from the Macedonian churches and not take a dime from them - just to shame them.

But he always centered his discussions of finances on Christ. Verse 9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." He talked about the church that was sending messengers to collect the money as being "messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ." He is trying to help them to have a Christ-centered perspective on their money.

Let me read the most famous verses in this section - chapter 9:6-11.

2Cor. 9:6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

2Cor. 9:10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

You know, I think in some ways we probably have not sought your good in this area sufficiently. And what I mean by this is that we have not preached on stewardship as much as we probably should. It's one of the reasons we have made this whole year be the focus on stewardship - stewardship of the Bible, of our bodies, our children, lands, money, health, intellect, and everything else. We have probably overreacted to the nutsos out there who are always asking for money. But this doesn't have to do with us. It has to do with the joy you can experience as you generously steward everything you are and have for the Lord. The Lord loves to pour much more into those who are faithful stewards and He tends to gradually take away stewardship trust from those who selfishly keep things for themselves. Especially in this year when the elders have been focusing on being better stewards of our time, talents, and everything we are and have, this might be a good chapter for each of you to meditate on deeply. Gary has preached on stewardship of other areas of life. I believe his next sermon will be on stewardship of stuff - and I'm looking forward to that. I find stewardship to be an exciting adventure with the Lord.

B. Admonitions to the minority faction that is still causing trouble (2 Cor. 10-13)

But this brings us to chapters 10-13 where the tone completely changes. Everything has been fairly positive up to this point, but Paul suddenly takes on a severe tone. The tone is so different that some have wondered if this was a totally different letter that Paul has spliced onto the previous chapters. But the simplest explanation that most evangelicals accept is that chapters 1-9 are addressed to the majority who have repented and who have sided with Paul and chapters 10-13 is addressed to the minority faction that has stirred up so much dissension and trouble. And we can learn a lot even from this section that takes on the superapostles who are not really Biblical apostles at all.

Biblical leaders often must deal with slander (10:1-12:21)

In chapter 10:1-12:21 Paul deals with their slander, accusations, and attacks against his character. If it had just been slander from people who were outside the church, he could have ignored it. Almost all leaders have to put up with slander that they can't deal with. But this is a case of slander from within a church that he has jurisdiction over. And if slander from within isn't dealt with, it can spread like a cancer and destroy the church. So he has to answer the slanders. Let me list them fairly quickly.

He answers the charge of cowardice (10:1-2)

He answers the charge of cowardice by telling them not to interpret patience as cowardice. If he has to, he will deal with them severely. And he repeats that idea in chapter 13, where he promises that if they don't mend their ways, he will exercise supernatural power against them. But Paul was slow to pull out all the stops. As a good leader he was patient with personal attacks, but he lets them know that this has gone on long enough and they too will face severe discipline if they don't repent. He patiently tells them that they are going to get hammered if they don't stop.

He answers the charge of walking in the flesh (10:3-6)

In 10:3-9 he answers the charge of walking in the flesh. This is a frequently quoted section from this book. Here is how he denies that charge.

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Interestingly, verse 6 shows that church discipline is one of those weapons that are mighty in God for pulling down strongholds. And I have personally seen God back up discipline in remarkable ways over the years. Sadly, the vast majority of American evangelical churches never exercise discipline. They prefer the carnal tools supplied by the church growth movement. And this book is a corrective of the modern church on a massive scale.

He answers the charge of personal weakness (10:7-11)

In verses 7-11 he answers the charge of personal weakness. They claimed he was writing because he couldn't back up his threats. They are almost daring Paul to do anything with them.

He answers the charge of overstepping his jurisdiction (10:12-18)

In verses 12-18 he answers the charge of overstepping his jurisdiction. Now, jurisdiction is a legitimate point to examine. We leaders must not overstep our jurisdiction. But in their case, it was a bogus charge. And interestingly, these superapostles who lack any jurisdiction are using their influence to challenge Paul's jurisdiction. It's weird. This happens when the spirit of the rebellion of Korah invades churches. Anyway, Paul points out that the superapostles have no jurisdiction, and he knows exactly what his jurisdictional limits are.

Leaders must understand their jurisdictional limits. For example, verse 13 says, "We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of

the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.” He knows his bounded sphere; his bounded jurisdiction that God had given. And each of the other verses deals with one facet or another of jurisdictional issues. We may not overstep a family’s jurisdiction just as the state may not overstep a church’s jurisdiction. Families may not overstep the church’s jurisdiction by baptizing, home churching, or serving communion. God has put those bounds in place. It’s a very important principle that all leaders must know, whether they are in business, church, civics, or other areas of life. But in this case, it was a bogus charge. And by the way, it is a charge that almost always is leveled against legitimate leaders by those who are influenced by the spirit of Jezebel, the spirit of Ahab, or the spirit of Korah. And you will have to review other sermons to know what those spirits are. When you start to see too many of these kinds of accusations begin to examine whether they are guilty of the same things they are accusing others of.

He defends the office of apostle against the superapostles (11:1-12:13)

In 11:1-12:13 he defends the office of apostle against the false apostles who used deceit to gain informal leadership influence over the people. He minces no words in exposing their false credentials and he goes to great lengths to defend his own credentials. In the last decade there have been numerous people who have used the false credentials gained by traction on social media to attack true leaders with true credentials in the church. And it’s important that church members understand these tumultuous times and not be sucked in by the rhetoric of modern superapostles.

He’s even a bit embarrassed to compare himself to them, but since they boast about being Hebrews, ministers, etc., he shows how they really are nothing even when compared on the basis of their own presumptions. In 11:22 and following he says,

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes beyond measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked..."

And he goes on to speak of the enormous sacrifices that he has made to serve the church and to serve Christ. If you want to pit hard work and sacrifice against Paul, the superapostles don’t even measure up.

But those aren’t the credentials Paul is interested in. He prefers not to argue in an ad hominem way, though that is sometimes necessary. We do sometimes have to answer a man according to his folly. But he primarily

sticks to the Bible. He his credentials Scripturally and under Christ.

But the bottom line is that leaders must not be apologetic about their office. Because of so much abuse of the office of elder (and there has been a lot of abuse of the pastoral office in the last century - because of that abuse), there are many who have completely thrown office out the window and with very convincing rhetoric - making you look like you are an abuser if you defend the office. But it is a slander to Scripture and to Christ's name to fail to defend the offices that Christ has instituted. And so Paul vigorously defends his office.

He answers the charges of lack of love and taking advantage of them (12:14-21)

In 12:14-21 he answers the charges of lack of love and taking advantage of them. And he basically shows how manipulative that charge is. How do you even answer that charge? It is so subjective - that Paul does not love us. We don't feel loved by you Paul. Well, Paul basically tells them that with all the loving things and sacrifices that he has made on their behalf he shouldn't really have to prove that he loves them. And he certainly didn't take advantage of them. He didn't even take a salary. Call manipulation what it is. They were being manipulative, and Paul refused to get pulled into that unwinnable game. It is an unwinnable contest. Don't even go there with other people.

The advantages and disadvantages of personal presence versus writing (13:1-14)

But in the last chapters, Paul speaks about the advantages and disadvantages of his being personally present there versus writing letters. Each has its advantages and each has its disadvantages. Commentaries draw those out rather well.

There are actually many papers and books that have drawn out at least a few of the principles of leadership and ministry from 2 Corinthians. But the bottom line is that the leaders that the God of glory establishes must not act like the world. That's the bottom line. They must get their wisdom for leadership from Christ - from the Bible, and they must operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. The two kinds of leadership are worlds apart. One has the power and blessing of the Triune God to back it up and the other has only human skills to back it up.

Pray for us leaders that we would be faithful to our charge to be God-centered in our leadership. And by the way, every one of you lead in some

way. Even you children lead at least one sibling from time to time. The question is, do you lead with the wisdom of Christ? May we all do so. Amen.