

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

“The Danger of Embracing a false Jesus, a false Spirit, and a False Gospel”

August 10, 2014

Sermon Text: Overview of 2Cor

Scripture Reading: Genesis 11

Introduction-

(2Co 11:3) But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(2Co 11:4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

This warning is not just for the Corinthians who lived so many centuries ago. It is a warning to us – that in our flesh, if we are careless and fail to test everything by Scripture, we will “readily enough” put up with a false gospel, being duped by false teachers. This is a constant threat in every era of church history and is very much a danger to us.

As we survey this second letter to the Corinthians, we see that Paul touches upon a number of different topics:

- How God comforted him in his sufferings
- The necessity of forgiving a repentant brother

- The truthfulness and sincerity of Paul as an apostle
- The Old Covenant contrasted with the New Covenant
- Persevering in suffering
- The resurrection body
- The Christian's separation from the world
- Principles of Christian giving and stewardship
- False apostles
- Paul's heavenly vision and the thorn in his flesh

And so the tendency is to read through this letter, or any other of the New Testament letters, look at these individual subjects, derive some applications from them, and feel then that we have really grasped the main message.

But we have not if this is as far as we go. We will have missed the primary "big" picture of 2 Corinthians. There is a REASON why Paul writes about these subjects! Listen very carefully because this is the real message and purpose of 2 Corinthians-

The Apostle Paul is being rejected by some of the Corinthians and false teachers/apostles are being embraced by them. Why? Because the Corinthians' thinking is dominated by this world's wisdom rather than the wisdom of God. They are thinking like carnal people rather than like

spiritual men who are citizens of God's kingdom. So when these false teachers come along speaking and teaching in terms that make sense to the world, these infant Christians are falling for it.

AND SO WILL WE IF WE DO NOT GROW AND MATURE AND THINK LIKE SPIRITUAL MEN!!

There are two false gospels-

- Legalism
- Libertinism

This church has been hit by both over the years. While we were fighting libertinism and encroaching liberalism, legalism crept in the side door. And I say again, as I am about to demonstrate to you from Scripture, the way we become vulnerable to these attacks is by failing to think biblically, like Christ, rather than according to this world's measure of things. We listen to people because we hold them in too much regard. The fear of man really is a snare.

Alright then, let me demonstrate to you that 2 Corinthians (and really so much of the Scriptures) is in fact the Apostle Paul teaching us to think in accordance with God's wisdom and not the world's wisdom. If we can think according to the Spirit as He renews

our minds, then these false teachers will not be able to ensnare us.

2Co 1:3-11 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 affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (5) For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (6) If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (7) Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (8) For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (10) He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us

again. (11) You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Is Paul primarily teaching us about how God comforts us when we suffer? Well, he is teaching that, but his purpose is much more-

Paul is teaching the Corinthians that suffering and being afflicted is the expected result for every Christian and is NOT the mark of failure, as they were being told it was by these false teachers.

We share in Christ's sufferings when we stand for Him in this evil world.

Question: *Do you believe this? What do you think when your or this church are not popular with the mass of this community? What do you think when trouble comes our way? The world will tell you, as will false teachers who creep in among us, that things are very wrong in your church or in your life and that we need to change. Not all that long ago myself and the elders had one of these false brethren tell us "you didn't listen to me! If you had just listened to me! Look at all the trouble." And if we embrace the world's wisdom, we will be led off by these kinds of wolves.*

2Co 1:12-13 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. **(13)** For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—

See, here it is again. Paul contrasts his ministry and words and behavior with that of “earthly wisdom.” In this case, earthly wisdom entails molding and shaping a message so that it is pleasing to people. Paul did not do that. He spoke to them and behaved toward them in truthfulness, sincerity, without equivocation. The world wants the politician. The insincere baby kisser. The rhetoric. They want someone who is bigger than life, that is to say, someone who is not real.

Many churches today have exactly those kinds of teachers and leaders and the people love it so. The money rolls in. Buildings go up. The throngs come. The world and the community around pronounce it all a wonderful success, a real work of God – but it is not. It is, well, it is this –

Gen 11:3-4 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and

bitumen for mortar. **(4)** Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

Babel is what the world wants when it comes to religion, you see. Churches made of mud that are then pronounced as some great work of God. This is from below. It is demonic. It is not from the Lord.

You have it again –

2Co 2:14-17 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. **(15)** For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, **(16)** to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? **(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.

It is the same thing once more. Peddling God's Word. That is the world's way. Peddlers of religion who alter the gospel so that it is appealing

to the masses. So that it smells real fine to the unsaved man. This fleshly aroma comes in the same two familiar packages-

- The stench of libertinism. Lawlessness. Universalism. Do what you like and everyone will have God's approval.
- The stench of legalism – which makes perfect sense to the natural man. Work and work and then God owes you.

Again –

2Co 4:1-2 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. **(2)** But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul continues with his purpose-

2Co 3:1-3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? **(2)** You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. **(3)** And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with

ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

The world likes titles and degrees and references. It equates greatness with a great introduction. "It is my privilege to introduce our speaker to you. He is the pastor of a very large church in a large city, he has written many books, he has two PhD's from Oxford.....". That is greatness in the world's sight and it will be your concept of greatness if you slip into carnal thinking. What kind of an introduction would Paul have been given? How did God the Father introduce His Son to this world? Greatness in God's kingdom is not measured in these worldly terms – by these "letters of recommendation." That is apparently what had happened at Corinth. These false teachers had come into town with their letters and seals recommending them as great men of God, having great position in the church. The Corinthians went for it.

We have far too long been listening to these kinds of great ones and it has gotten the church into a terrible fix. Consider the terrible, false teachings and oppressive teachings that John Piper has spread all over the world. Yet people continue to flock after him, fawning on his every word! Why? Well, because he is a man of "renown," a man of "letters." And he isn't alone. These men and some

women come to us on the radio, in podcasts, in their writings and on the internet, and Christians listen to them with the assumption that everything they say is true because, well, because they have “letters.”

But Paul reminds us as he reminds these Corinthians that it is the Spirit of God changing people’s hearts and giving them life in Christ that is what really matters.

Last week I was talking with Kevin, our son-in-law, who is helping the pastor of a church plant in Victoria, the St. James Bay area. It is a wealthy, liberal, outwardly beautiful, godless place just down the street from the Empress Hotel and all the other attractions you have seen if you ever have been there. So here is this small church bringing Christ to that community. Maybe 30 people. Rented facility. Not long ago one of the key families told the pastor they were throwing it in, giving it up, leaving. Why? Because “the kids want more.”

Now, let’s give this some serious thought. What is it that these parents are teaching their children about Christ? About true greatness in God’s kingdom? About following Christ? About what a true servant of Christ looks like? Well, I can tell you – they are teaching them the world’s answers to these questions. They are equipping

them to follow a false gospel, a false church, a false teacher, a false spirit. Because they are telling them and modeling for them the message “this cannot be a place truly blessed by God. It is too small. There is not enough happening here.”

Here is greatness in God’s kingdom, as Paul continues –

2Co 4:7-18 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (8) We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; (10) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (11) For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So death is at work in us, but life in you. (13) Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, (14) knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. (15) For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends

to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (16) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (17) For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (18) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Question: Do you believe this? Do you, really? Do you believe that a genuine Christian, a real minister of Christ, a real church, is afflicted in every way, perplexed sometimes in wonder about what God's purpose is in all the suffering, struck down, given over to death....do you believe this?

Because, you see, take very careful note of that 18th verse again –

“...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

There is the heart of it, is it not? We MUST look at that which is not seen – by faith! The fleshly man looks at things and measures their greatness or

lack of it by outward appearances. *And never forget, when we think and see in terms of the world and our natural flesh, we become putty in the hands of false teachers.* We slide into carnal libertinism or we fall off the truth into carnal legalism. This is the enemy. It is his way. It is his tactic.

Paul keeps it up-

2Co 5:11-12 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 and not about what is in the heart.

Outward appearance. See it? A false gospel, a false church, a false preacher, a false spirit will look sooo marvelous outwardly. In contrast, listen to Paul tell it once more –

2Co 6:4-13 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, (5) beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; (6) by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; (7) by truthful speech, and

the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; (8) through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; (9) as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; (10) as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. (11) We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. (12) You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. (13) In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

Do you see? The Corinthians, because of their worldly thinking, were restricted in their affections toward Paul. They saw his suffering, his beatings, his being hated by so many, and they were being encouraged by the false teachers to dismiss Paul then as not truly blessed by God. They seemed to skip over the fruit of the Spirit in Paul – his purity, knowledge, patience, kindness and so on – fruits of the Holy Spirit which would have been evidently lacking in the false teachers and should have been a huge clue to them that they were indeed false teachers.

“We are treated as impostors, and yet are true.”

This threat is all around us today. Right now, I would suggest to you, Christ Reformation Church is going through a very similar test given us by the Lord. And if we are careless and we do not walk in the Spirit as He leads us and as He renews our minds so that we understand the will of the Lord more and more perfectly and so that we are able with greater clarity to see Christ and discern His truth from error, then this church may well pass into oblivion. There have been and there are presently many voices out and about – voices of people who profess to be Christians – who would work to convince all of us that a ministry that has suffered as we have over the years and which is no larger than it is – simply cannot be something that is blessed by God.

But apply that thinking to Paul. To Christ. To any of the servants of the Lord that we find in Scripture. Think of the seven churches of Asia-

Rev 2:8-11 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. (9) **"I know your tribulation and your poverty** (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a

synagogue of Satan. (10) Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (11) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

So let me ask you – do you believe this? Do you believe that a church that is small, that is poor, that is going through persecution and that is slandered by many people who claim to be Christians, do you believe that God's blessing is upon such a church, or not? Because if you don't, then you are a plump target all ready to be picked off by the enemy. Just like those Corinthians.

Do you believe that Christ is able to do a wonderful, powerful, effective work through a small, unpopular little church like this one? Listen to Paul again –

2Co 8:1-5 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a

wealth of generosity on their part. (3) For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— (5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Do you see? See it? By His Spirit, the Lord is able to take churches that are undergoing “severe tests of affliction” and bring forth from them overflowing wealth beyond which they are even able to give. First though, such people must (see vs 5) “give themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

Listen to this letter I received this week from a lady who has been abused intensely by a very wicked man for many years-

Hi,
It has been awhile since I've reached out to you but I continue to find comfort and support in your website. Thank you! I am still in the middle of the divorce settlement and in recent months he has only shown in spades the truth of what I suspected. I could write a book. Yet, God has been so faithful and how he has shown himself to me and strengthened me has

far exceeded anything I could imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

The story of Jonathan and David has been persistently in my recent bible studies and on my mind. I don't know what to do with it but I felt compelled to write the attached piece and pass it along. I am continually moved by what I have gleaned from their bond.

You have done more for me on this journey than you will ever know. I thank you for being a warrior for people like me. As I find myself also wanting to be an advocate (though I'm not ready for anything close to your degree!) one of the things I delight in doing is passing along your website in hopes that others will find healing also.

V.

Now please understand, as I try to frequently remind you, that YOU are participants in all of this. The letter could be addressed to all of you because it is this church that does so much to support the A Cry for Justice ministry. Myself and the other ACFJ team members could give you more of these kinds of letters every single week.

And here is even more-

2Co 10:7-10 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident

that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. **(8)** For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. **(9)** I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. **(10) For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."**

See it once more? Outward appearance. The world's false way of measuring what is great, what is true, what is genuine. It will always lead you to embrace that which is false, that which is not Christ, that which is Babel, rather than Christ's true church and Christ's true people. You all have voices all around you luring you, trying to do exactly what these false teachers were trying to do to the Corinthians – draw them away from Christ to a false Christ.

This has happened and is happening to myriads of people who profess to be Christians today. Like Esau, they trade off their birthright for a pot of mush. You must not do the same. We are in desperate need of the renewing of our minds that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by reading to you a description of a true gospel, a true Christian ministry, a true apostle of Christ, from the 11th chapter of 2 Corinthians. As you listen, examine yourself once more. Do you believe this?

2Co 11:16-33 I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. (17) What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. (18) Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. (19) For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! (20) For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. (21) To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. (22) Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. (23) Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. (24) Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty

lashes less one. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; (26) on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; (27) in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (28) And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (29) Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (30) If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (31) The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. (32) At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, (33) but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

Is THIS your estimation of what is true, of what is of Jesus Christ, or not? If it is not, then you are in grave danger of being led off to spiritual shipwreck by the agents of the enemy.