

2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6

Chapter 2

Verses 12-13:

--**Furthermore** breaks off the digression of 5-11 where Paul addressed the situation of the repentant man who they had placed under church discipline and brings us back to the topic of his travels and why he had not yet come to Corinth.

--Paul shares that he went to Troas to preach **Christ's gospel**—the gospel of which Jesus Christ is the Author. And when he arrived **a door was opened to me by the Lord**—which means God was obviously doing something there.

--(13) Even so, he shares that when he didn't meet up with Titus there he **had no rest** in his spirit because he was worried about Titus (no doubt) but also whether the Corinthians would be an obedient or an apostate church. Paul knew a rejection of healthy doctrine would eventually kill the church.

--Paul's shepherd heart was concerned that his flock was gone astray or led astray! *Many here probably know the pain of watching a church—once healthy and alive—slowly die. It is a tragic thing.*

Verses 14-16:

--(14) **Now** leads us into a discussion of the ministry and the gospel that will last until chapter 7 where Paul again picks up the issue of his travels. It is a beautiful and heartfelt section that is some of the best instruction in the Scripture regarding the heart and soul of Christian ministry.

--First, Paul expresses his thanks to God because he knows that all his travels, all his labor in the gospel, and all his sufferings were not in vain. Why? Because he is fighting the good fight that Jesus has already won. **Who always leads us in triumph in Christ!**

--No doubt, Paul is using the illustration of a Roman victory march through the city with incense to gods rising and the victorious soldiers parading with captives chained and following. *How* Paul is using this illustration is a little debated. I don't think you can push it too far. I believe he is simply making Jesus the victorious general leading our celebratory march home.

--Our personal victory is secured tied up **in Christ**. Jesus leads as the Captain of the Lord's Hosts!

***Joshua 5:13-14: And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"**

So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"*

--He is not on our team. We are on His team! We have confidence because *He* is our Commander.

--Then Paul moves into the illustration of the aroma or burning incense that would come along with these victory parades. That smell would be recognizable and to the Roman citizens, it would be the aroma of victory and life, but to the chained captives it would be the aroma of defeat and death.

--Certainly the believers would be familiar with these images as well as the Old Testament pictures of the priestly perfumes and the sacrificial incense and offerings that were said to be pleasing to God. See (**Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 17:6; Num. 15:13; Ezra 6:10**).

--The smell being diffused in Paul's illustration here is not the spices and herbs of incense but the scent of **His knowledge**—the knowledge of Christ as more than information but that of spiritual apprehension.

--So you and I become the means that God uses to diffuse this fragrance in the world! *Think the sanctified smell of an OT priest*

--Paul used this image of a diffused aroma as an illustration of Christian life that is pleasing to God. What of us? What scent are we giving off in this dark and wicked world?

Ephesians 5:2: And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Philippians 4:18: Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

--What happens then? People are divided into two crowds—those who smell life and those who smell death! The scent of the knowledge of Jesus Christ is always pleasing to the Father but it is not always pleasing to those who are against Jesus Christ. ***1 Peter 2:4-8***

--In the end, we are all either for or against the Lord Jesus Christ.

--**And who is sufficient for these things?** Puts into perspective the grand scope of what is happening in the world. It also leads into Paul's discussion of those that feel that they can be sufficiently "credentialed" for this grand work of victory in the world.

Verse 17:

--Paul here—including Timothy, Titus, and Silas no doubt—states one of the things that makes his aroma or ministry different than others. They were not **peddling the word of God!**

--**Peddling**—Greek word (*kaleleuo*) is used only here. Your Bible may say *corrupt* but the idea is really that of a *retailer*. Someone who makes money by selling anything. It describes those who are "trading" in the Word of God.

*Buechner (A Room Called Remember): *“Peddlers are people with packs on their backs full of things they want to sell, and the things they try to sell hardest are the things they think will sell best. Peddlers are less concerned with what the world needs than with what the world wants or can be made to settle for. Peddlers are salespeople who are interested less in the quality of what they’re selling than in the success of their sale. So if the peddlers of God’s word happen to be preachers, it’s preaching as an end in itself that they’re apt to concentrate on. They do their best to be effective, eloquent, original. They choose the stories that will go over best and be remembered to their credit longer.”**

--And sadly, Paul calls this peddling crowd **so many!** There were already many in his day and there are legion in ours. May God give preachers and hearers more discernment to preach sincerely and hear with discernment.

--Satan knows that he cannot stop all preaching so he works to corrupt it. For him, corrupted preaching and corrupted churches are better than no preaching or no churches. *Sad that so many from our church have such a hard time finding another solid church!*

1 Corinthians 11:17: Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

--Paul was not one of them. It was not prideful to point that out. Nor is it prideful to say otherwise and may we always be able to say of Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia what Paul says of himself: **We are not!** of such a crowd.

--What was the difference?

1) Paul preached the Word of God sincerely. He wanted to get across what God wanted to say. That was no *mixing* or *dilution* of God’s message for ulterior purposes.

2) Paul preached the Word of God as from God. Paul preached the perfect, divine, infallible Word of God—it doesn’t just “contain” the Word of God. This means what Paul preached was *the* truth and authoritative.

3) Paul preached the Word of God in the sight of God and Christ. In the fear of God—as if God was *with him* and not just *for him*. *How many preachers in America today would never get up on that stage if they really believed God was there waiting for them?*

Chapter 3

Verses 1-3:

--Here Paul asks if he (like some of these false teachers in Corinth who didn’t believe in the resurrection, etc.) needed a letter of recommendation from someone else to come to them and minister.

--Paul knew that he didn’t for a number of reasons:

1) Paul knew he was an apostle by the will of God. The will of man didn’t matter.

2) Paul knew true evidence or “credentials” in the work of God were seen in the salvation of souls and in hearts changed by the Holy Spirit. **You are our epistle!**

1 Corinthians 9:2: *If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

--Anyone could write a letter with ink but only the supernatural power of God could change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Jeremiah 31:33: *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

3) Paul knew he didn't need letters of commendation. Practically, Paul was always trailblazing into unreached areas—letters didn't matter to unsaved people!

--I will pause here to make the point that Paul wasn't against commending Christian character. He often commended other believers and ministers in his personal epistles such as: Timothy Titus, Silas, Phoebe, Epaphras, etc. but he understood his letters didn't "qualify" or "credential" them for any work. Only the Spirit of God could do so.

Verses 4-6:

--(4) Paul's confidence was in God's own work in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

--(5) Paul was quick to point out that he had nothing to claim and nothing to think about in himself that would be sufficient. Instead he declares: ***our sufficiency is from God.***

--This remarkable apostle claims no credentials but many other ministers then and now sure do! All competence *must* come from God alone. Not intellect. Not experience. Not the commendation of other men. God alone can accomplish eternal and spiritual work. If it doesn't come from the life of God it isn't true spiritual fruit.

1 Corinthians 4:7: *And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

--(6) ***Who also made us sufficient as ministers.*** . . . in this we see the balance of Paul's point. Faithful ministers should be vessels fit for the Master's use but none of the merit is theirs. All the glory is the Lord's.

--In the end, there is no such things as "ministry training" from a human standpoint. If God is not actively forming the minister for His own will and task—man or woman—no human attempts can matter. *Balance of Spurgeon's pastoral college*

--Now, Paul begins his contrast between the ministry of the Old Covenant which he calls ***the letter (Rom. 2:27; 7:6; Gal. 3:3)*** and the New Covenant which he calls ***the Spirit (Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:8-9)***.

--Jesus taught this reality to His disciples saying:

John 6:63: *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

--This was a hard thing for those early Jews to understand, that the written law and their religious observances couldn't save them. Only the work of the Spirit could. Jesus made it clear that their outward religious lives looked beautiful but inwardly they were dead and rotting.

Matthew 23:27: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

--Now, you and I today might not be tempted to go back to OT forms or law, but this truth should also be a warning to our modern protestant and orthodox realms of Christianity. We too are familiar with good doctrine and like to have outwardly moral lives. But what is the reality of our inward nature before God?

--Our "letter" is not the law or Jewish religious rites but mere Bible words, human training, outward good "Christian" works, pew numbers, statistical methodologies, and swollen church banks accounts.

--Knowledge of history, Hebrew, Greek, Biblical theology, and even Bible verse memorization alone, without the life of the Spirit, cannot do anything to change our fleshly nature. These types of knowledge don't make us saved and it don't make us sufficient ministers. Only God working the supernatural reality of what the Bible teaches through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9: Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

--Paul made it very clear that there is such a thing as the gospel in word only.

1 Thessalonians 1:5: For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit...

**Law (The Power of the Spirit): "What than can a learned knowledge of literature and language and oratorical abilities perform in this kingdom? Just as much as they can do towards the resurrection of the dead; for all that is to be done in this heavenly kingdom is nothing less than resurrection into divine life from the death of sin. Therefore the power which gave eyes to the blind, cleansed the lepers, cast out devils, and raised the dead can and must alone do all that is to be done in this gospel Kingdom of God. Every smallest work of grace must be as solely done by God as the greatest miracle, because in every work of grace is the same overcoming of nature and sin as when the dead are raised to life. A letter-learned zeal, far from making any man a partaker of divine nature, only confirms him in his own fallen state: for his proud glorying in the letter blinds him to his emptiness and lack of reality in the Holy Spirit. One can be so proud of his doctrinal soundness that the Holy Spirit cannot convict him of the unsoundness of his life.*

*. . . The Bible teacher and religious leader who gain and hold a church position through intellectual attainments and oratorical skills can be said to differ from lesser men only as the serpent differed from the other beasts of the field—in that it was more subtle. And the old Serpent has elevated many of his servants through this same subtlety into places of authority and influence within that which pretends to be the Church of Christ."**

--What does this look like? Those who pretend to preach the same gospel and the same Word of God but who don't trust in the same power and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit.

--Can we imagine Paul, or the other apostles, or even the Corinthian church, thinking that skillful bands, light shows, smoke machines, stage props, and cultural relevance would tip the scales in sufficiency?

--How can you tell if someone is a preacher of the gospel in word only? Well, they will be very concerned about their words, what to say, how to say it, how to present it, and they study to find what the ears of their listeners are itching to hear. Their preaching is the end and not the means.

--All of these man-powered things simply mask the reality of what is not there: The life and power of the Holy Spirit.

--There are some that fear the message of the necessity of the Holy Spirit. If a Christian comes along and insists that there is more spiritual life to be found in our daily experience of God than what the mere words of their systematic theology state they call that one: Crazy, Heretic, Charismatic or Emotionalist. *The abuses do not negate the reality!*

--Some would rather the verse read: *The Spirit kills but the letter gives life.*

--We are desperately in need of Spirit and truth. And all good ministers must know where the true sufficiency for life and ministry come from, and ***have such trust through Christ toward God.***