

Message #5

II Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Several years ago President Bush was being criticized for going to war with Iraq. People were taking potshots at him and he had to continually defend the decisions he made. President Bush was a very gracious man. He was a straight shooting man. I would never be good at being a politician because when some idiotic reporter would ask me some stupid question, I would probably lose it and say to the reporter “perhaps you should check with your doctor to see if God really did give you a brain.” But that is me, not President Bush. When he was asked absurd things, he would calmly answer “I take full responsibility for the decisions I made and based on the information I had I would do the same thing again.” That is integrity and that is exactly the kind of integrity Paul had when he was being criticized.

It is obvious when we come to this section of II Corinthians that Paul is trying to restore a relationship between himself and the Corinthian church, with a bunch of people who were emotional, irrational and fickle. The fact is, Paul hadn't done anything wrong and the actual problem was with some of the people in the church. There were people who were accusing Paul of all kinds of things. Yet Paul was as calm as he could be.

What I find so amazing is the grace Paul demonstrates to these people. Some of us would be quick to write off the Corinthians as being a bunch of losers, but not Paul. What he does here is amazing:

PAUL GIVES A DEFENSE OF THE LIFE HE LIVED, THE MESSAGE HE PREACHED AND THE DECISIONS HE MADE CONCERNING THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH.

Paul had actually been criticized for suffering too much, so he had to say there was purpose in suffering. He also was being criticized as being a double-talking religious person who lacked integrity. So Paul had to defend himself on this point.

There is a place for defending yourself. There is a place for defending how you have lived in life, what you have done in ministry and what you have preached from the pulpit. That is what Paul does here. There are five ministry realities he addresses:

MINISTRY REALITY #1 – Paul defends his pastoral ministry to the Corinthians. 1:12

The Apostle Paul could not boast about his circumstances, or his money or his mansions or his numbers, but he could boast about his spiritual integrity. The Apostle Paul was an apostle and spiritual leader who did have real spiritual integrity.

Paul had properly conducted himself in the world and for the Corinthians. There are five facts concerning Paul's ministry:

(Fact #1) - Paul had a good conscience . 1:12a

This word “proud” or “boast” (καυχημα) is a critical word of II Corinthians. It comes from a word group that appears multiple times in the book of II Corinthians (1:12; 5:12; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2, 3; 10:8, 13, 15, 16, 17, 30; 12:1, 5, 6, 9). The word means to boast about something in the sense of glorying joyously in something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 242-243).

Paul asks what is my source of boasting. He certainly could not begin by saying I gloriously rejoice in the fact that you people are criticizing me and doubting that I have been called by God to even be an apostle. So what could Paul find joy in? The answer is the testimony of our “conscience.”

The word “conscience” (συνειδησις) refers to the critical self-analysis of one’s conscience in an objective way to determine whether or not Paul had acted improperly toward the Corinthians or anyone in anything or any way.

The Corinthians were accusing Paul of all kinds of things, including not caring about them, and Paul said I have a good, clear conscience. Paul’s conscience was clear and clean in everything he had done in regard to the Corinthians. He could analyze everything he had done in regard to the Corinthians and say my conscience is clear and clean.

Having a good conscience is critical to ministry. Having a good conscience is critical to being able to look people in the eyes, knowing you have never done a thing against them that was improper. When you know you have not done things to hurt any of your flock, it is a real blessing of God and your conscience is clean.

Paul always had the best of motives for doing things.

(Fact #2) - Paul had gracious holiness . 1:12b

This is a rare Greek word translated “holiness.” The better Greek manuscripts use a word (απλοτης) which tells us that Paul was a very generous, sincere and gracious man. He was not some rigid Pharisee who strutted around with a lot of religious pomp trying to impress people. His holiness was generous and gracious.

(Fact #3) - Paul had godly sincerity . 1:12c

The word “sincerity” (ειλκρινεια) is a word that would indicate that Paul had a sincere purity (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 132). There was nothing phony about Paul. His purity was real. In other words, Paul was a straight-forward man, not some crafty religious leader sneaking around trying to manipulate or con people.

(Fact #4) - Paul always promoted the grace of God to the world. **1:12d**

Now the religious world was all caught up in fleshly works and religion. Man-made systems of religion with all of their rituals and religious rules dominated the world. Paul says I have always conducted myself in this world promoting the grace of God. I have lived it and I have taught it. Taking the grace Gospel to the world was Paul's assignment given to Him directly from Jesus Christ.

(Fact #5) - Paul always conducted himself stressing the grace of God to the Corinthians.
1:12e

If any group of people should have known that Paul promoted grace it should have been these Corinthians. In fact, the adverb "especially" means way beyond measure. If any group should know the integrity of Paul's grace reflection, it should be the Corinthians.

When Paul wrote I Corinthians, he said some of these Corinthians had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and swindlers; but they had responded to the grace message Paul preached and they were washed, sanctified and justified (I Cor. 6:9-11).

Paul said I have always conducted myself with the Corinthians and with the world in a way that promoted and communicated the grace of God.

MINISTRY REALITY #2 – Paul defends his writings. **1:13-14**

Paul may not have been able to visit as often as he would like, but he did take the time to write them four key letters. Paul had written strong letters to the Corinthians. Two of Paul's letters to the Corinthians were inspired by God.

Paul wrote in simple, straight-forward, understandable language and his letters were intended to be read and understood. Paul addressed things straight up. He wrote things readable and understandable. Paul hoped the Corinthians would study and understand the written Word of God until the end.

Paul is basically saying I have acted toward you properly in writing these letters and I hope until the end that you will study these letters and apply them because there will come a judgment day, and if you have done that you will be proud of me and I will be proud of you. There is what we could call "justifiable pride."

If ever there is an admonition for God's people to carefully study to understand the written Word of God until the end, it is this one right here. If we will purpose to study and apply the written Scriptures until we leave this world, when we face judgment we will be proud of the apostles and the apostles will be proud of us.

MINISTRY REALITY #3 – Paul defends his ministry travels for the Corinthians. **1:15-18**

In **verses 15-16** Paul describes his original plans. Paul intended to visit Corinth twice—once on his way to Macedonia and again on his way back from Macedonia. In fact, initially he had intended to perhaps even spend the winter in Corinth (I Cor. 16:5-9). Things had changed and some were alleging that Paul was not a man of his word, so Paul had to defend himself and say I am not some fickle man who said he would do something and then didn't do it.

Paul's travel plans had changed. He wanted these Corinthians to realize that he was not the kind of man who decides to do something by some fleshly whim, which is what the Corinthians were obviously alleging.

The change in Paul's itinerary led some of the Corinthians to conclude that he was not a man of his word and he was just being guided by his own human and fleshly wisdom. They were obviously saying that he did not have any real contact with the Lord in his decision making, but was just making fleshly decisions based on what benefited him.

Paul is saying sometimes, according to the sovereignty of God, plans may change but not my scruples or principles.

Paul says in **verse 17**, I was not vacillating between “yes and no.” I was not making decisions according to my flesh. Paul said I do not speak out of both sides of my mouth.

Paul says in **verse 18**, God is faithful and our word is faithful. There is no variation when it comes to truth.

As a Christian, our words should be straight-forward, clean and decent. Our yes should be yes and our no should be no. We should be people who tell the truth. That was Paul.

MINISTRY REALITY #4 – Paul defends the message he preached to the Corinthians. **1:19-22**

Paul has already said I came preaching grace to you and now in **verses 19-22**, Paul zeroes in on the grace word he preached. He preached grace in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11).

Paul says the word that we have preached to you is dogmatic grace truth and the grace truth zeroes in on one Divine Person – Jesus Christ. Now Paul goes right into a rich message about truth pertaining to Jesus Christ.

Now why does Paul do this? Why does he jump from discussing things about himself to Jesus Christ? The answer is because Paul did not want the criticisms being leveled against him to negate the grace message he preached. He wanted these Corinthians to realize that the grace Gospel I preach that is centered on Jesus Christ is dogmatic truth.

There had been some religious leaders who were trying to tell the Corinthians that they needed to keep the Law and do religious works to be right with God and Paul wants to emphasize that the message he preached was Jesus Christ. Everything we have in a relationship with God is found in Christ and not in us. There are six Christological truths that Paul reminds them he preached:

Christological Truth #1 - Jesus Christ is the Son of the God. **1:19a** (ο υιος του θεου)

Paul starts with this point. Christ Jesus is the Son of the God. “Christ” means Jesus is the Jewish Messiah; “Jesus” means Jesus is the Savior and “the Son of the God” means Jesus is Deity. So by using this simple proper noun formula, Paul is saying to the Corinthians my message to you is that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, Jesus is the Savior and Jesus is God. That is what I taught.

Christological Truth #2 - Jesus Christ was preached to you by us. **1:19b**

Now Paul says we all preached this truth about Jesus Christ to you. I preached it, Silvanus preached it and so did Timothy. Now the essence of what they preached is seen at the end of **verse 19**, a “yes in Him” message. Paul says that is what we preached. We preached that any relationship with God, any forgiveness of sins, any hope of eternal life is found “in Him.” All of the blessings of God are found “in Him.”

By the way, do you notice how the church was formed; by “preaching.” The message of Jesus Christ was preached. That participle “preach” (κηρυσσω) is aorist passive. What this clearly teaches us is that they did not just meet with people to share stories; they specifically and pointedly proclaimed and heralded the truth (Smith, p. 246). The people were the passive recipients of the expositions, so this was not a let’s all share what it means to us gathering. These apostles went to places and preached the Word of God about Jesus Christ. They preached verbal messages.

Christological Truth #3 - Jesus Christ gives us all the promises of God. **1:20**

Do you grasp this point? All of the promises of God that will ever be fulfilled for Israel or for us center on Jesus Christ. When you believe on Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, you link yourself to all of the promises of God because those promises are “yes in Him.” When Paul says “by Him is our Amen,” he is saying truly everything we have in a relationship with God is found in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who is in us that enables us to live to the glory of God.

Christological Truth #4 - God is the one who established us in Christ. **1:21a**

The word “establish” (βεβαιωω) is one that means to establish us and confirm us to the point of giving us a guarantee of security (*Ibid.*, p. 79). The tense of the participle is present which speaks of continual action. Now don’t miss this; Paul says what we preached is that when you believe on Jesus Christ, God gives you a continual guarantee that you are established and confirmed as His family. We are just as established and confirmed as the apostles. In fact, that is exactly what Paul says here—“establishes us with you in Christ.”

Christological Truth #5 - God is the One who anointed us in Christ. **1:21b**

Now the word “anoint” (χρίω) is one that means God gives us a very sacred status the moment we believe. He consecrates us as a sacred person on the level of a priest (*Ibid.*, p. 485). The aorist tense of the participle indicates this is a point of time moment. So from the moment you believe on Jesus Christ you have a very sacred status in a relationship with God.

Christological Truth #6 - God is the One who sealed us and gave us the Spirit. **1:22**

Paul says also the moment we believe we were sealed by the Holy Spirit. He was given to us as a pledge or down payment that we now are the property of heaven. The participle “sealed” is aorist tense and the participle “gave” is aorist tense. What this means is that there was one point in time when you were sealed and given the Holy Spirit and that moment was the moment you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

MINISTRY REALITY #5 – God will witness I did not come to Corinth to spare you.
1:23-2:4

This was the reason Paul did not pay them another visit; he wanted to spare them of another negative and painful confrontation. No pastor in his right mind likes negative confrontation. Sometimes the right thing to do is not to call on the people.

Paul says the reason why I didn't come is because when I have to do or say something that makes you sad, it makes me sad.

Paul says I am not lording it over you, but the fact is I want our relationship to be joyful and happy and I decided not to come visit you in a negative way again. Paul said I did not come to you because I wanted the situation to be better when I did finally come.

Paul said in **verses 3-4** that when I wrote those negative letters, my heart was broken. I wrote the negative things with tears. I did not write to make you sad, but I wrote because of the love I have for you.

I find it intriguing how many times he refers to things written. He never winged it. He was always studying and writing. People who minister like Paul think things through and write things down.

But Paul's love for the Corinthians doesn't even compare to God's love for us. God offers all of us undeserved, unearned, non-merited grace. God offers all of us total and complete forgiveness from all of our sins. This grace is found in Jesus Christ. Believe on Him and the riches of the grace of God are all yours.

That is exactly what Paul taught the Corinthians and that is what God's written Word teaches us.