

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

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

***“Still Wising Up to the Enemy’s
Schemes”***

June 1, 2014

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:12 –
2:4

Scripture Reading: John 8:31-59

Introduction-

This week I came across a professing Christian who I am very glad goes to someone else’s church! You couldn’t tell him anything, and yet it was obvious that *he didn’t know anything!*

How common it is to see pride and ignorance married in the same person! It is a dangerous combination. He was all about show and feeling. I really doubt that he could have explained any basic doctrine of Scripture in any depth at all – yet he wanted to give the impression that he was quite mature in the faith. That man, in all his arrogance, is a sitting duck for the tactics of the enemy which we see being used at Corinth. These Corinthians were arrogant. And their arrogance was getting them into trouble. False teachers had crept in who measured truth according to the world’s standards. They were alienating the Corinthians from Paul, and thereby alienating them from Christ’s truth.

Here, in this next section of the first chapter, Paul has to deal with one of these accusations being spread about him. It seems so trivial – and really it was. Yet it was having the effect these enemies wanted as they attacked Paul’s credibility as an apostle. Listen as Paul responds, and listen carefully

because the enemy uses *the very same tactics against us today*.

NOTE: It is my intent to deal with this rather large section in a kind of "overview" this morning, and then next week zero in more specifically on several especially important points ("For all the promises of God find their Yes in him....he also put his seal on us and has given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee....").

2Co 1:12-24 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. (13) For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and acknowledge and I hope you will fully acknowledge-- (14) just as you did partially acknowledge us--that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. (15) Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. (16) I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. (17) Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the

same time? (18) As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. (19) For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. (20) For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (21) And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, (22) and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (23) But I call God to witness against me--it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. (24) Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

2Co 2:1-4 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. (2) For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? (3) And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. (4) For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know

the abundant love that I have for you.

A Change in Travel Plans

Paul explains (starting at verse 15) that his original intent was to come to Corinth earlier, but that he changed those plans for good reason. He was writing from Macedonia (to the north of Corinth), and he had planned on stopping at Corinth on the way there, then stopping once again at Corinth on the way back as he traveled to Judea (with the collection for the suffering believers there). But he changed his plans and did not stop, but went instead straight to Macedonia.

This change of plans was for the Corinthians *good*:

“But I call God to witness against me – it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth.” (vs 23)

He already had made one “painful visit” to Corinth (see 2:1, “another”) during which the Corinthians had to be seriously chastised. He did not want to have to do that again. He decided to hold off coming until their repentance was plain, out of his love for them, which he expresses again in 2:1-4.

But there were those at Corinth who were working to turn the believers

there against Paul. People who regarded themselves as “super apostles.” They were probably Jews who wanted to distort the gospel into law works all for the purpose of glorifying themselves. The same old story. Diotrophes is always around in the churches – *he wants to be first* – and that means he has to eliminate all competition by driving true ministers of Christ out:

3Jn 1:8-10 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (9) I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. (10) So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Those 3 verses ought to be taught in detail in every seminary, in every church – they ought to be posted on the wall of every church building. This is the age-old tactic Satan sends in the person of his emissaries to destroy the ministry of Christ. Diotrophes is a narcissist and sociopath. Diotrophes is full of himself. Diotrophes must be first citizen – he craves it like an addict craves his drug. What does Diotrophes

do to gain his power and control and praise?

- Rejects the authority of Christ's appointed ministers
- Talks "wicked nonsense" against Christ's appointed ministers
- Works to isolate Christ's people from Christ's appointed ministers
- Uses threats against those who are balking at obeying him.

This is the thing that was going on at Corinth. In this case, these Diotrophes types were jumping all over something as minor as Paul's change of itinerary to try to persuade the Corinthians that Paul's word was not to be trusted about anything, including the gospel.

Paul responds, not only by explaining and defending his decision to not visit Corinth just yet, but by using this opportunity to teach the Corinthians about the nature of Christ and true servants of Christ in contrast to the world. Listen again:

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

acknowledge and I hope you will fully acknowledge--

One of the greatest flaws I have seen over the years in pastors is that they approach their ministry in the world's terms. They put on a façade. They become a different person in the pulpit than they are in reality. Their speech changes. Their demeanor and vocabulary changes. Of course we know that in preaching a sermon or in teaching a class our speech and mannerisms to some extent are going to reflect the occasion – versus how we would speak and behave at lunch with a friend. But what I mean in this case is, a façade of "greatness." A façade of "piety." On a fishing trip with friends my speech and behavior will be more informal than when I am preaching a sermon. But in neither case am I to be *fake* – *pretending to be something great*. Apparently that is what Corinthian worldly wisdom looked for in a speaker:

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God **with lofty speech or wisdom**. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in **weakness and in fear and much trembling**, (4) and my speech and my message were **not in**

plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

In the church today, not much has changed from the time Paul wrote this. Worldly-minded people embrace worldly minded men and reject Christ's true ministers. Diotrefes is alive and well.

Ministers and church leaders – and really anyone in the church who craves to be “first” – will be tempted then to employ *duplicity and insincerity*, the very opposite of what Paul resolved to practice. Using *equivocation* – saying one thing but meaning another. Pretense and pretending. Much like the Pharisees-

Mat 6:5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Every genuine minister of Christ *despises* this sort of thing. And every genuine Christian does as well. You should be able, by the Spirit of Christ in you, to see right through it and reject it. Yet many churches *are actually built and*

populated on this kind of false 'charisma' of some man. This is not Christ. Christ is humble and lowly, coming to serve rather than to be served. His real servants are appalled anytime adulation starts coming at them –

Act 14:13-15 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. (14) But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, (15) "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Many people crave this kind of thing. I have heard them say things like, “well, you know, I am glad that you like all that detail in Romans about justification and election and so on. But I am just a person who needs a preacher who reaches out and *grabs onto my heart* all through the sermon with real life stories that move me to tears.” In other words, a person like that wants a *performance and a*

performer. And many who profess to be ministers of Christ today are quite glad to give such a performance. Paul rejected all of this.

Simplicity and Sincerity

Paul's ministry was characterized then by *simplicity* and *sincerity*. That word translated "simplicity" means "simple" in the sense of "singleness." Sincerity is "purity of motive." What did he mean? Simply this: *What you see in us is what you get. What you read is what we mean. We are what we are. We do not put on a façade. We do not say one thing to you but really mean another. We wear our motives on our sleeve. We are not trying to deceive you or manipulate you.*

You see this in other places here in this same letter:

2Co 1:18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No.

2Co 2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

2Co 4:2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to

tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Peddlers of God's Word. What a term! Religion and the pulpit of a local church attracts these peddlers. Men who crave self-glory and praise and money and power. They are the exact opposite of the Apostle Paul's description here of a genuine servant of Christ. But because of the Corinthians' arrogance and ignorance, they were prime targets for these very kinds of false leaders. And so it is still today. Genuine ministers and Christians, the real gospel, are often rejected and instead a wicked substitute is embraced. This will continue to be a danger to us as long as *we see things and think about things through a worldly lens. If we measure greatness by natural criteria, we will inevitably reject Christ, His servants, and His Word.*

2Co 1:17-20 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? (18) As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. (19) For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes

and No, but in him it is always Yes. (20) For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

What is a true church? What does a real minister of Christ look and sound like? What, as we have asked before, *does Jesus Christ look like?*

Earthly Wisdom Negates God's Grace

2Co 1:12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

We dare not miss still another vital point here in this 12th verse. Notice that Paul contrasts in sheer opposition:

- Earthly wisdom
- and-
- The grace of God

The thinking of the world, of the natural man – always, always, always opposes the gospel of Jesus Christ and the grace of God in it. Worldly thinking about greatness and “truth” always leads to a false religion of works righteousness, without fail. Earthly wisdom creates a religion of SHOW. Of FAÇADE. Grace exposes

who man really is – a sinner dead in sin, unable to make a single step toward his rescue. The message of the gospel of God's grace in Christ makes no pretense about these things – it pulls no punches and it does not attribute any goodness to man. That is the message that this *simplicity and godly sincerity* will proclaim without apology. The truth of Christ drives what a true minister and true Christians speak and do.

You see it in verse 13. Look at it again-

2Co 1:13 For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and acknowledge and I hope you will fully acknowledge--

Do you see what Paul's point is? He is telling the Corinthians that he isn't playing any games with them when he writes to them. He isn't trying to be deceptive or secretly manipulative or carefully crafting his words in such a way that they have a double meaning (*duplicity*). “What you read here is exactly what I mean. There is nothing hidden that you don't already know. I have spoken freely and honestly and I write to you in the same way.”

This is vital. WE must trust one another! Over the years we have had in this church – as most all of you know – numbers of Diotrophes types who

wanted to be first. And their method was the same as we see here in 2 Corinthians – to sow discord and distrust, especially between the members of the church and the shepherds of the church.

One very common way these kinds operate their evil is, just as was happening at Corinth, to attribute bad motives to good actions. Paul's motives were good in deciding not to come to Corinth first, and what he did was good. But these enemies come and work their evil among the people by claiming they KNEW Paul's motives – that he was just stringing the people along and using them and thus *nothing he said was to be trusted*.

In the same way, we must be wary of people today who use the tactic of *telling us what our motives are. Of telling us what our thoughts are*. Quite often over the years I have had to experience wicked people seeking to control others and to sow distrust in the church announce to me in front of others that they know the “real” reason I said or did something. And, of course, it was a bad or sinful reason, according to them. You may have been the target of a very similar thing yourself. *“I know why you said/did that and I am going to tell you right now so everyone can hear.”* Think about it – no one has the ability to see

our motives or to read what is in our minds!

These wicked people at Corinth claimed that they knew Paul's real motives in his change of plans. As it turns out, as he explains his reasons, they had no idea at all and their charges were false.

The Temptations of a Christian Minister to Duplicity and Facade

Just as the Corinthians craved a showy façade, “great” in the thinking of the world, so it is today. False ministers are chosen and exalted. Genuine ministers are rejected. This, of course, is magnified when churches are filled with unsaved people who are convinced they are fine Christians!

Let me explain, from my personal experience over the years as a pastor, how this pressure to “deliver” a worldly ministry comes at a pastor.

1. When I was still in seminary, back in the days when I was a police officer, I had several professing Christians tell me that there was no way I could ever be a pastor, because “I just didn't have the right personality for it.” I actually wasn't even planning to be a pastor! What then did these people have in their minds a real pastor should look like?

What kind of personality? I can tell you – a fake. A performer. Someone who would and could step into “the role” and play it.

2. People want a “triumphant” minister and ministry. They don’t want one who offends. They certainly don’t want one who is weak and who suffers as the Apostle Paul suffered! They want a popular leader and a popular church. I remember about a year after I first came to this church and as we were confronting all the sin that had been parading as godliness, one of the ring leaders said “This church has a reputation in the community as a wonderful family church and now look at all this trouble. Our image has been ruined now.” Yes, and that is all it was – an image. Ministers are pressured to maintain the “image” and that negates being the kind of minister Paul was. Purity of motive and godly sincerity must be thrown under the bus.
3. I can think of at least 6 occasions over the years when people who paraded as fine Christians and who loved to be “first” in the church, told me that I was not competent or fit or called to be in the pastoral ministry. [And by the way, each of our elders has been

the target of the very same accusations now]. Why? What was their point? In each case it was because I would not wear the façade that they insisted I wear, and be someone I was not and that God had not called me to be. “Jeff, you aren’t more of a politician, you won’t make it as a pastor.” Such people do not want this simplicity and sincerity that Paul speaks of here. None of these accusers, by the way, ended well. One who paraded as a Christian counselor was found out to have had a horrid marriage all along. Another pursued an unrepentant course of adultery later. Another was put out of the church for evil and unrepentant sin.

4. It has also been my experience that pressure is put upon the minister to not use “plain speaking.” To leave a certain sense of ambiguity and vagueness in sermons, for example. The whole motive of course is to *avoid causing offense, which is simply translated into – letting the guilty remain anonymous and able to continue walking in sin.* Clearly identifying the wicked and false teachers openly is frowned upon because it offends and puts people off and...well, it just stirs

up trouble. As a result, the wicked continue to enjoy anonymity and the people of Christ are left confused as to where the wolf is.

Those are just some examples then of the pressure and demands put upon the Christian minister – and really upon each one of you if you really know Christ – to embrace worldly concepts and wisdom and to become a great pretender, according to what pleases the world and worldlings hiding in the church. This is all repugnant to Paul because it is repugnant to our Lord Jesus Christ, who sees everything in perfect clarity.

Do not be surprised then when a minister of Christ rejects pretense, embraces simplicity and godly sincerity, and is as a result maligned by enemies. Do not fall prey to such tactics.

Conclusion

Later, Paul will continue to encourage the Corinthians to embrace him and his gospel again –

2Co 4:5-6 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our

hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is really the very heart of true Christian ministry. A servant who has experienced the Light of Christ himself and whose motive is to announce Jesus Christ as Lord and the saving knowledge of Him to others. And thus Paul implores these Corinthians:

2Co 6:11-13 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. (12) You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. (13) In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

We must trust one another. This church must be a place where the truth and the light of Christ shines. Where there is no duplicity of word or motive, no façade, no secret and hidden sin hiding behind a pious disguise that sows seeds of discord and distrust and confusion, and ultimately hinders us from hearing and believing the Word of Jesus Christ Himself.