

A GOD WHO IS WORTHY OF PRAISE  
2 Cor. 1:1-11

Intro: If you were going to name the people who have been used in a special way in your life as a Christian, who would you name? I am thinking of people who have helped me to understand the Scriptures, and people who by their lives have been an inspiration to me. All of us are indebted to others to a great degree, and we can be thankful for everyone who has been used by the Lord in our lives.

There have been some people whom I have never known, but whose biographies have been a tremendous blessing to me. I think of Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Robert Murray McChesney, Amy Carmichael, Samuel Rutherford, G. Campbell Morgan, and others.

This is one place where the Word of God meets a special need for all of us. Biographical studies in the Scriptures give us one of the richest sources of truth. Every once in a while I like to bring a message, or a series of messages, on the life of some Biblical person.

Such is the character of 2 Corinthians.

It is the greatest source of information about Paul that we have in the NT. But it is not a study of his life, but of the man himself!

It came about this way.

Paul had written 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. He had written concerning all of the problems that the church was experiencing. He intended to get to Corinth again, but, as he explained in 1 Cor. 16:8, 9, he had been delayed by the "open door" which he had in Ephesus for the Gospel.

He had hoped that Timothy would get there, but this had not materialized either.

Titus had gone to Corinth.

When Paul got to Macedonia he got together with Titus (see 2 Cor. 7) and there received a good report concerning the way his first epistle had been received, and the changes which had followed.

However, a new problem had developed. SOME HAD LAUNCHED A PERSONAL ATTACK UPON THE APOSTLE PAUL HIMSELF. They questioned his apostleship. They misrepresented his motives and his conduct (cf. Angus-Green, p. 695). They pointed out that he had not kept his promise that he would come to them. Instead, they

said that he had used strong language in his letter which he would not even think of using if he had been with them.

Under other circumstances a defence might not have been so necessary, but here it was BECAUSE THE AUTHORITY OF HIS WRITINGS RESTED SQUARELY ON HIS APOSTLESHIP.

So now, in beginning 2 Corinthians, we are setting out on one of the greatest opportunities we will ever have to learn something about the man, Paul, the Apostle, and thus learn more about what a man of God should be, and how he should walk with God!

Note first

#### I. HIS USUAL INTRODUCTION (1:1, 2).

See how he identifies himself. This takes on more meaning as we read the epistle. He wants us to be clear that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ," but not of his own choosing. Instead, "by the will of God."

He wants them to know that this is not just for the church at Corinth, but it is a circular letter to include "all the saints who are in all Achaia"—modern Greece. It shows how the attack on Paul was spreading.

Then he finishes his introduction by using his customary greeting: "Grace . . . peace . . ." Let us not permit it to get common with us. Evidently the child of God has no greater needs—needs which were mentioned first in Num. 6:24-26.

Then, as in Eph. 1:3, and as Peter in 1 Pet. 1:3, as well as in 2 Cor. 11:31, Paul, in spite of all of the troubles gives

#### II. AN EXPRESSION OF HIS PRAISE TO GOD (1:3-11).

In many ways 2 Cor. is like Phil. and 1 Peter. There is a paradoxical mixture of joy and testing. Possibly nothing hurts more than the difficulties which come to us from those we love the most.

But Paul, in spite of the task before him (and it was personally distasteful for him to write about himself), and in spite of all that he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel, actually begins this epistle with a word which is one of the greatest of all commentaries on his life: "BLESSED." "BLESSED BE GOD." "BLESSED BE GOD, EVEN THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST." (Then read the rest of the verse.)

What does he mean by, "Blessed"?

He means that this "God" is without any question whatsoever always worthy of the constant and most exalted praise that we can possibly give Him!

Why?

Because of:

- (1) What He is: "The Father of mercies."
- (2) What He does: as "the God of all comfort"—a key word in this epistle. God is our Paraclete (cf. John 14:16).

Note: Contrast "Father" and "God."

- (3) The extent of his help, consolation, encouragement, and instruction (all included in "comfort").

From this point he is going to move in a circle, and then come back in v. 11 to the point of praise where he is starting in v. 3.

Note first, then,

- A. The extent to which we can expect help from God. See v. 3b. Cf. Phil. 4:19. Spurgeon: "He will either make the burden lighter, or the back stronger; he will limit the need or increase the supply" (Comfort's Assurance, p. 9).
- B. One of the reasons for our sufferings (v. 4).

We become instruments of God's comfort, His help, to other believers who are being tested. BUT WE MUST KEEP IN MIND THAT IT ALL, ULTIMATELY COMES FROM HIM!

Read also vv. 5, 6.

At times our troubles seem more than we can bear, and then His comfort becomes more than sufficient for all of our troubles, and we do not see how we can contain all He gives. Cf. v. 7.

Have you never experienced this?

- C. The reason our sufferings got so intense at times (vv. 8-10).

Just what Paul is talking about, we do not know. But cf. 1 Cor. 15:32; 16:10; Acts 19:23 ff.

Whatever it was, he never expected to survive. He had lit. the answer of death (v. 9). (Explain.) The only hope he had was in the God of resurrection.

So, according to v. 10, he was just living a day at a time. Paul did not know when some mob might take his

life.

So he was learning to trust the Lord in a deeper way, trusting Him day by day, not knowing what a day might bring, but just trusting the Lord to meet his need and to work out His purposes in him.

- D. The way the Corinthian believers had been moved to pray (v. 11).

Listen: "Ye also helping together by prayer for us." Do you think that your prayers are unimportant, your prayers for specific needs (for that is what the word means here)?

Paul indicates that one of the chief reasons for getting many to pray is that then many will praise as they see how marvelously God meets the needs of His own!

Note: They are not telling Him what to do. They are praying about the need, but leaving what needs to be done in His hands.

Concl: How ashamed the Corinthians must have been (or should have been) to read these words from their devoted father in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15). So convinced was he that we should be praising God continually that he looked upon the most difficult circumstances of his life as having been designed by God for that purpose.

What must God have felt when Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15).

Or, what about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou has set up" (Dan. 3:16b-18).

He may not always deliver us from, but He will always be with us through, and His comfort will always be more than enough to meet the need of any trial that will come along.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT OF A FAITHFUL GOD  
2 Cor. 1:12-24

Intro: In introducing 2 Corinthians last Sunday I spoke of it as an autobiography of the Apostle Paul—not so much of his life as of the man!

This makes it an epistle which becomes a kind of a treatise on the Christian life. In 1 Cor. 11:1 he had written, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," but we learn more about what that means in 2 Corinthians than we do in 1 Corinthians.

Last Sunday we learned something about Paul's trials, and why he had suffered as he had, and there are several very important principles which I will not take time to repeat this morning.

But let us look at the verses beginning with verse 12.

Paul had really started his letter praising the Lord (see v. 3), and now it is apparent that he is continuing to praise the Lord in spite of the charges that were being leveled at him.

WHAT, BASICALLY, WAS THE CHARGE?

They were charging him with using "lightness," i.e., being fickle, making his plans and then changing them for no good reason. In short, they were saying that he was unstable. And, they implied in this that, if he were unstable, possibly there was not much to his message either! Cf. v. 17.

Just who was saying these things, we do not know, but it evidently had influenced enough of the church that Paul felt that it was necessary to write about it.

Now, the fact that this was important enough for him to write about it serves to establish a very important principle in God's ways with us. It is this: WHAT WE ARE WILL, IN THE MINDS OF PEOPLE, ALWAYS BE RELATED TO THE MESSAGE WE PREACH. IF PEOPLE CANNOT RESPECT US, IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL IF THEY WILL HAVE AN EAR FOR WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY!

This is why the Word of God has more to say about what we are than about how we are to serve the Lord.

Such a charge struck right at the foundation of Paul's ministry. If what some were saying about him were really true, serious questions were raised concerning the claims of the Apostle to be an apostle, and upon his entire ministry wherever he may have gone.

Therefore, if you and I are to learn from the Apostle Paul at this point we must realize that it made a great deal of difference to him if people questioned his sincerity.

And so he writes.

But how does he write? Just like he started his letter—rejoicing! Let us see why.

It can be expressed in five words: "the testimony of our conscience" (v. 12).

If you study the Greek of the New Testament you find that there are many words which were used by the Greeks which seem to have been adopted, and then exalted to a much higher meaning, by the Holy Spirit.

This is true of the word conscience. It became a favorite word with the Apostle Paul. He used it when he was speaking before the Roman governor, Felix.

"And in this do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

To the Greeks this meant for a man to sit in judgment on himself!

Paul evidently recognized in this what God had done in the heart of man in order to protect him from doing the wrong thing. This was His whole approach to Cain in Genesis 4.

The Apostle John spoke of it in another way. He said, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21).

Paul talks about those in the last days who will have "their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2), and in Eph. 4:19 he writes about those "who, being past feeling, have given themselves over" to all kinds of gross sins.

But in neither passage is he talking about the child of God! The Spirit of God will never let a child of God get completely unresponsive to his conscience. Cf. Lot in Gen. 19.

What kind of a testimony did Paul's conscience give? We are about to see why we can call him, A FAITHFUL SERVANT OF A FAITHFUL GOD.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS CONSCIENCE CONCERNING THE LIFE HE HAD BEEN LIVING (v. 12).

To have your conversation means that you have lived accord-

ing to certain basic principles. Let us see what they were.

- A. Everything was examined in the light of the Word of God.

This is really the meaning of "godly sincerity," or more literally, the sincerity of God. It describes bringing something out into the light and finding it to be pure.

And with this he speaks of "simplicity," singleness of purpose. Cf. Matt. 6:22; Jas. 1:8.

Paul was "an apostle by the will of God," and doing that will was all that he was concerned about.

What about us? Can we spread our lives out, so to speak, in the sunlight of the Word of God, and know that we are doing the right things, and saying the right things?

- B. He sought to do everything in dependence upon "the grace of God."

IF YOU AND I COULD ONLY UNDERSTAND ALL THAT PAUL UNDERSTOOD BY THE TERM, "THE GRACE OF GOD," OUR GROWTH WOULD BE PHENOMENAL!

Here he seems to be contrasting God's way with man's way—the enabling grace of God with the limited and faulty wisdom of man.

Think of all that he said about this in 1 Cor. 1, 2.

Some of the Corinthians were saying, "You make your own plans. You do what you want to do. You talk like a man of God, but you live like a man of the world."

Nothing could have cut him more deeply because it struck at the message as well as at the man!

- C. He lived just the same way before the world that he did before believers, but he was especially careful before believers.

Do you have two standards? Do you think that you have to be one way in the world if you are to reach the world, and another way in the church when you are with the people of God? Or do you think that you can exercise greater laxity just because you are with the people of God?

If you do, then your life is different from that of the Apostle Paul.

But now let us look at v. 13 where we have

II. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS CONSCIENCE CONCERNING HIS MINISTRY TO THE CORINTHIANS (v. 13).

Is this not a strange statement, "For we write no other things unto you than what ye read"? Why would he say this? Because some were saying that Paul says one thing, but he means another. You have to look for some hidden motive or meaning behind what he writes.

He is talking about this epistle, and it reminds us that there are always people who in reading the Word of God will pass over the obvious meaning to try to find something obscure (which is usually ridiculous).

In reading the Word, don't always be looking for something under the surface while you ignore that which is right on top!

More than this, Paul says, "Ye . . . acknowledge," that is, you not only are well acquainted with it, but you have accepted it as true!

Have you ever noticed how much of the Word is a re-statement of what the people of God have already been taught? John said,

"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

Or read what Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 1:12-15.

We need never apologize for the truth, and we dare not substitute anything for the truth, nor must we ever feel that it is inconsistent with the leading of the Spirit to talk to believers about the very truths they know the best!

The unchanging character of the truth is apparent when he writes, "And I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end."

III. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS CONSCIENCE CONCERNING HIS LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD (v. 14).

They were trying to say that Paul did not love them as he claimed he did, and that they should not therefore love him.

Note how he answers this.



"The day of the Lord Jesus" is the rapture, the day when the Lord comes for the Church.

When Paul wrote about this to the Thessalónian church, he said, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"Together." What a marvelous word!

What is going to make us joyful when the Lord returns?

Of course, seeing Him Who gave Himself for us. But also seeing one another. Read 1 Thess. 2:19, 20,

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Or Phil. 2:16,

"Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain."

Concl: What lessons there are in these verses for you and for me! How wonderful it would be if we could all become followers of the Apostle Paul as he was of the Lord!

No one who stands for the Gospel and who seeks to live for the Lord is going to escape the opposition of the enemy--and sometimes it comes from within the church itself. But, when it does come, how wonderful to be able to call your conscience to the stand and rejoice because--

- you have lived as He has taught you in His Word,
- you have not turned aside from the Word of God in your witness, and
- you have placed the spiritual blessing of the Lord's people before every other interest you might have in your life.

This constitutes any child of God, A FAITHFUL SERVANT OF A FAITHFUL GOD.

A DIVINE GUARANTEE  
2 Cor. 1:17-22

Intro: Paul was a man who suffered in his ministry from those who were opposed to the Gospel of Christ, BUT HIS GREATEST SUFFERING (at least in his own heart) CAME AS A RESULT OF THE OPPOSITION OF THOSE WHO WERE HIS FELLOW-BELIEVERS!

He has shown us how his sufferings had been used to help in his ministry to the Corinthians (vv. 3-11).

Then, last Sunday, we saw how clear his conscience was before God in connection with:

- (1) the life he had lived before them (v. 12),
- (2) the ministry he had had with them (v. 13), and
- (3) the way he delighted in them as he anticipated "the day of the Lord Jesus" (v. 14).

From this point he goes on to face the accusation that some had brought against him--that he was changeable, fickle, because he had said that he was coming to them, but so far they had not seen him.

Paul says in vv. 15, 16 that he had planned to come, not once, but two times.

But there was one thing about this accusation which cut like a knife. It was this: THEY WERE SAYING THAT IF HE COULD SAY "YES" WHEN HE MEANT "NO" ABOUT HIS PLANS, HOW COULD THEY BE SURE THAT HIS PREACHING WAS RELIABLE. MAYBE HE DID THIS IN HIS PREACHING TOO!

It seems that "yea" and "nay" is used to express contradictions--that the Apostle would say one thing one time, but say something else another time.

How could Paul reassure the Corinthians that his message was true, and always the same?

He cites four proofs which constitute A DIVINE GUARANTEE.

- I. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (v. 18). Cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13. (The literal translation of "true" is faithful.)

This evidently, from the way it is emphasized in the NT, was one of the things which amazed and delighted the hearts of heathen Gentiles who had "turned to God from idols" (1 Th. 1:9b). He was One who could be trusted, one who was always dependable in the dealings which the Corinthians had had with Him!

We may see plenty of needs in the lives of those who preach the Gospel, but you will never discover any unfaithfulness, any lack of dependability, any failure, IN GOD!

So, Paul says, our preaching to you was not yes and no, but it was consistently the same.

II. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST (v. 19)--and the harmony which could be observed in the preaching of Paul as compared with that of Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy.

Paul does not refer to the Gospel of which Jesus Christ is the theme, but he speaks of "the Son of God, Jesus Christ" as being the very heart of the Gospel.

What did Paul preach about Jesus Christ?

That He was "the Son of God." Did he ever preach that He was anything different--either before His incarnation, or during His earthly life, or after His ascension? Absolutely not!

What did Silas preach about Jesus Christ?

The very same thing that Paul did.

What did Timothy preach about Jesus Christ?

The very same thing that Paul and Silas did--that He always had been and always will be "the Son of God."

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8)--always Deity, always the Son of God.

Just as there is nothing changeable about God, neither is there anything changeable about Jesus Christ!

And those who declare the Deity of Jesus Christ will always say the same things about Him. Cf. the same issue in Gal. 2:2, 6.

We have an unchanging Gospel because we have an unchanging Savior, "Jesus Christ" who is "the Son of God."

III. THE WORD OF GOD (v. 20).

The Greek here, instead of reading "all the promises," should be translated, as many promises (as had been given by God concerning salvation--because this is the subject under consideration here). ALL OF THE PROMISES WHICH GOD GAVE CONCERNING OUR SALVATION HAVE FOUND THEIR FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST!

Think how this applied to the very first promise given in the Scriptures: Gen. 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

How do you think Moses explained that?

But follow it on down. In Isa. 7:14, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

That verse is still so unbelievable to men that they are continuing to attempt to do away with the virgin birth of Christ!

What finally happened?

Read Luke 1:26, And . . . the angel, Gabriel, was sent from God . . . to a virgin . . . and the virgin's name was Mary" (v. 27). "And the angel said unto her, . . . thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS" (vv. 30, 31). And this is exactly what happened!

It is the same with every promise, and any Gentile or Jew who would like to check the record and can only come up with a Gentile "yea" or a Jewish "Amen."

God's promises are always the same, and they all point to Christ!

Finally, Paul speaks of

#### IV. SALVATION AS A WORK OF GOD (vv. 21, 22).

You will always find many differences among Christians. Our devotion to the Lord is different. Our spiritual growth is different. Our understanding of the Word of God is different. And so on and on . . .

BUT--THE WORK OF SALVATION ITSELF IS IDENTICALLY THE SAME FOR EVERY CHILD OF GOD. It is the same for all of us who are here this morning. It is the same for every Christian in the world today. It was the same for all who have received Christ from NT times down to the present--and that is what Paul wants these Corinthian Christians to recognize.

They have the same blessings in salvation that he does! He did not claim a special kind of salvation for himself. God only has one way of salvation. So it is not one thing at one time, and another thing at another time!

Look at the verbs he uses here.

- (1) The first one, "establisheth," describes something which God is continuously doing for us.
- (2) The next three, "anointed . . . sealed . . . and given the earnest" all are once-for-all acts of God AND THEY HAVE TO DO WITH THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION.

To establish us God is keeping us secure, making us steadfast--not allowing anything to happen to our salvation.

Is it not amazing that there has never been any person who has really been born again who has ever lost their salvation?

Every one of us have been anointed by the Spirit of God --to qualify us to serve the Lord. Every one of us has been sealed--He has placed His mark on us indicating that we belong to Him. Every one of us has been "given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," the earnest money, so to speak, guaranteeing that one day we will enter fully into all that salvation means--when we will be like Christ!

This has not changed, and it will not change. Paul preached only one way of salvation for all--and the Corinthians knew it, and believed just as Paul did!

Concl: I can imagine that the Corinthians who had brought the charges of instability against Paul and against his preaching wished that they had never said anything. You are not generally going to find that an unstable person preaches such stable truth!

A guarantee is no better than those who make it.

Who makes this guarantee, this divine guarantee?

- (1) A faithful God.
- (2) Jesus Christ, "the Son of God."
- (3) The Holy Spirit.

And it is all written out, so there need be no mistake, in the Word of God.

What glorious truth this is to bring us to the Lord's table.

RESTORING A CHRISTIAN WHO SINS  
2 Cor. 1:23-2:11

Intro: My subject this morning is: Restoring A Christian Who Sins.

I have chosen this subject because it expresses the main ideas in the Scripture we have read this morning.

First, we learn from this passage, as well as from many, many others, that it is possible for a Christian to sin. I do not say that he must sin, but that he can sin. There is no teaching in the Bible that we will ever get beyond this possibility until we get to heaven.

Secondly, we learn that there is something for every believer to do when another Christian sins--especially when we belong to the same local church ministry. Sin in the life of even one Christian has a disruptive effect upon the whole Church. We see this very clearly in 1 Corinthians, and it appears again in 2 Corinthians.

Third, our primary objective when any child of God sins is to see that believer restored to fellowship with God, and with the people of God. Paul wrote to the Galatian churches:

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

There is almost universal agreement among those who have studied 1 and 2 Corinthians that the person the Apostle Paul is talking about here is the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5--the fornicator who had gotten involved with his stepmother (or possibly with his own mother)! Even the non-Christian Gentiles outside of the Church had been shocked by the scandal within the Church. And Paul had advised that the strongest possible measures be taken against the man. (We must remember that there is nothing inconsistent between discipline by the Church and the restoration of the sinner. Nowhere in the Bible do we learn that sin is to be coddled, excused, or overlooked.)

The sin of this man had caused added trouble between Paul and the Corinthian Church--as we can see by the way Paul leads up to this. He first answers the accusations that he made his plans in a fickle manner, and then went on to answer the charges about his teaching.

It is on the subject of his teaching that we must begin this morning.

I. IN RESTORING A CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SINNED WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT IT IS IN THE BIBLE THAT WE LEARN WHAT THINGS ARE SIN.

Some were evidently saying that Paul was setting himself up as THE authority!

He, as an Apostle, had a right to do so, but not in this case. Read v. 24a (of ch. ), "Not for that we have dominion over your faith."

What does he mean?

In the original it means, I am not your Lord so that I have the right to originate what you are to believe and to decide how you are to live!

So often one who teaches the Word of God is charged with interfering in other people's lives, or a church that stands for the Word of God will be accused this way. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16).

We need to be sure that we are teaching the Word of God, but, being sure, we should be confident and faithful in our teaching. People need to know, "Thus saith the Lord"!

The Church does not determine what sin is. Christians do not determine it. Tradition is not our authority. GOD IS! AND HE HAS SPOKEN IN HIS WORD! If I did not believe this, I would not be in the ministry.

II. IN RESTORING A CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SINNED WE MUST NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST SIN.

When you read from 1:23 down through 2:5 you can see how it grieved Paul to write 1 Corinthians, and how it grieved the Corinthian Church to read it.

He had written about it hoping that the situation would be cleared up before he returned, and he had delayed his visit to give them time to clear it up. He hated to think about going to Corinth to face such a tragic situation in the Church.

Well, but someone says, could not Paul have just left it alone, and everyone would have been a lot better off?

The answer is, NO! And in this connection I want to

call your attention to the way Paul describes his ministry here. He says we are "helpers of your joy." Cf. what our Lord said in John 15:11. PAUL BELIEVED THAT HE WAS TO MINISTER FOR THE "JOY," THE BLESSING, OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Joy, blessing, is never the result of sin. Therefore, when sin comes along this is a threat to the "joy" of God's people, and one who is a faithful servant of the Lord must speak out.

BUT--and this is so important--HE WILL ALWAYS BE JUST AS CONCERNED ABOUT HOW HE DOES IT AS HE WILL BE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT HE DOES.

Notice the tenderness of his heart in this section. He even tells them in the latter part of v. 4 that no one loves them like he does!

We need to speak the truth, but we need to speak the truth in love.

Let us note that, although this is not specifically mentioned, we can assume that this man had broken the sinful relationship that he had been involved in, and that he had turned to the Lord for forgiveness. What Paul says in v. 6 ff. would be meaningless if this had not been the case.

Therefore,

### III. IN RESTORING A CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SINNED WE MUST BE PREPARED TO FORGIVE THEM AND TO RESTORE THEM BACK TO FELLOWSHIP IN THE CHURCH.

Let us see why.

- A. While he needs to seek the Lord's forgiveness first, he also needs to be forgiven by the Lord's people-- and to be sure of it.

We must forgive . . . comfort . . . confirm.

"Forgive" is a word related to grace. "Comfort" indicates a paraclete, one called to another's side to give help. "Confirm" is something done publicly and permanently.

This will keep him from being "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." Failure to be accepted by the Lord's people can drive even a believer to despair. So the Church has a tremendous responsibility. How hard it is for sinning Christians to get back "in."

- B. It will prove the genuineness of the Church. Cf.



v. 9. "The proof." This is a word which is used in distinguishing genuine coins from the counterfeit.

What marks out a group of the Lord's people as being genuine? One thing above everything else: a readiness to obey the Word of God regardless!

So this was a test for the Corinthians Church. It always is--when we are compelled to deal with Christians who have sinned.

But there are two other reasons.

- C. It is what the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to do. Cf. v. 10. Paul is willing to forgive, and he does so, not "in the person of Christ," but as in the presence of Christ.

Who is "Christ"? Why does not Paul speak of the Father?

Because "it is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

The Lord was present in Corinth, watching to see what the Corinthians would do with the prodigal, and when they forgave him, the Lord was pleased!

Can you not see the reason that Paul had mentioned that every believer, even prodigals, are "anointed . . . sealed . . ." and have "the earnest of the Spirit" in their hearts--and so are established, secure.

What a passage on the security of the saints!

Now for the final point. We must be ready to forgive because

- D. Satan is standing by to "get an advantage of us," i.e., to take possession of something which is not his.

Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his devices," his thoughts, his purposes. But so many of us are!

Who is "Satan"? He is an adversary. He is the Devil. Paul believed in a personal, living Devil

who is always waiting around to take advantage of any situation involving the people of God. And when we refuse to forgive, he moves in!

Concl: Tell the story of the Prodigal Son which appeared in the Young Life magazine, July 1967 (filed in Luke file).

Our Lord told a story like that in Luke 15:11-24.

There are many prodigals, but how sad when a child of God gets into sin!

Perhaps there is a prodigal here this morning. You know you are a child of God, but somewhere along the line you got into sin. Maybe you are here this morning because you have said in your heart, "I will arise and go to my Father . . ." If so, he is waiting. If you will confess and forsake your sin, He will forgive and receive you back into his fellowship.

Or perhaps there are some of us who are dealing with prodigals who want to come back. The Lord has forgiven them. But we have not!

Then our chapter for this morning is God's message to you, and may the Lord use it in all of our lives to keep us walking with Him, and with each other!

BEGIN WITH  
EPH. 4:11, 12.

A TRIUMPHANT MINISTRY  
2 Cor. 2:12-17

Intro: Paul has been explaining to the Corinthian church that his failure to visit them again had not been due to any lack of love for them. He had been so concerned about the sin that was in the church that he wanted to give them time to correct it--if they would.

In vv. 12, 13 he tells them how the Lord had opened a door to him in Troas, but in spite of this he had gone on to Macedonia because he was so anxious to hear about the Corinthians from Titus.

The report was good--but he does not tell us about it until chapter 7, verses 5-16.

This is why Charles Hodge speaks of "the impulsive character of this epistle" (p. 43). Because, instead of speaking of the report (which they themselves knew as well as he), he turns again to speak of the ministry!

This is one of those very important passages (vv. 14-17) in which we see Paul's understanding of the work that God had committed to his hands. HE HAD SEEN BLESSING IN EPHESUS (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8, 9). THEN HE HAD SEEN THE LORD'S HAND IN TROAS. AND, THROUGH HIS FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, HE HAD SEEN GOD AT WORK IN CORINTH. At this point he is so overwhelmed with the triumphs of the Lord that he can hardly contain himself.

We can see from 1 and 2 Corinthians that triumph did not mean a lack of opposition, nor a lack of difficulty, because there was plenty of both. BUT IN SPITE OF THE DIFFICULTIES, HE WAS ENJOYING THE BLESSING OF GOD.

Why?

Have we ever stopped to ask ourselves why God blessed Paul as he did?

Sometimes we can see that God raises men up for special times of ministry. This is very true. BUT WE CAN ALSO SEE THAT THOSE MEN WHO ARE BLESSED OF GOD IN A SPECIAL WAY ARE MEN WHO HAVE LEARNED CERTAIN TRUTHS FROM THE LORD AND WHO, BY HIS GRACE, HAVE ACTED ON THOSE TRUTHS.

What were the truths, the principles, upon which the ministry of Paul, the Apostle, was founded? We may not be used as Paul was, but if we are to be used of God at all we must know what these principles are, and then act in accordance with them.

- I. It almost seems so simple to mention, but THE WORK OF THE LORD IS A WORK WHICH THE LORD DOES--not just men working in their own energy and wisdom. Note the emphasis upon the Lord in v. 14.

The Lord is the only One who is deserving of the glory.

He is the One who makes himself known by us in an unmistakable and fragrant way "in every place." He always leads us in triumph in Christ.

The greatest evidence that we have today that God lives and can change the lives of men, meeting their every need, is the Christian!

We cannot do this. If we try to, we only fail--and fail miserably. BUT IN WAYS WHICH WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE LORD IS ALWAYS SEEKING TO REVEAL HIMSELF THROUGH US--"maketh manifest."

If we think that the Lord's work is something primarily which we do for the Lord, then we are not going to see the Lord working through us, revealing Himself, as He so wants to do.

This is the first thing.

## II. WE MUST UNDERSTAND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

It is seen in the expression, "which always causeth us to triumph in Christ," or better, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Paul is using an illustration well-known to those who lived in the Roman Empire. When a military leader had been victorious in battle, he celebrated that victory by marching his captives through the streets. But THERE IS A DIFFERENCE WHICH THE LORD CAPTURES MEN, AND GAINS THE VICTORY OVER THEM (through salvation). His captives not only are triumphed over, but they join Him as He claims victories over the lives of others.

And Paul had experienced the victories of God's grace everywhere he had gone. Cf. Rom. 1:16.

Why is it that we do not have this conception of the Gospel today? If man is really like he is pictured to be in Romans 1-3 (and he is), then nothing but the mighty power of Christ could even make him want to trust the Lord as his Savior.

But there is another thing here.

III. WHAT WE ARE TO GOD DETERMINES WHAT WE ARE TO MEN. Read vv. 15, 16.

There are just two kinds of people in the world, and Paul mentions them here: lit., those who are being saved, and those who are perishing.

It is God's desire that we have a ministry to both.

But notice: "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ!"

THE ONE THING THAT DELIGHTS GOD ABOUT US IS WHAT HE SEES IN US THAT REMINDS HIM OF HIS SON, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Oh, that we might only learn this. Cf. Matt. 3:17b, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," in whom I find all my delight!

All of God's delight is in His Son.

Therefore, if God is going to work in us He is going to manifest those things to men--the things of Christ.

To those who are being saved it will lead to growth and progress in that salvation. They will become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

To those who are perishing, it will mean added confirmation that they are walking in the way that leads to eternal death--that possibly they might be aroused to their need of Christ, and receive Him as Savior. Or, with the thought of this passage, ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE TAKEN CAPTIVE BY GOD'S WONDERFUL SON!

Is it any wonder that at the end of v. 16 he seems completely overwhelmed by such a ministry? No man can be sufficient in himself, but he will show in ch. 3 how God can make us sufficient for such a ministry. But at this point it seems that NO ONE COULD POSSIBLY ACCOMPLISH SUCH A WORK.

However, in our last verse (v. 17) he gives the final point that I want to mention this morning. It is this:

IV. IF GOD IS GOING TO TRIUMPH IN THE LIVES OF MEN IT WILL BE BECAUSE HE IS ABLE TO WORK THROUGH HIS WORD (v. 17).

This is why there is always great opposition to the inspiration of Scripture!

It is only through the Word that men can hear the truth about Christ.

It is only through the Word that men can be saved--through the Gospel of Christ.

It is only through the Word that we who are Christians will grow in the Lord.

WITHOUT THE WORD WE WOULD <sup>BE</sup> SURE OF NOTHING!

This is why Central Bible Church is dedicated to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God!

Let us notice how Paul speaks of it, and learn from him!

- A. Paul never corrupted the Word of God, that is, he never watered it down to make it more acceptable to men, nor did he use it to serve his own purposes

"Many" were misusing the Word, and "many" misuse it today. NO MAN HAS THIS RIGHT, AND NO CHILD OF GOD SHOULD TOLERATE SUCH MISUSE!

- B. "Of sincerity." Paul is speaking here about his own life. He had no subtle motive for preaching the Word. He only wanted to see men come to Christ, and then be built up in the faith.
- C. "Of God." He never allowed himself to forget where his message came from. We speak of Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, BUT IN REALITY IT IS GOD'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS--and to us!

Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

- D. "In the sight of God."

Paul never forgot about the presence of God. Do we--especially where the ministry of the Word is concerned.

God is here this morning, and He is vitally concerned about I am saying to you.

- Ill. Seminary professors listening to our preaching and to our praying.

Cf. Mark 6:30.

Finally

E. "Speak we in Christ" - in union with Him, in dependence upon Him.

Without Him we can do nothing; with Him, we can do all things. Cf. John 15:5b; Phil. 4:13.

Concl: What a passage! Can you not sense the complete joy (and amazement) of the Apostle Paul at the way he had seen the Lord work? He never ceased to be amazed at what God did, nor did he hesitate to give God all of the glory!

What was the reason? It was to be seen in Paul's love for God, his love for the Lord Jesus, and his love for the Word of God!

We are facing terrific opposition to the Gospel these days on every hand. But we have no right to change the plan.

GOD IS AT WORK. There is no doubt about this.

GOD IS SEEKING TO MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN THROUGH HIS PEOPLE. There is no doubt about this.

GOD WORKS AS HE ALWAYS HAS WORKED--THROUGH HIS WORD. There is no doubt about this.

If we will act on these great, divine principles, then we will see the Lord work in our day as He has in past days--and the need has never been greater, never more urgent!

THE EPISTLE OF CHRIST, AND OF PAUL  
2 Cor. 3:1-3

Intro: Letters of commendation were well-known in the early Church. We have one example in 1 Cor. 16:10; another in 2 Cor. 8:22, 23.

Paul was being forced by his opponents into a position where he was forced to write a letter of commendation for himself—a thing which was most distasteful to him!

From v. 1 we see that he felt himself to be in the position of one who had never been to Corinth, instead of being the one who had brought the Gospel to them. Must he get letters of commendation before they would accept him? Or, should he get letters of commendation from them before he could expect to minister in other places?

It was just as though they were the ones who were determining IF and WHERE he should minister.

By the very nature of the latter part of this chapter it would seem that at least some of Paul's opponents were Jews who, although they professed faith in Christ, had never quite entered into a full understanding of the grace of God.

However, in spite of the deep way Paul must have felt the charges which were intended to undermine him in the eyes of all believers, he manifests here that he knew not only how to preach grace, but how to manifest grace.

After all, what is the greatest proof that every generation can SEE that the Gospel of Christ is the message which is capable of meeting the needs of men?

It is seen in the words: "Ye are our epistle . . . ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ" (vv. 2, 3).

What was Paul's letter of commendation? **THEY WERE.**

What was our Lord's letter of commendation? **THEY WERE.**

Note that here, as in the latter part of chapter 2, we have the Apostle Paul setting before us certain aspects of the ministry.

Let us think, first of all, of

I. The Epistle.

The Epistle is people, the people of God, those who by faith in Christ have become new creatures. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21.



Although God has many purposes for His people, one is that they might be used to convey a message. They can be read even though they do not speak.

A letter never makes a sound, but it can convey any kind of a message.

## II. The Writers of the Epistle.

We have already seen that two names have been linked with the Corinthian Christians when we think of them as an epistle. They are the epistle of Paul, and the epistle of Christ.

Now we want to add a third name: "the Spirit of the living God."

So this letter very definitely has a divine side, but it also has a human side.

How do we relate the two?

Paul indicates this when he writes, "ministered by us," because he uses a word which indicates that he is only a servant who is doing the work which another has bidden him do.

All three Persons of the Godhead are involved in this work, but Paul is preparing to emphasize the ministry of the One we refer to as the Third Person: the Holy Spirit.

He is in no sense inferior, or different. He has been mentioned only once so far in this epistle. Cf. 1:22. BUT NOW PAUL IS PREPARING TO SAY A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HIM. Cf. 3:6, 8, 17, 18.

They are Paul's epistle because he was the human instrument whom God used.

They are "the epistle of Christ" because apart from Him nothing could be done. Paul came to Corinth to tell them about the Lord Jesus Christ, and what He could do for them if they would only trust Him.

But it was "the Spirit of the living God" who empowered that message so that many of the Corinthians were brought to Christ.

Therefore, it can be said that no message has ever been given which has been written like that which can be read in the people of God.

### III. Where the Epistle Has been Written.

I am not thinking about the place, such as Corinth, BUT WHERE IN THE CORINTHIANS THEMSELVES DO YOU FIND THIS LETTER that Paul is talking about?

He mentions two places:

- 1) "Written in our hearts."
- 2) "Written . . . in fleshly tables of the heart," or, as Hodge has translated it, "on tables which are hearts of flesh" (p. 52).

In other words, this is not some outward performance which is completely external. This is a letter written where a transforming and genuine work can be done: in the heart.

They had been written in Paul's heart as he was being used by the Spirit of God to write the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their hearts.

What man in his right mind would even pretend to be capable of such a work? The Spirit of God must do this, or the epistle will never be written. There will be nothing to read.

### IV. The Readers of this Epistle.

The Corinthian epistles were written primarily for the Corinthians. FOR WHOM WAS THIS EPISTLE WRITTEN . . . the epistle which commends, which proves that the ministry of Christ was genuine, and that the ministry of Paul was equally genuine?

Here is our answer: "known and read of all men."

See also: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ." Cf. 2:14.

This does not mean that all men can read it, but that all men do read it. IF YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD, YOU CANNOT CONCEAL THE FACT. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO COME TO JESUS CHRIST AND TO REMAIN THE SAME. THERE WILL BE AN EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION OF THAT INTERNAL WRITING WHICH THE SPIRIT OF GOD HAS BEEN DOING IN YOUR HEART—and all will recognize that there is a message there, and will read it.

How many have been brought to Christ because they "read" something in another person's life, only to find out that it was a manifestation of the new life that that person had!

Concl: We are not talking about something that you and I have

to produce; WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A MESSAGE THAT THE LORD HAS ALREADY WRITTEN THERE FOR ALL MEN TO READ.

May I ask this morning—are you one of those Christians who has been more concerned about giving a witness than you are about being one?

Cf. our Lord in John 3:1 ff. Nicodemus had "read" something.

Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15.

I am not concerned about the problems in our lives this morning --I am just trying to establish this fact which Paul cites here.

Did he need letters of commendation? NO!

Why?

Because the Corinthians Christians, in spite of all of their problems, would never have been what they were **IF** God Himself by the Holy Spirit had not been working through Paul to change their lives.

As we begin a new year together with all of the tremendous possibilities before us, let us place the emphasis where it nee<sup>s</sup> to be placed, and trust the Lord to use us in writing His message in the hearts of men who today have nothing!

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL--THEIR GLORY COMPARED  
2 Cor. 3:4-18

Intro: In the first part of ch. 3 Paul is concerned about "epistles of commendation." Such epistles were written to introduce and to "vouch for" some servant of the Lord when he was going to be with some of the Lord's people whom he had not met before.

This naturally led to the question: What really was the greatest observable evidence that Paul was a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The answer: They were!

Their very lives, the changes that had taken place were all the confirmation needed that God had really done a transforming work through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. The Corinthian believers were proof of this.

But in stating this Paul refers to "tables of stone." THIS SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT SOME OF PAUL OPPONENTS WERE JEWS WHO WERE UNHAPPY WITH HIM BECAUSE HE DID NOT PREACH THE MOSAIC LAW! This leads Paul along the lines which he follows to the end of chapter 3.

He begins to contrast what he calls "the new testament," or better, the new covenant, which he mentions in v. 6, with "the old testament," or covenant which he mentions in v. 14.

Our Bibles are divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. We will be able to see what Paul is talking about here if we try to answer two questions:

- 1) Doctrinally, what is the main theme of the Old Testament?
- 2) Doctrinally, what is the main theme of the New Testament?

The answers are quite easy to give.

In the Old Testament we are dealing with a people who from Exodus 19 on are under the Law given to Moses. The Law incorporated many things that were practised before, but no one can study the Old Testament intelligently and overlook the importance of the Law.

In the New Testament the emphasis is upon the Gospel. The Gospel does not originate in the New Testament, but it is in the New Testament that we are brought to a full understanding of the Gospel.

Now it is importance to keep in mind that there is no conflict between the Law and the Gospel IF we understand what God's pur-

pose was in each of these doctrinal messages. THE PROBLEM DEVELOPED WHEN THE JEWS BEGAN TO MISINTERPRET THE LAW. THEY MADE IT THE WAY OF SALVATION, THE WAY FOR MAN TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD, AND SO THEY CAME UP WITH SALVATION BY WORKS--AN EMPHASIS WHICH IS NEVER MADE BY GOD, AND NEVER MADE BY ANY OF THE TRUE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT!

So, not only were the Jews misinterpreting their national hero, but this kept them from seeing the place that Christ had in the Old Testament, and it made them violently opposed to men like Paul who preached the Gospel of the grace of God, and who would include the Gentiles for salvation as well as the Jews IF THEY RECEIVED CHRIST BY FAITH.

ONE OF THE GREATEST SOURCES OF CONFUSION TODAY HAS TO DO WITH THE LAW OF MOSES. Practically every major cult emphasizes the Law of Moses in a way that is contrary to the Old Testament and to the New Testament. And, as churches have turned from the Gospel, they have preached works--and people have come to know far more about Moses than they know about the Lord Jesus Christ.

I trust that the Lord will help us to see the Law and the Gospel in their true light this morning, and to recognize God's purpose in each.

First of all, let us notice

I. THE TERMS WHICH PAUL USES TO DESCRIBE THE LAW, AND THEN, THE GOSPEL.

A. The Law:

1. "The letter" (v. 6)--a writing from God in which He set forth His moral standards for Israel.
2. "The ministration of death" (v. 7). It "killeth" (v. 6).
3. "The ministration of condemnation" (v. 9). Since man could not measure up to the divine standard, he was guilty (Rom. 3:19, 20), he stood condemned, and fell under the sentence of death.
4. "That which is done away" (v. 11). This same verb is used again in vv. 7, 13, 14. The Law was never meant to be permanent.
5. "The old testament," or better, the old covenant (v. 14). The very term suggests that it has been superseded by a new one.
6. "Moses" (v. 15). How grieved Moses himself would have been to know how the Jews had such an exalted opinion of him that they would not even listen to anything that was being said about Jesus Christ!

B. The Gospel:

1. "The new testament," or, the new covenant (v. 6). It "giveth life" (v. 6).

2. "The ministration of the Spirit" (v. 8).
3. "The ministration of righteousness" (v. 9). Putting these two together we see that the Gospel is a work of the Holy Spirit for us and that the result is a position of righteousness before God.
4. "That which remaineth" (v. 11). Contrary to what Paul says about the Law, there will be no change as far as the Gospel is concerned.
5. "Hope" (v. 12)--in the NT this word means a "joyous and confident expectation of eternal salvation" (Thayer, p. 205).
6. "Christ" (v. 14). There is no Gospel without Christ. He came to provide salvation for us, not to tell us how to get it for ourselves (a work we could never do).

So the difference between the Law and the Gospel is basically this: God gave the Law to show the need for salvation, but in giving the Gospel He has provided the way of salvation.

The one points to the need for the other!

But let us go on. Since both of them are the Word of God, how does their glory indicate their greatness? Thus, we must look at

II. THE COMPARISON OF THEIR GLORY. We must remember that "glory" is an OT expression for the manifestation of God's presence. We know from Ex. 34:29-35 about the glory of the Law.

Paul refers to it here in 2 Cor. 3:7. (Read.)

Then he begins a threefold statement in vv. 8-11 which give us the comparison which we need.

- A. If what God did through Moses was glorious, would you not expect that what he did through the Spirit would also be glorious? (In reading v. 8, omit the words "rather" or "more" since it is not a comparison here of the degree of glory, but only that what God did by His Spirit would certainly not be less than what He would do through a man such as Moses.) Cf. vv. 7, 8.
- B. If a covenant which condemned man to death were glorious, would you not expect that a covenant which made man righteous in God's sight would be even more glorious? Cf. v. 9.

We must admit that there is nothing wrong with this kind of reasoning.

9. If what is temporary was glorious, then what is to be permanent should be even more glorious. Cf. v. 11.

In fact, the glory of the Gospel is so great that by comparison it makes the Law look like it had no glory at all (v. 10)!

### III. THE EXPLANATION FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF THE GOSPEL.

Paul's enthusiasm is so great in v. 12 that he indicates that he has thrown restraint to the wind because, lit., having such a hope, it would be impossible to overstate the glory of the Gospel.

And yet vv. 13-15 show how heavy his heart was over the blindness of Israel.

What did they need to do?

They needed to turn to the Lord—not Moses (v. 16). Then even the old covenant would make sense to them.

The immediate result would be "liberty"—liberty from the bondage of trying to earn their own salvation, liberty from the judgment of God, liberty from the tyranny of sin, and so on and on.

But what about the goal? This is where we really see the glory of the Gospel. Read v. 18.

EVERY CHILD OF GOD IS DESTINED TO BECOME LIKE THE LORD JESUS, AND THIS TRANSFORMATION IS TO BE TAKING PLACE NOW AS WE CONTINUE TO LOOK INTO THE WORD OF GOD WHICH REFLECTS THE GLORY OF CHRIST, MAKING US MORE AND MORE LIKE HE IS!

Concl: This is the ultimate end of the Gospel. Is it any wonder that Paul felt inadequate for such a ministry? He could not change himself. How could he ever hope to change others?

But this was a work the Holy Spirit was doing. Paul was only a minister, a servant, doing the will of his Master, preaching the Gospel of a Savior who died, who rose again, who now lives in glory, and who is coming back. And it is Christ, not Moses, who is not only able to deliver us from our sins, but who starts a work in our hearts the moment we trust Him as Savior that will ultimately mean that we will be like Him.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3, 4).

*When the Law  
was given,  
only Moses  
was changed,  
& that was  
temporarily;  
under the  
Gospel  
ALL BELIEVERS  
WILL BE  
CHANGED  
PERMANENTLY.*

FIRST CENTURY PREACHING FOR TWENTIETH CENTURY PEOPLE  
2 Cor. 4:1-6

Intro: If we could invite the Apostle Paul from the first century to preach this morning to us in the twentieth century about evangelizing the world, do you think that he would speak to us as he wrote to the Corinthian church about the same subject?

Many would say, "No." Some would feel that the special needs of this century call for a new approach in evangelizing the world.

But those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God would say, "Yes." I say, "Yes." And I say it for these reasons:

- WE DON'T  
FEEL WE ARE  
LOOKING AT  
ANOTHER  
WORLD WHEN  
WE READ  
1 & 2 COR.
- (1) In 20 centuries man has not changed. By nature he is still the same now that he was then.
  - (2) God has not changed. A CARDINAL DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE.
  - (3) The Gospel has not changed. SAME 2000 B.C. .
  - (4) Those forces which are opposed to the Gospel have not changed.
- Therefore, it takes exactly the same measures today to reach men with the Gospel that it took in the first century.

Let us see what these are.

- I. Reaching the world with the Gospel of Christ basically calls for a "manifestation of the truth."

You would expect Paul to emphasize preaching the truth. Much of what he says in these six verses does have to do with preaching, but when he singles out the one thing which is needed above everything else he calls it the "manifestation of the truth," i.e., of the Word of God.

This is a favorite expression of the Apostle in this section of 2 Corinthians. Cf. 2:14; 3:3. It means a visible evidence, something which people can see in specific instances which shows the world the results which can be observed in the life of one who has received Jesus Christ as his Savior.

All that Paul says in vv. 1, 2 (point these out) leads up to the statement, "commending ourselves to everyman's conscience in the sight of God."

When we go to people with the Gospel telling them what the Lord Jesus Christ can do for them, they are going to be looking to see if they can see that He has done those things for us.

Remember that "our sufficiency is of God" (3:5), but our



failure at this point is the main reason the world does not take our preaching too seriously. IT WAS TRUE IN THE FIRST CENTURY; IT IS TRUE TODAY IN THE 20TH CENTURY!

- II. REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL CALLS FOR A KNOWLEDGE OF THE KIND OF OPPOSITION WE ARE UP AGAINST. Cf. vv. 3, 4.

We face this paradoxical situation: We can do all that is necessary to keep the Gospel from being hidden, and yet men still will not understand it.

Why? Read v. 4--"the god of this age."

Man already is "lost," perishing, but in addition Satan "hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them."

It makes no difference how much light there is if a person is blind.

Thus, we are faced with an impossible situation. And every one who seeks to take the Gospel to people in the world must recognize this.

Some would feel that, since men are blinded to the Gospel, we must reach them in some other way—leading up to the Gospel.

But here is another paradox: THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD ARE GOING TO BE REACHED BY THE VERY MESSAGE TO WHICH THEY ARE BLINDED. How?

This brings us to our third point:

- III. REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL CALLS FOR GOD TO WORK JUST AS MIRACULOUSLY AS HE DID IN CREATION (vv. 5, 6).

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness." When did He do this? In Gen. 1:3. Going right back to the beginning of the Word of God we have the basic lesson which need in spreading the Gospel.

What has the Lord done?

He "hath shined in our hearts, to give . . ." This takes us back to the emphasis in v. 2, "but by manifestation of the truth . . ."

Concl: The darkness which Satan has imposed upon the minds of men will only be dispelled when (1) the Gospel of Christ is preached; (2) when the people of God manifest in their lives what the Lord can do; and (3) when God Himself works through His Word and through His people to open blind eyes.

GOD'S EARTHEN VESSELS  
2 Cor. 4:7-18

Intro: I want to remind you again this morning that as Paul speaks of the "ministry" that he is not talking about the ministry in any way so as to exclude those who were not giving all of their time to preaching and teaching the Word of God. While he speaks of himself and his co-workers, he is seeking to emphasize the fact that every child of God has a part in this ministry!

And, it must also be said, that no one who reads 2 Corinthians can possibly have a low conception of the work that God has called us to do, nor can anyone who understands this epistle have a mistaken idea as to what the ministry is.

There are those who want to change the church today. There are those who want to change the ministry.

We need to recognize the fact that many churches are not true churches in the NT sense of the word. They have lost their way. They are trying to do things God has never indicated that they should do. Many ministers are the same way.

WHAT WE NEED IS FOR ALL WHO KNOW THE LORD TO TAKE THE WORD OF GOD AND LEARN FROM THE SCRIPTURES WHAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO. NOT UNTIL WE DO HIS WILL IN THIS CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE HIS BLESSING UPON OUR WORK.

There is no better place to learn this than in 2 Corinthians!

ONE THING WHICH WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR WHICH IS OF PRIME IMPORTANCE IS THAT OUR MINISTRY BASICALLY IS DEPENDENT UPON WHAT WE ARE!

We are epistles which all men are reading.

God changed us when we trusted Christ as Savior, and He is continuing to change us day by day. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18.

Paul has had much to say about what we are; very little about what we say. In fact, he has indicated that if we are not what we should be we can nullify completely anything that we might say.

THEREFORE, YOU MIGHT FEEL THAT THE PEOPLE WHOM GOD HAS CHOSEN TO SHARE IN THIS MINISTRY WOULD BE THE OUTSTANDING PEOPLE OF THE WORLD—THAT THEY WOULD ALMOST PERFECT, AND PRACTICALLY INDESTRUCTIBLE!

But this is not the case. Let us note what Paul has written in 2 Cor. 4:7-18.

7. THE WAY GOD HAS CHOSEN TO WORK, AND WHY (2 Cor. 4:7).

A. The Way: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels!"

Paul has already told us about "this treasure." It is "this ministry" (4:1)—the fact that God has chosen to work in us and then work through us "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6b).

It is a "treasure" because there is nothing in all the world that is any more important than the gospel—how sinful men can be brought into a right relationship with a holy God!

But why did God choose to work through "earthen vessels"? He is talking about us, about our bodies, made of clay, so fragile, so easily broken.

Vessels were utensils that were to be used in homes, or in the Temple.

God is the Master Workman, and we are His utensils, His vessels—BUT WHY DID HE MAKE US "EARTHEN VESSELS"? Did He not know better than this? Did He not learn from the OT that His people were often His greatest problem?

B. Why? "That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

This sounds like 1 Cor. 1:26-31, does it not?

This is not the way God had to work; this is the way He chose to work!

And let me say it this morning—I hope none of us will ever forget it. THERE IS NOT A ONE OF US HERE THIS MORNING WHO HAS WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO SERVE THE LORD IN THIS MINISTRY.

We are altogether inadequate.

But the other side of the story is this: "the excellency of the power" is "of God."

What does this mean?

IT MEANS THAT, WHATEVER YOU AND I HAVE HAVE TO GO THROUGH AS OUR PART IN "THIS MINISTRY," THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH POWER IN GOD TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED EVEN THOUGH WE ARE JUST "EARTHEN VESSELS."

II. WHAT THING SAID IN PAUL'S EXPERIENCE, AND WHY (2 Cor. 4: 6-12).

I believe it is safe to say that no one suffered more than the Apostle Paul did--except for the Lord Jesus Himself!

Look at vv. 8, 9. He was like a fighter cornered, not knowing what move to make next, hunted by his enemies, and, at times, "cast down"—flat on his back.

But with all of this he was "not distressed,"  
"not in despair,"  
"not forsaken,"  
"not destroyed."

But why?

Read vv. 10, 11.

PAUL WAS REPEATEDLY BROUGHT TO THE END OF HIS RESOURCES--  
in body, and in mind, and in spirit--"that the life also of  
Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

What doctrine did Paul have trouble with, and did Peter have trouble with, all through the book of Acts?

It was the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ!

How was God making that truth known? By the preaching of the Apostle, to be sure. BUT ALSO BY THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE. THERE WAS MANY, MANY TIMES WHEN HE WOULD HAVE BEEN THROUGH, WASHED UP, FINISHED, IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE LIVING PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN HIS LIFE.

This is why he wrote back to the Philippian church from Rome and say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

But there was another part to this why. See v. 12.

God was using the experiences of the Apostle Paul to teach the Corinthians church (and all of the others) that there is more than enough power in Christ for whatever we have to endure as His "earthen vessels."

But, now we need to ask: How could Paul go through all of this from the standpoint of his own life? What comfort did he have facing death all of the time, and not knowing from one day until the next when it might come to him?

III. HOW PAUL COULD REDUCE THE SUFFERINGS WHICH HE FACED THROUGH-  
OUT HIS LIFE (2 Cor. 4:12-18).

There are really two reasons: one has to do with the future; the other, with the present.

A. Hope from the future (2 Cor. 4:13-15).

Perhaps we should say that Paul got help from the past as well as from the future.

BUT HE HAD FAITH IN THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES FOR US. HE HAD FAITH IN THE WORD OF GOD.

Who would you say was Paul's counterpart in the OT as far as suffering was concerned?

I would say David.

Doubtless Paul got a lot of encouragement from the Psalms. In v. 13 he is quoting from Psa. 116:10 (but we are not sure that this was a Davidic Psalm although some feel very definitely that it was).

Paul's faith was strengthened by the faith of the OT saints---in the ultimate fulfillment of all that God has set out to do.

And he knew that the resurrection of Christ guaranteed his own resurrection.

NEVER LET ANYONE TELL YOU THAT DOCTRINE IS UNIMPORTANT! IN TIMES OF TROUBLE THE DOCTRINE, THE TRUTH, OF THE WORD OF GOD MAY BE ALL THAT YOU WILL HAVE.

And Paul could only rejoice at the thought of being presented to the Father, and the joy that would be his at the abounding glory that would be given to God at that day.

B. Hope from the present (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Paul compared what he was experiencing with what was coming and found:

- 1) That there was no basis for comparison---what was coming was so much greater than what he was going through now. Cf. Rom. 8:18.
- 2) That what was happening now was a part of what he would experience later. His "light affliction" was working for him!

He had his eyes on the goal, and he knew that the present was leading in that direction.

Concl: From all of this we can see that there are really three

reasons why God has left us as His earthen vessels:

- 1) Because He wants all of the glory for that which is being accomplished through you and me.
- 2) Because He wants us to be showing others, by His grace, that He is a living Savior, and that He will enable us to do and to endure where otherwise it would be impossible.
- 3) Because He wants us to remember that He is not only working through us, but in us—for that day when we will know that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Then we can rejoice that we are God's Earthen Vessels.

WHEN A CHRISTIAN DIES--WHAT THEN?

2 Cor. 5:1-10

Intro: Suffering has been one of the dominant themes of 2 Cor. from the very beginning. Suffering has emphasized the weakness of the flesh, and, especially in Paul's case, we see how he constantly lived in the shadow of death.

In 1 Cor. 15:31 he had written, "I die daily." In 2 Cor. 5:10, 11 he states the same truth twice: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . . We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake."

Add to this the fact that Paul recognizes that his body is only an earthen vessel--so weak, so easily broken.

This naturally leads him to speak of death, and of that which lies beyond for the child of God. This he does in our text of this morning.

As chapter 4 ends Paul is on one of those mountain peaks of the epistle, especially in v. 17. (Read.)

Now, because of that, Paul can state in 5:1

I. A POSITIVE CERTAINTY (2 Cor. 5:1).

Here, as in many places in the Bible, it is not necessary to go into prophetic detail. Paul goes from death (described as the folding up of a tent--he was a tentmaker) to the very end: "We have a building of God . . ."

He says nothing here about the coming of the Lord.

Nor does he say anything here about the resurrection of the body.

He had done all of that in the first epistle, chapter 15.

Here he goes from the death of any child of God to that which will ultimately be his condition when he comes into the possession of that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (4:17).

Our bodies now are earthly and temporary. But the time is coming when we will have heavenly bodies which are eternal. He is not concerned about the sequence of events. He simply wants them to recognize this as a truth as specific and trustworthy as anything that is revealed in the Word of God. He can write, "We have," in the same positive way as though it had already happened.

This leads to our second point:

- II. AN EARNEST DESIRE (2 Cor. 5:2-4). Vv. 2-4 give us a parallel statement similar to 4:10, 11. Vv. 2, 3 give us the first statement; v. 4 re-states it in a slightly different way.

But we need to see here that the truth of v. 1 made Paul long for the realization of that promise.

It is important that we understand the terms that he uses here.

Look first at "naked" and "unclothed."

This is Paul's way of describing death. There are a lot of things that we do not understand about believer's after death, but one thing that we do know is that they do not have their earthly body, and we also know that they have not yet received their eternal body. So they are naked, unclothed, with respect to a body.

V. 1 has given many the idea of an intermediate body, but that would not be the eternal body, and it would take away from the meaning of the verses we are now considering.

Twice Paul mentions groaning in these verses. It certainly describes the desire man has for a better life. Cf. Rom. 8:22, 23,

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

PAUL IS NOT SAYING THAT HE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO DEATH! HE IS EXPRESSING THE HOPE THAT HE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO GLORY--AND TO AVOID BEING "NAKED" OR UNCLOTHED" WOULD MEAN THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO LIVE TO SEE THE COMING OF THE LORD!

In v. 4 he gives an indication of the relationship between our present bodies and our future bodies. It is seen in the words, "mortality is swallowed up (lit.) through life." The old is swallowed up by the new, so that the body is the same but in a glorified state.

And, knowing that truth, Paul could not but long for that day to come.

This lead to ~~a second~~



## III. A SPECIAL CAMPAIGN OF GRACE (2 Cor. 5:5).

We, of course, could never attain anything by ourselves. How do we know that such a destiny is possible. Our verse gives the answer.

"Wrought" means prepared. The preparation has included all that is involved in our salvation: redemption, justification, sanctification, etc.

It is all designed with our glorification in mind. AND OUR GUARANTEE IS THE INDWELLING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES. The Holy Spirit is called "the earnest" because He is the One Who has made the contract valid, God's way of securing a legal claim on every person He has saved (so to speak).

This leads Paul to two other things which he wants to point out regarding a Christian and death, and the practical effect it has on our lives.

## IV. TWO PRACTICAL RESULTS (2 Cor. 5:6-10).

## A. Concerning life and death (2 Cor. 5-8).

Here is the most glorious part of the future of every child of God. Some day all of us are going to be "with the Lord." As I have mentioned before, this is the major emphasis about life-after-death in the Word of God. IT MEANS THAT WE WILL BE WITH HIM.

Peter touches on this in 1 Pet. 1:8, 9,

"Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

As long as we are present in our earthly bodies, we are not with the Lord, but whenever the time comes for us to leave these bodies, we will be "present with the Lord."

Is it any wonder that Paul preferred ("willing rather") to be "absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"?

But there is another point. It has to do with

## B. Life and judgment (2 Cor. 5:9, 10).

Because some day we are going to be "with" Him, Paul says that his one ambition now is to be well-pleasing to Him.

He was not worrying about being "accepted." He was concerned about being well-pleasing.

This was because he loved the Lord, but it was also because one day he was going to stand "before the judgment seat of Christ," and there he would "appear" (lit., be manifested, be revealed for what he really was).

It would have to do, not only with his ministry, but with himself, what he had been as well as what he had done.

This section parallels 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

This has to take place after the rapture when all believers are no longer in their present bodies, and it is a time when we will "receive," or be rewarded for all that has been done through our bodies.

Concl: What is going to happen after a Christian dies?

He is going immediately to be with the Lord.

He will receive his glorified body when the Church is raptured from the earth. Oh, that that day might come before we die!

He will stand before "the judgment seat of Christ," and there his whole life will be judged and rewards given.

It is no wonder that Paul's response to all of this truth is stated in v. 9. May it be ours also!

PAUL, AN AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST  
2 Cor. 5:11-21

Intro: I want to take only half of this passage this morning--  
down through v. 16--and then finish the chapter, the  
Lord willing, next Sunday morning.

We have seen that Paul has been writing about THE MINISTRY--not  
in a way that is limited to apostles, or pastors, or to  
missionaries, but applying it to the ministry of every child  
of God.

In v. 20 he writes, "Now, then, WE are AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST."  
And, leading up to that point he is telling us what is involved  
in being AMBASSADORS. Cf. Eph. 6:20.

The dictionary defines an ambassador as "the highest ranking  
representative appointed by one country or government to  
represent it in another country" (Webster's New World Diction-  
ary, p. 22). He also is "an official messenger with a special  
mission" (Ibid.).

Most Christians know WHAT their mission in the world is, BUT  
VERY FEW OF US HAVE ANY IDEA OF ALL THAT IS INVOLVED IN BEING  
AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST!

We know that we must beseech men to be reconciled to God.

BUT--DO WE KNOW THAT AMBASSADORS HAVE TO PRESENT THEIR CREDEN-  
TIALS BEFORE THEY CAN SERVE AS AMBASSADORS?

This is Paul's concern as he leads up to the end of this chap-  
ter where we see the ambassador at work. BUT, FIRST OF ALL,  
WE NEED TO LOOK AT HIS CREDENTIALS.

I. TWO OF THE MOTIVES WHICH CAUSED PAUL TO SERVE AS AN AMBASSA-  
DOR (we will consider the third next Sunday).

A. "The terror of the Lord," or, lit., the fear of the  
Lord.

V. 11 is linked by the word, "therefore," to v. 10 where  
he had referred to "the judgment seat of Christ."  
There every Christian will "appear," be manifest, or  
shown to be what he really is.

THIS FACT WAS A GREAT CONCERN TO THE APOSTLE PAUL, AND  
THIS TIME OF JUDGMENT IN THE FUTURE WAS ONE OF THE  
GREAT MOTIVATING FORCES OF HIS LIFE.

This expression, "the fear of the Lord," comes right  
out of the OT, although you find it in the NT too. For

a long time in my ministry I tried to convince myself that fear did not mean fear—that it meant reverence, or respect, but not really fear.

On "the fear of the Lord," cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; Rom. 3:18; Matt. 10:28.

Even the Word of God is called, "the fear of the Lord," in Psa. 19:9.

But I have come to the conclusion that to "fear" the Lord means to "fear" the Lord!

This does not mean that I am terrorized by the Lord, but it does mean that I have such an exalted opinion of the holiness of God, of His sovereignty in my life, of His all-seeing eye, of His hatred of all forms of evil, that I refrain from doing those things that displease Him and seek to do the things that please Him because I am afraid of the consequences of doing anything else!

This was not the only motive that Paul is talking about, but he does place it first!

III. The relationship between a father and son.

The knowledge that Paul was going to stand and be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ was a major factor in all of his service for the Lord.

Cf. Prov. 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge . . ."

But there is a second motive.

B. "The love of Christ" (v. 14).

When Paul uses this expression he does not mean our love for Christ, but the love which Christ has manifested to us.

This has to be taken with the fear of the Lord. And note the change from "Lord" to "Christ."

"Constraineth" is a very strong word which means to compress "with irresistible power all our energies into one channel" (JFB, VI, 350). Cf. Acts 18:5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST BROUGHT PAUL TO JUST ONE POSSIBLE CONCLUSION FOR HIMSELF. It was that he had no other alternative but to live for "him who died, for them and rose again."

Vv. 14, 15 obviously will remind us of Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:21, 22, but we must resist the temptation to spread out into all of the wonderful truth taught in those passages. PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT HOW THIS "LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINED" HIM TO REALIZE THAT HE OWED HIS ENTIRE LIFE TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Have you ever thought about "the love of Christ" and the only conclusion that you can come to once you have come to know the Lord Jesus as your Savior?

Now, because of what we have already seen, Paul also had

II. ONE MAJOR CONCERN ABOUT HIMSELF AS AN AMBASSADOR: He writes, "We persuade men."

When we first read this we might think that he is talking about persuading men to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. But the context does not support that interpretation. INSTEAD, HE IS CONCERNED ABOUT PERSUADING MEN THAT HE IS A TRUE AMBASSADOR, NOT AN IMPOSTOR, AND NOT GUILTY OF THE CHARGES OF INSINCERITY THAT WERE BEING BROUGHT AGAINST HIM BY THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE GOSPEL.

This is why he has been talking about "epistles of commendation." It started in 1:12. It continues in 3:1 ff. It reaches its peak in 11:16-30 (esp. vv. 22ff.).

His concern in this area sometimes made him appear as though he was "beside" himself, a mad man; at other times he appeared "sober." But whatever was the case, it was always for God or for them--not for himself--that he carried this great concern.

PAUL WANTED THE CORINTHIANS TO KNOW THAT HE DID NOT GLORY JUST IN THE OUTER MAN, BUT IN THE HEART. Cf. v. 12; 2:4; 3:2; 4:6.

Finally, we see

III. THE EMPHASIS NEGATIVELY IN PAUL'S MINISTRY AS AN AMBASSADOR (v. 16).

Sometimes it helps us to understand a man's work by noticing what he does not do.

ONE OF THE FIRST PROBLEMS WHICH PAUL MENTIONS IN 1 CORINTHIANS WAS THEIR TENDENCY TO GLORY IN MEN!

We see it in the divisions: Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter).

*Cf. Joseph  
in Matt. 4:1.  
15, 16 - a  
rejection  
our side  
was anything  
special for  
him!*

We see it rebuked in that marvelous statement about our "calling" at the end of 1 Cor. 1.

We see it in the tendency of the Jews to set themselves above the Gentiles, and vice versa.

ALL OF THIS LED TO BUT ONE CONCLUSION, AS FALSE AS IT WAS. IT WAS THIS: THAT GOD DELIGHTS IN SAVING SOME PEOPLE, BUT HE IS NOT TOO ANXIOUS TO SAVE OTHERS.

"Christ died for all." And He died for all because "He is not willing that ANY should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Cf. "whosoever" in John 3:16.

The black and the white, the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, the wise and the barbarian--all need Christ, and all may come to Him without any question but that they will be received--regardless of what they have done, or not done!

"Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh."  
HOW WE NEED TO MAKE THIS TRUTH CRYSTAL CLEAR FOR EVERYONE  
IN OUR GENERATION.

But there is also a second part to this.

Cf. the latter part of v. 16.

PAUL IS HERE DECLARING THAT EVEN WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THE FACTS CONNECTED WITH HIS EARTHLY LIFE ARE NOT THE CONCLUSION WHERE WE MUST STOP.

The fact that He was a Jew is not the subject of our Gospel. Nor that He lived 33 years. Nor even that He spent His earthly ministry "doing good."

All of these things are important, and foundation. BUT IF YOU STOP HERE YOU NEVER GET TO THE HEART OF THINGS. AND THIS IS WHERE WE COME TO THE GREATEST POSSIBLE INDICTMENT OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF MODERN DAY LIBERAL PREACHING WHICH COMES FROM THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ALL ABOUT THE LIFE OF CHRIST, BUT IT IS HIS DEATH, HIS RESURRECTION, HIS ASCENSION, HIS PRESENT MINISTRY IN HEAVEN, AND HIS SECOND COMING WHICH NEEDS TO BE PROCLAIMED FAR AND WIDE.

We need to live for Him who died for us and rose again!

It is a crucified and risen Savior we need to proclaim, the One who died to save us--Not One who taught us how to live so that we could save ourselves!

Concl: Do you see how the Lord Himself figures so majestically into Paul's understanding of what it means to be an ambassador for Christ?

It is the fact that he is going to stand before this same Lord some day.

It is because of the amazing love which Christ displayed for the ambassador himself.

And, it is because of the apparent contradiction that so much depends upon the spiritual character of the ambassador, but it matters not what has taken place in the life of that person who has never yet received the Lord Jesus Christ.

Am I speaking to anyone here this morning who has not received the Lord Jesus as Savior because you feel that you are too great a sinner, or because for some reason God does not love you?

Nothing could be farther from the truth. You need Him, and He wants you. He died for you, and He will save you this very moment if you will but turn to Him for salvation.

Let us as Christians pray that we may never distort the Gospel by giving people the idea that they cannot be saved. And the best way to do that is by remembering that it was only by grace--infinite grace--that He could save any one of us here this morning!

THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY IN THE WORLD  
2 Cor. 5:17-21

Intro: As the professing Church has gotten farther and farther away from the Word of God, it has also gotten farther and farther away from its distinctive ministry in the world.

The organized Church has probably never been more involved with the world than it is today, and yet it has lost ground as never before. Some churches are so concerned about the issues of the day that they have lost sight of (if they have ever known) THE REAL ISSUE.

These are days when we need to know the Word of God as never before so that we will not lose sight of what it is that we as the people of God are supposed to be doing here in this world. 2 Corinthians is an excellent epistle to get us on the right track.

Last Sunday I pointed out to you that Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:20 that "we are ambassadors for Christ."

An ambassador does not choose his own mission. His work is laid out for him by the government he represents, and he is where he is in the interests of his government. SO AS "AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST" WE MUST FIND OUT WHAT HIS PRIMARY CONCERN IS FOR THE WORLD SO THAT WE WILL KNOW WHAT HE WANTS US TO DO.

From v. 11 on Paul mentions three reasons as to why he was an ambassador:

- 1) "The terror of the Lord," or, the fear of the Lord. He knew, according to v. 10, that he was going to have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and HE DID NOT CONSIDER THAT FACT LIGHTLY! Cf. v. 11.
- 2) "The love of Christ." He is not talking about the love of Christ for the world, but what the love of Christ meant to him. IT MEANT THAT HE WAS UNDER AN ETERNAL DEBT TO LIVE FOR THE ONE WHO DIED FOR HIM, AND ROSE AGAIN. In view of what Christ had done for him, he could come to no other conclusion. Cf. v. 14, and v. 15.

We covered these last Sunday.

Now we are ready for the third. It is this:

- 3) "God . . . hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (v. 19). This is a very strong expression. It means that He has placed this IN us, and that this, therefore, is the primary reason for our existence!

What we need, then, is to find out just what this "word of reconciliation" is, and do what we are supposed to do with it.



But please note: NOT ONE OF US HAS CHOSEN TO BE AN AMBASSADOR; GOD HIMSELF HAS MADE THE APPOINTMENT, AND WE ARE TO TAKE CARE OF THAT WHICH HE HAS CHOSEN US TO DO.

Let us look at the passage as thoroughly as we can in the time that we have. First, let us determine

## I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD, RECONCILIATION.

It does not just mean that enemies become friends, but it also includes the idea that that which caused the enmity has been changed, that it no longer is an issue.

Ill. A husband and wife are separated. They may want to be reconciled, but neither of them may want to change. This makes a reconciliation impossible.

Now when we use this term in connection with our relationship with God as human beings, we need to make it very clear that the enmity is on our side--not God's! He has always loved man. It is man who does not want to have anything to do with God. And if any man does feel the need to get right with God, he may not feel that he wants to change anything.

What has caused the alienation between man and God?

It is our "trespasses"--a word which Paul has carefully chosen to describe all sins from a simple mistake to a deliberate violation of God's will.

Because of our sins we have become God's enemies, and God cannot accept us into His favor until something is done about our sins. And yet this is something which we cannot change because it not only has to do with the things we have done, but also with what we are!

## II. THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION.

It is most important for us to note that, first of all,

A. Reconciliation is A WORK OF GOD. Cf. vv. 18a, 19a, 20a.

V. 18 has to do with the reconciled person. The result is all of God.

V. 19 has to do with the requirement. It was something which God was doing in Christ.

V. 20 has to do with the ministry. We may beg (lit.) men to be reconciled to God, but even there God is the

One Who is using us.

B. THE WORK was made possible THROUGH CHRIST.

There are many people who feel the need for forgiveness, or they may want to come to God, but they insult both God and His Son by ignoring what Christ had to do for our sins because the need was so great.

God did not impute, did not charge us with the full punishment of our sins, but He did charge them to His Son. Cf. Isa. 53:6. Also 2 Cor. 5:21.

IF YOU DO NOT THINK THAT SIN IS THE MAIN PROBLEM IN ALL OF THE UNIVERSE, THEN TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED ON THE CROSS—AND LEARN WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE THERE!

The height of blasphemy is for any man to think that he can come to God in any other way except through Christ.

C. THE EXTENT OF THE WORK.

Vv. 19 and 20 seem to present conflicting ideas:

- 1) V. 19 says the world was reconciled to God, but
- 2) V. 20 says that "we are ambassadors for Christ" to go to the world with the message, "Be ye reconciled to God."

Please be careful to see that this is the need of people all over the world. It makes no difference where they may be, the color of their skin, the language they speak, or anything else about them—Christ died for them, and the sin problem is the greatest problem they have. Why? Because it is a problem with eternal consequences, and it is the problem which has given rise to all of the other problems we have!

But, to go back to our question . . . Christ, by His death, made possible the reconciliation of the whole world. AT THE SAME TIME, THE VERY LANGUAGE OF THIS PASSAGE MAKES IT VERY CLEAR THAT RECONCILIATION DOES NOT BECOME MINE UNTIL I RECEIVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS MY PERSONAL SAVIOR.

However, there is one other word which needs to be said about THE EXTENT OF THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION. It is to be seen in v. 17.

I started out by saying this morning that man's reconciliation to God required a change. It required a change because of what we have done—our "trespasses."

So far we have spent our time talking about this.

BUT IT REQUIRES A CHANGE IN WHAT WE ARE! The reason I sin is because I am a sinner. Can God do anything about that?

Yes, He can!!! Read v. 17.

Paul is telling us here just how far God has gone with the work of reconciliation. HE HAS ACTUALLY CREATED A NEW PERSON—ONE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT HE WAS BEFORE HE CAME TO CHRIST.

"In Christ." No words are more important in all of the Bible. They mean:

- 1) That all of the advantages that Christ has with the Father are mine in Him. Cf. Eph. 1:3-14, esp. v. 12.
- 2) That all of the strength, and wisdom, and love, righteousness which I need is mine in the same way that the life of the vine goes into the branches.

But I am (lit.) a new creation. Just as it took a display of omnipotence to create this world in which we live, it took the same kind of power to make you and me new creatures when we received the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

Oh, we can still sin. BUT WE CAN NEVER BE JUST WHAT WE WERE BEFORE WE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOUR.

Concl: What a privilege to be able to go <sup>to</sup> the world with a message like this—a message for the whole world about a mighty, miraculous work which God wants to do in their hearts through Christ, the One who died for them and rose again.

Don't let anybody ever make you feel apologetic because you are preaching the Gospel of Christ. If they are not preaching the Gospel, THEY ARE ONLY DEALING WITH THE SYMPTOMS OF MAN'S PROBLEMS. THE GOSPEL DEALS WITH THE MAIN NEED WHICH EVERY MAN HAS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.