

Christ Reformation Church

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

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

“God’s Divine Power Among Us”

March 22, 2015

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 12:11 – 13:14

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 11:17-34

Introduction-

This morning we come to the conclusion of our study of this Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth, and I trust that we are all wiser about the nature of evil and of God’s truth than we were at the beginning. The Corinthians, you will

remember, had terribly wrong and worldly notions about what a true servant of Christ looks like and as a result they had been duped by these wicked false teachers who had come in among them. They thought, and the false teachers affirmed their errors, that a servant of Christ:

- Never suffers
- Never needs comfort
- Is popular
- Wields power like some CEO with a big club, lording it over people
- Uses the same “weaponry” that the world uses
- Gets paid lots of money
- Preaches a “gospel” that is appealing to people
- Exalts himself above others

And the result? Well, they rejected the true Apostle and embraced wolves. They accepted a false Jesus, a false gospel, and a false spirit, drifting from the truth that Paul had delivered to them. They were holding themselves off from Paul. They had been deceived

by these servants of Satan who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ.

These truths certainly have direct application to us as individuals and as a local church today. Not only have we seen many such false brethren creep in among us and cause all kinds of havoc in years past, but I believe we are seeing the very same thing in our association, ARBCA, right now. What has happened? It appears to me, and I am not alone in this conclusion by any means, that evil, legalistic, self-seeking men have crept in and have worked to lure people away from pure and simple devotion to Christ, emphasizing the letter rather than the spirit of the law. They are very zealously working to bring others under this yoke of bondage.

How did this happen? How did such men attain the influential positions they are in? They craved it. They sought it. They presented themselves as Christ's servants, but are not. And they were allowed to do so.

I have talked with several of you recently about the dangers of "structure." What I mean by "structure" is this – When an organization is formed (and there must be organization even in one local individual church), there will always

be certain kinds of people who crave to rise to the top of that organized "ladder." Here was this church at Corinth. And here came these evil men who loved to be first and who craved power and control and position. Scripture warns us over and over about such people – that we are to be on guard against such Diotrephes and call them out when they evidence themselves. They will hate you for it if you do so. Do it anyway. Christ forbids any such lording over and self-promotion in His church. *It shall not be so among you!*

But when a structure is formed, such as ARBCA – with councils and chairmanships and committees and budgets – you can be SURE of this – Diotrephes will evidence himself by *craving* position and "firstness." Oh how he presents himself as such "godly servant," ready to sacrifice and labor for the good of all. He is lauded as an eminent, gifted saint (which he loves) and when a position in the organization is vacant, his name is the first to be nominated. Up the ladder he goes.

Make no mistake, this is the road to popery. It is how the monster of Rome originated and that same evil spirit with its false Jesus and false gospel is still with us today. I have seen this thing functioning in EVERY church I

have pastored and EVERY denominational organization I have been in. These wicked types crave power and control and if allowed to run their course they will obtain it and they will enslave those under them. I fully expect ARBCA to continue down a path further and further away from Christ – a very legalistic one in which people bite and devour one another.

As I have seen these things work, I have grown to appreciate and love this church more and more. Here in this fellowship, we can much more easily identify anyone who craves position and power and control. If a Diotrephes showed up here some Sunday and began to work his evil craft, it would not be long before he was exposed. But what happens when we vote for people in some multi-church organization that we don't really even know? Danger is afoot in those cases.

Well, back to our text. Paul has been working to expose these evil “ladder-climbers,” and in fact that is the whole purpose of this 2nd Epistle. Remember the gravity of this thing and of the nature of who these guys really were (and are today):

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere

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

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Just take a moment and let the weight of these words sink in. Paul tells us that when someone creeps into a church, brings as in this case a false gospel of legalism, craves and works to be first, wears an angelic disguise – they are in fact servants of the devil. Satan, please understand this, has more than once sent his servants in among us. We must always be on guard.

Now, we also see the gravity of this matter here in this closing section, particularly from the weighty words Paul uses in regard to the sobering divine power the Lord will bring against any of these evil people at

Corinth who refuse to repent. That is to say, as we read this, notice that the Lord's patience with evil people in His church will one day run out. He DOES act against evil *now*, and no one should deceive themselves into thinking that they can harm Christ's church and get away with it indefinitely. Paul is not speaking here of the Day of the Lord yet future, but of a time immediately when he comes to Corinth and Christ's Apostle:

2 Corinthians 12:11-21 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. (12) The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. (13) For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! (14) Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. (15) I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? (16) But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better

of you by deceit. (17) Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? (18) I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? (19) Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. (20) For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish--that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. (21) I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

2 Corinthians 13:1-14 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (2) I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them-- (3) since you seek

proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. (4) For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. (5) Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (6) I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. (7) But we pray to God that you may not do wrong--not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. (8) For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. (9) For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. (10) For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. (11) Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (12) Greet one another with a holy kiss. (13)

All the saints greet you. (14) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

There are many themes in this section that we could spend more time on – most of which we have examined in earlier chapters:

- Paul’s humility being used as a basis of accusation against him by these enemies
- Paul’s refusal to take financial support from them when he first came to them – also used against him by these critics
- Paul’s genuine love for these people
- The principle of “when I am weak, then I am strong” – because the Lord works His power through our weakness, that no one can boast

But what I want us to focus on this morning is this sobering theme:

The Lord will destroy His enemies. Any who have crept into His church and who refuse His command to repent, who view His patience as license to continue to sin, will sooner or later experience His divine power and He will not spare them.

Consider these verses again:

2 Corinthians 12:20-21 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish--that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. (21) I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

This is what the Corinthian scene looked like. As long as the Corinthians continued to embrace worldly notions of greatness and power, they would be at odds with Paul, and he with them. Why? Because the fruit of this false Jesus, false gospel and false spirit is:

- Quarreling
- Jealousy
- Anger
- Hostility
- Slander
- Gossip
- Conceit
- Disorder

Paul is afraid that they won't repent and if they do not, then when he comes to them again he will be "humbled" (saddened, grieved) rather than being able to "boast" of their genuine love

for Christ. Notice also that there must have been others who were still resisting Paul's call for repentance from another category of evil:

- Impurity
- Sexual immorality
- Sensuality

These sins were addressed in 1 Corinthians – we looked at one such call to repentance last week in 1 Cor 6 –

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

NOTE: I find it interesting that these false apostles at Corinth apparently were not bothered about these kinds of sins, as long as the people bowed to them and their self-serving authority. It is the same today, make no mistake. Many, many churches are dominated by people who lord it over the flock and who let rampant sin go unchallenged in the church, *as long as glory and honor and power is given to these false shepherds!* The chief and

only sin in such a “church” is to “question authority” or violate the man-made traditions that have been created in such a place.

Now, notice these verses again in particular –

2 Corinthians 13:1-4 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (2) I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them-- (3) since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. (4) For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

2 Corinthians 13:10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

I don't know what Paul had in mind. We do have examples of Apostolic, divine power in Scripture:

Acts 13:6-12 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. (7) He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. (8) But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. (9) But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him (10) and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? (11) And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. (12) Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

You have the account of Ananias and Sapphira. And Paul reminds them that the Lord's power had verified Paul's apostleship when he had been with them earlier –

2 Corinthians 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

The Lord's consistent "rule of evidence" is "two or three witnesses" as stated in the OT. Two or three witnesses confirms a matter, and Paul applies it in a very sobering manner here by way of warning these unrepentant ones. This next visit of his is going to be the third time. The third strike. If he comes to them and finds them unrepentant still, he says "I will not spare them." He says –

"You seem to be eager to see proof and the power of God. Alright, just continue to refuse to repent and you will see it when I come."

These are fearsome words, but Paul uses them only very reluctantly. He knows this is the Lord's power, not his, and he would much rather use that power and his apostolic office to build up Christ's people rather than to "tear down."

Conclusion

Let's apply these words to ourselves and to this church. I think they should be very, very encouraging to us –

unless there is anyone here who is actually a servant of the devil in disguise. For a person like that, the response should be fear and trembling.

Notice again –

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Scripture calls all of us to examine ourselves. Paul has told the Corinthians this before (see 1 Cor 11) and the Galatian churches as well (6:4). Hebrews also contains numbers of similar admonitions and warnings:

Hebrews 4:6-12 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, (7) again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. (9) So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, (10) for

whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (11) Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (12) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

No true Christian will ever perish. Christ holds us and will bring us safely home. At the same time, every true Christian examines himself. The doctrines of election and the perseverance of the saints do not teach *presumption*. They do not teach that a person can live in sin and yet be saved just because they are “elect.” No! Calvinists are wrongly accused this way. What we believe the Bible teaches is that anyone who is truly elect, who is genuinely regenerated by God in Christ, will be able to examine themselves and see evidence of the Spirit of Christ in them. And anyone who lacks that fruit should have no confidence that they belong to Christ, ie, that they have “passed the test.”

Listen to the Belgic Confession of Faith (article 24) -

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith working through love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.

How do we test ourselves then? Well by this:

“Jesus Christ is in you.”

This is true of EVERY real Christian. Christ comes to us and indwells us by His Spirit. And we know that His Spirit is active in us, leading us in righteousness, producing His fruit in us. We can take great encouragement because in spite of our lingering sinful flesh, our identity has been radically changed in the new birth. It is Christ

who characterizes us now, not the flesh (See Romans 8; Gal 5).

But if honest examination reveals that Christ is not in a person, then they must realize that they have “failed the test” and repent and call upon God for His mercy in Christ, while, as Hebrews puts it, *it is still “Today.”*

Christ knows who belong to Him and who do not. He knows the genuine, and He knows the counterfeit. If you are in Him and know Him, He knows it. If you are still dead in sin, a child of the devil, wearing a sheep disguise, He knows that too.

The Corinthians arrived at that day so long ago when Paul came to them again. I don't know how Paul found them. I hope they had repented. Perhaps those false apostles experienced God's divine power against them through Paul. We don't know.

Paul is not coming to us, but Christ is. We must be sure to examine ourselves with ruthless honesty, and if we truly belong to Christ then take great comfort and encouragement, looking forward to that Day.

But if anyone here this morning fails the test, it is vital that they come to know it. When Paul came to Corinth, as he said, it was for the third time and

it would have been too late for repentance then. So it is with us in regard to Christ's appearing. *Is Jesus Christ in you, or not?* That is the question each of us must answer, and it is an answer we must not be wrong about.