

2 Corinthians 2 Commentary-Wayne Barber

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2 Corinthians 1:12-2:6 Evidence That God Proves Us Guilty

Turn with me this morning to 2 Corinthians as we continue to move right along as we study this wonderful book, this letter of Paul to the Corinthian church. We're talking about a mini-series within a big series. It's called, "When Our Walk Matches Our Talk," and this is part 2 of that. I want to emphasize the fact of the evidence that convicts us as guilty.

You say, "Where in the world are you headed with this?" Well, just hang on and I think you'll understand. When I was in youth and recreation work, I had a gymnasium and I did all the recreation activities and the camps and everything. And we had a big banner, I had a big banner put up all the way the length of the wall in that gym and on it were huge letters that said these words: If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

And that came in real handy, especially when we were having church league men's basketball games. You see, when I was growing up I was in city league ball and you had to be bleeding to have a foul. I mean, I want to tell you the worst group I've ever dealt with has been in the church leagues. When you have Mr. Deacon and Mr. Sunday School Teacher, and whoever it is, playing basketball, funny things come out of them, especially when you make a call they don't like. And so that sign really helped me out. I'd just walk up to them and put my arm around them and just get them over to the side and point to the sign. If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? That usually solved the whole situation. Sometimes we had to do more drastic measures.

Well, today in our text in 2 Corinthians 1, we're going to see that the apostle Paul had all the evidence that was needed to convict him as being guilty of being a Christian. Now it is this evidence in our lives that people see. This is the evidence in our lives that touches people that don't know about the Lord Jesus Christ. When we're in the restaurant, when we're across the street, when we're doing our normal thing during the week, when they look at us and see the evidence that we really are what we say we are. Our walk is matching our talk; this is what we call "missions" across the street and around the world.

How do we become a part of reaching people for the Lord Jesus Christ? And I know this sounds simple, but as I was studying this message, God gave me the answer. The answer is right in front of my face. You know where it starts? It doesn't start out there; it doesn't start with somebody who is really good at raising funds. I'm terrible at that. Where it starts is each individual person that makes up the church begins to have an intimate walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Letting Jesus be Jesus in and through us. You see, it's only then that we get to join Him in what He's already up to in this world. He's the One Who prompts the heart to give; He's the One Who gives direction to the needs that He puts within our grasp. He in us makes a lasting impression on the people that are around us.

The thing that changes the image of the church is not what we do with the property, it's not cutting the grass. We are the church: it's when we come to that place of surrender in our lives and Jesus is Jesus in us. That's what changes the world. And it's so exciting to see people who are allowing God to do that.

Recently I had the opportunity to fly to California for less than 24 hours. And it was in a beautiful place. I was speaking to the Young Professional Organization in America. That's the CEO's and presidents of companies that are 40 years old and under. And they told me they were going to have a limo to pick me up. I got outside and there was a lady standing there saying, "Mr. Barber?" I walked over and said I was Wayne and she said, "I'm your limo driver." And this limo driver got me in there, and I was sitting in the back. And it wasn't thirty seconds into the drive and she started talking to me and she said, "I just want you to know I'm a born-again believer and I love the Lord Jesus Christ." And she found out I was a preacher and liked to have talked the ears off my head before we got to that place. It was awesome. She's been working with this company for two years and she's going to Bible school and she just wanted to tell me about it.

I had the opportunity to speak the next morning and turned right around and went back, it was less than 24 hours. I got in that limo again and it wasn't my little friend. It was another fellow and he was about early 50s. And I said, "What do you do?" And he said, "Man, I'm a surfer. And I came out here to California because I love to surf." I said, "Really? How long have you been with this company?" He said, "Oh, ten, twelve years. But let me tell you this. That's not really what I do now." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "This just makes my money. When I got out here to surf, I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm a believer and I live my life just to tell people about Jesus." And I'm thinking, "Where am I?" Man, it was awesome! And I'll tell you one thing: they made an impact on me.

Let me ask you this question: is there enough evidence in your life this morning to convict you of being a believer when you're out in the world that you're in? See, this evidence is what we'll see today in the apostle Paul. And the apostle Paul was the greatest missionary in his day and he tells us why. He says it's because he came to understand that Jesus was living in him now as a believer. On the Damascus road he had a life changing experience and he just let Jesus be Jesus in him.

And according to Romans 15:18, he reached a Gentile world—that God had assigned, by the way, to him—and in verse 18 of that chapter he said it was a result of Christ working through him. He said, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." Well, one of the things that Christ accomplished through Paul was the church of Corinth. Acts tells us about that. When he went over to Corinth and he met Priscilla and Aquila who were tentmakers and he got to know them and here comes Silas and Timothy and they started preaching the Word of God and the church of Corinth was birthed. Now, we're studying the book of 2 Corinthians. They are the result of a man that said, "I want to have a walk with God; I want to let Jesus be Jesus in me."

That's what I'm trying to tell us today. It starts right there. Well, when the church began, the apostle Paul learned what it takes some of us a lot longer to learn. There were some who hated him. You know why? Because he preached the Word of God which did something that they didn't like. It raised the standard in their lives and they didn't want to live under anybody's authority. As a result of that the church of Corinth was upside down, enamored by the world and the way the world does things.

They were constantly trying to find any flaw in the character of the apostle Paul. And we're going to see today what they did. An unfortunate thing happened that he had to change his plans, and we understand it from a textual study today. But because he didn't do what he said he was going to do—he has a good answer for it—the people that didn't like what he preached used this to tear the man down. He's not a man of his word is what they said. As a result of this, you see, it's the same old thing that goes on in the 21st century: tear the man down, you can tear the message down, and then you don't have to live up under any kind of authority.

But I want to tell you something: the apostle Paul lived daily with such a clear conscience that their accusations had no weight against him. This is something that is so important. Several weeks ago we studied verse 12 and what it means to have a pure testimony. I hope you understand this: when you have a clear conscience that does not condemn you, the Holy Spirit not convicting you, then you can face anything. The accusations that come, and they will come, they just come and go, and you'll go right on. You'll continue to walk right on regardless of the unfounded accusations of others. The testimony of a clear conscience is an indisputable and an indestructible witness to the people around us. It is evidence that we are believers, regardless of the accusations that come against us.

The world, no matter how much it hates us, has to stand back and take notice of a person that keeps his head up and continues right on, focused, because he has a clear conscience, he has a pure testimony and whatever accusation comes his way that is unfounded does not bother him. Verse 12 says that's just why he really starts it off this way: "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." Paul says this to the Corinthian believers. Jesus was being Jesus in Paul and that was Christ's witness in him. That was evidence that he was who he said he was.

Now I want to ask you one more time before we get into the message today, I'm not meddling, I'm just asking. Is there enough evidence in your life Monday through Saturday to convince and convict others and to convict you that you truly are a believer? Well, let's see some of the evidence, and these are evidences that normally you don't think about. There are many more than what's here but we're in a context and a context is very focused. So I want you to see how Paul kept on keeping on as evidence of the fact that Jesus was being Jesus in him. I want you to see some things that maybe you've never thought of.

He kept on in spite of the fact that he was unappreciated

First of all is this: he kept on in spite of the fact that he was unappreciated. You know, all of us that are believers today know by now that not everybody rejoices when we become believers. And the hardest thing in the world for a believer is when he surrenders his heart to Jesus and nobody around him seems to appreciate him or the fact that he's a believer.

In 2 Corinthians 1:13 he says, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end." When the Corinthian believers read Paul's letters, even though they were very tough—remember this is the fourth

letter he's written to these people and this is probably the best one of all of them because they've been really tough—they had no trouble in understanding what he said when he wrote to them. You see, he didn't try to impress them; he didn't try to use big words whether he was speaking or writing to them. He just shared his heart with them. He spoke honestly and plainly. He never used methods that would in any way shut down the message he was trying to get across.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 2:1 he said, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech." Paul was a transparent individual; he might have taught the deep things, Simon Peter said that "Our brother Paul, he says some deep things sometimes, hard to understand." He had a mind and he would take them deep and he would challenge them and he would stretch them, but it was plain what he was saying. They could understand what he was saying. He had no agenda at all; what he wrote and what he said was right there in front of you. What you see with Paul is what you have. He said what you read you understand.

I heard a person say one time, "Read the man's life first, and then read his book." They'd read his life. He'd been with them; they knew who he was. They knew good and well who he was. Now they could read his letter. But they understood only to a point. Verse 14 adds another thought, "just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." See, they didn't fully appreciate the apostle Paul. The phrase, "you also partially did understand us," hinges on the word "understand." The word "understand" in the Greek is *epiginosko*. And *epiginosko* means to fully understand, to fully grab something, to fully understand something. It's not just to be informed by what your mind has comprehended; it's to be transformed as you take what has been comprehended and act upon it.

You may understand it in your head but maybe it hasn't made the 18-inch journey down into your heart. Now let me make sure you understand what I'm saying here. They could comprehend what he wrote. They understood that. But not acting upon it would then keep them from *epiginosko*. That's fullness of knowledge. Knowledge is just something you comprehend; *epiginosko* is what you thoroughly comprehend having acted upon it. You see, one can read something and simply understand it but not appreciate it by allowing it to dig deep into their life and change their behavior.

The Corinthians understood what Paul said. They comprehended what he had said. Particularly his third letter that told them to deal with a man in that church. They didn't want to do that: fear had gripped them. But finally they're going to go ahead and act upon it, but right at this point they haven't. They've only partially understood the message and partially understood the messenger. You see, they didn't appreciate Paul for who he was. They didn't understand the gift that Paul was to those people in their day. And so Paul continues to say that "we are your reason to be proud, as you are also ours."

But then he says this: "in the day of our Lord Jesus." Now what is he talking about there? Well if you look at the context and read on over in 5:10, he talks about the judgment seat of Christ. And he's talking about this, and he talks about it in 1 Corinthians 3:13, the day when all believers will stand before God one day and we will be rewarded for that which we allowed Him to do through us, *epiginosko*, as opposed to that which we did for Him which may have come out of *gnosis*, but we never acted upon the fact that it was supposed to be Christ in us. Not what we do for Him, but what He does through us.

The apostle Paul says on that day, at least, it is going to be on that day that we're going to start understanding and appreciating what God has allowed in our life. The people He's put there and the messages He's allowed us to hear. Listen, I've said this many times: if there are any rewards for me on that day, it's a day of reward, not a judgment, we're judged at the cross, but it's a day of rewards. And if there are any rewards for Wayne Barber that day, I'm going to have to take most of them and give them to others that God has put into my life that probably when they were in my life, I didn't appreciate them. But one day, in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm going to see them for what they truly were worth and I'm going to be proud of them as they hopefully will be proud of me. That's what he's saying.

The sad part is they just didn't appreciate Paul in the day he was living. They didn't appreciate his message, they didn't appreciate his position that God had given him as an apostle. The Corinthian believers didn't seem to get it and appreciate the gift that Paul was to them. Probably because he loved them so much he said the hard things that we'll look at later in the message. But one day, one day they would. They only partially understood him at that point. They hadn't acted upon everything he had said and they hadn't appreciated the One who had sent him. But one day they would appreciate him for allowing Christ to do the difficult things through him.

But in the meantime, even though they didn't appreciate him, even though he spends the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians defending himself from the critics and the skeptics in Corinthian, even through all that he kept on keeping on, and that's the evidence that proves him guilty of being a believer right there. When people don't appreciate us, and they won't, write it down, don't get bent out of shape, if your conscience is clear, your testimony is pure, you'll keep right on keeping on and that will be the evidence that people will look on and say that person loves the Lord Jesus Christ. They're moving on in spite of the fact that they're unappreciated.

When I used to referee in basketball, I had an old referee tell me, "If you've got your head in the stands, which totally does not appreciate you, then get off the floor. You don't need to be in the game." And it's the same way with a person walking with Jesus.

You can't put your head out there with people that don't appreciate who and what you are. Let your clear conscience hold you up and keep on keeping on. The evidence that Christ is living in us, the evidence that proves us guilty to a lost world, is that we keep on keeping on even when people don't appreciate us.

He kept on in spite of the fact that he was misrepresented

But secondly, he kept on; he just kept on keeping on in spite of the fact that he was misrepresented. Not only will we not be appreciated, but we'll be misrepresented by those who hate the Christ in us. In verse 15 and following, Paul finally unveils the incident that had taken place that had caused his writing mainly the whole first chapter of 1 Corinthians. It was an incident. There was an unfortunate event that took place that they criticized him for and they told people he was not a man of his word: that he didn't do what he told them he would do.

Paul had written to them in 1 Corinthians 16:5-7 and told them that he wanted to come to them on his way to Macedonia and see them. And then he was going to go to Macedonia and then he was going to come back and see them again. He was going to bless them twice. He had intended to pick up a collection that they'd been taking up for the suffering saints over in Judea. But he changed his plans. He had promised them he would come two times, but he got bad news. He had sent Timothy to them, and in 2 Corinthians 1 we find that Timothy is back. Timothy had come back and said, "Paul, I don't think you want to hear what I'm about to tell you. It's awful over there in Corinth and they are ripping you to shreds. They're attacking your character."

How do we know that? By the way he replied. Those who wanted to discredit him took this incident. See, what Paul did when he heard from Timothy that all this bad stuff was going on, he didn't go to Macedonia. He went immediately to where he could sit down and write them the third letter that we do not have. Probably Titus took it then and, boy, he just scalded them in that letter. And for the fact that he didn't come to see them, those skeptics, those people who hated him, spread the rumor, "You can't trust Paul. Paul is not a man of his word."

You see what they did? They didn't even know the circumstance; they didn't even understand why he hadn't come. According to verse 12 they had accused him of acting out of fleshly wisdom. Fleshly wisdom refers to how the flesh acts and disregards commitments and disregards the feelings of people that are involved. Paul said, "I didn't act that way. When I chose not to come it wasn't because of some frivolous whim of my flesh. I'm not irresponsible in what I do." Paul said it was his honest intention to come to them. Verse 15, "And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you, that you might twice receive a blessing," two times he was going to go there, "that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea."

Man, how those skeptics took that, accused him of being fickle. But they did something else. This is how they get to us. They see an inconsistency or what they perceive to be an inconsistency, not even knowing the facts, and they use that as leverage to tear down what he was saying. They said just as he was fickle in his choices, he was fickle in what he preached; you can't trust anything the man says. So Paul is responding in verse 17, "Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?" It's a question he's going to answer. "Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?"

What he's saying there is "You mean when I say yes I really mean no, or if I say no I really mean yes? You think that's the way I am? Do you think I'm that fickle in my life?" The word "vacillate" means to be fickle or untrustworthy in something. And Paul tells them that his word is his bond. And Paul says, "If I tell you yes, it's going to be yes." And of course he's including the fact unless some unforeseen circumstance comes about. "If I tell you no, I mean no. I'm not fickle in what I say. I'm not fickle in my character. I live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. My conscience bears me witness of that."

But isn't it interesting how quickly negative people are when they perceive an inconsistency in somebody's life? When they don't know the facts, when they've never bothered to sit down and discuss it with somebody, how quickly they will take that and use it against an individual simply because their own flesh has a problem with that person. And never give them the benefit of the doubt. I want to share that with you. People that walk in that spirit, I don't care what they do, they can stand on their heads, speak in an unknown tongue, they can do whatever they want. It means nothing to me if that individual doesn't love another person enough to give him the benefit of the doubt.

One of the first signs of a believer walking in the Spirit, he always gives his brother the benefit of the doubt. That's why, like Paul, it's very important to have a pure conscience when people don't give you that benefit of the doubt. When you know that your conscience is not condemning you and the Spirit of God is not convicting you, when your walk matches your talk and you keep on keeping on, even though people don't appreciate who you are, oh they will one day, and even though they misrepresent you simply because of a perceived flaw in your character, that is evidence that Jesus is being Jesus in you. Because you know why? Jesus had to do the same thing. And when He lives in us, He enables us to keep on keeping on when people don't appreciate us and when people misrepresent us based on a perception that's not even real.

He kept on keeping on knowing that he was being validated by Christ

Well, thirdly, you wonder how does a man do that? Hopefully you're beginning to understand Christ lives in us. Here's the real reason for the whole thing but it comes up in this point in our text. He kept on keeping on knowing that he was being validated by Christ. Our defense is Christ in us. And that's a beautiful thing. That's where our testimony comes from. Verse 18, "But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no." There's no verb in the statement, but God is faithful. There's no "is". That's a Hebraism. When you see a statement like that, that's an unchangeable characteristic of God. And the word "faithful" there, *pistos*, means He's true to His word. You'll never find Him any different. God is always true to His Word. Now what Paul is doing here, he says, "But as God is faithful," He's true to His Word; He doesn't say yes and mean no with it, "our word to you is not yes and no." In other words, there's no fickle meaning behind what we say. God is not about breaking His promises, so neither is Paul because God lives in him. The Faithful One lives in him.

Then he says in verse 19, "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him." Hopefully we can get the meaning out of it. The message of salvation in Christ Jesus that Paul preached to the Corinthians would never change. Salvation would always be in Christ Jesus. Paul didn't preach one day "yes, salvation's in Him," and then the next day say, "no, salvation is under the law." And then the next day say, "yes, salvation is in Him." Paul says, "No, that's not what I did. Salvation is always yes in Him."

The phrase "yes in Him" is in the perfect tense, which means it never changes, it's always going to be that way and so Paul says, "My message is as strong as it's ever been and I'm not fickle in anything that I do." Verse 20, "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." The promises of God refer to all God's promises, but particularly the promises of the Old Testament, of the Messiah. Every promise God ever made, they didn't have the New Testament, but every promise that God has ever made is found in Christ and is "yes in Him." They're all fulfilled in Christ Jesus. They are yes in Christ.

So Paul adds, "Therefore also, since they're all in Him and they're yes in Him, therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." Bottom line, what he's saying is Christ is faithful. God is faithful and God lives in me and every one of His promises that are found in Christ, they're going to be yes. They're not yes and no, yes today, no tomorrow. No. They're all found in Him. "But that same faithful God that is faithful to His Word lives in us," Paul says, "lives in me and therefore it's a guarantee that I'm a man of character." Because that's who it is you're dealing with, Paul is telling them.

As a matter of fact he goes on and extends that. He says Christ has already confirmed me before you. He says in verse 21, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ." Isn't it amazing how some people just don't pay attention? That if they just want to know if a man is faithful or have a man of integrity, just watch what God's doing in their life. And that's what Paul is saying. The word "establish" means to confirm. Paul says, "When I came among you God confirmed me in your midst. What do you mean I'm fickle and I'm not a man of my word?" And not only that, he said Christ had enabled him. It goes on and says, "and anointed us is God."

The word "anointed" is not something mystical. It's the empowerment, the enablement to do what God has assigned us to do. And he says, "Everything that I did in your midst, you didn't attribute that to me. You knew that came from God. God not only confirmed me, God enabled me." Then he also had been sealed by the Spirit. He's talking about his own salvation that's secure. But he has another meaning in this. It means "I've been authenticated in you." You've seen the Spirit of God working in me, verse 22, "who also sealed us and gave us the spirit in our hearts as a pledge." Not only a pledge that we'll have eternal life one day, but that pledge is a guarantee that we're of God.

Paul could have a totally pure conscience: he didn't do anything of his own when he was with you. As he says in Romans, "I would speak of nothing except that which Christ has accomplished through me. And you saw it. You understand that," he says to the Corinthians. They knew this; there was evidence in his life that proved him guilty of being who he said he was: a believer.

So Paul now calls God to his side as his witness. He said, "You want to accuse me? You want to come against me? The skeptics there in Corinth. I call God to come and take His stand beside me." He says in verse 23, "But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth." Paul had good reason not to go to them as he had promised. See, they didn't know this; listen folks, understand this in your relationships: always make sure you know the other side. Don't let a perception cause you to judge a brother. You may be doing to him what the Corinthians did to Paul.

Paul said, "I had a good reason. The reason I didn't come to you was to spare you. I'm not some egotistical minister that says because of how you've been acting you're not even saved. That's not what I'm trying to say." Verse 24, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm." "Your position in Christ is well secured in Him. I'm not here to threaten that," Paul says. "But I tell you what I am doing here. Your actions are not acceptable, and as His apostle and His preacher of His Word, I'm addressing what's wrong in this situation."

You see, it was Christ Who validated his actions. Paul said, "I'm not what you perceive me to be. I'm a man that has a walk with God and there's evidence in my life to convict me guilty." So the evidence was that he kept on keeping on when people didn't appreciate him because he had a clear conscience. He kept on keeping on when people intentionally misrepresented him and presented a total different perception that was even wrong. But he kept on keeping on because he knew that Christ in him validated him. Do you know that today? Is that keeping you going? Is that keeping you moving on? It's a beautiful thing to have a clear conscience. Your sins confessed up today, walking with God, Christ in you vindicating who you are.

He kept on keeping on even when he had to say the hard things

And that's where missions start: right there. If we don't have that kind of life, then what are we doing? No one can refute Christ working in our life. But the final thing I want you to see today, fourthly, he kept on keeping on even when he had to say the hard things. It's interesting, only those who love you will tell you what you need to hear; not what you want to hear, but what you need to hear.

You see, Paul so loved these people who didn't appreciate him, who intentionally misrepresented him because they didn't like the standard of God's Word that he'd preached to them. You see, he was willing to tell them the hard things. He so loved them he was willing to tell them the hard things. This was his way of sparing them when he wrote to them instead of coming to them. He had some hard things to say. There's no telling, my imagination goes wild. What would it have been like if Paul would have gone there? I have a funny feeling there would have been some scalded dogs in that place. He would have come in and he would have hammered those people. He chose not to do that.

Instead he felt like "if I write them it will be better. I chose not to go because I love you, to spare you the sorrow that I would have brought to you. Instead I wrote to you. That's what I chose to do." And that's his third letter he speaks of. Verse 1 of chapter 2, "But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again." Every time Paul had been with them it had been a sorrowful time because of the sin that was in Corinth. He said, "For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?" He didn't want that kind of relationship. And then he says in verse 3, "And this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy would be the joy of you all."

You know what he did? He said, "I had confidence when I wrote. I just really believed in my heart; I'm going to trust the Christ in you. And I believe you're going to handle this rightly. I believe you're going to respond the right way so that when I do see you it won't be a sorrowful time the next time, it'll be joyful." Well, but it still broke his heart. I want you to see the heart of this guy. He hated to tell them the hard things, but he had to. Verse 4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears." This broke his heart to say what he had to say. And evidently, we don't have that letter, but boy it was tough; "not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you."

"Broke my heart. I want you to understand. I don't want you to be sorrowful because I was in tears writing you. I want you to understand how much I love you. That's why I told you the hard things. That's why you misrepresent me. That's why you don't appreciate me. You don't like to hear the hard things, but I love you enough that I had to write them to you." He shows that the one who caused him so much grief; there was an individual in that church that had started that whole thing. It only takes one. And others had gotten in on it. It had fallen on the innocent as well as the guilty.

You see, Paul's letter was read publicly and the people that were innocent, they didn't even know what was going on. They had to hear the same message that the guilty had to hear and he said, "I'm just so sorry that even the innocent had to listen to this." And then in verse 5, "But if any has caused sorrow," he talks about that individual, "he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree," and that's the same word "partially," "in order not to say too much—to all of you."

Isn't it interesting how the one who refuses to let Jesus be Jesus in him, the one who will never give his brother the benefit of the doubt, the one who is always not appreciating that which God has given as a gift to the people, the one who intentionally misrepresents an individual based on a perception of a flaw in his character, isn't it interesting how when he does what he does, he doesn't just hurt the individual, he hurts the whole church? I wish all of us could come to understand that we're not islands unto ourselves. And people that will not let Jesus be Jesus in them, like many that were in Corinth, were not just hurting Paul, they were hurting the whole church of Corinth. Nothing is done that doesn't affect somebody else. It's a domino effect. And Paul, God's man, out of love for them was willing to say some things that they did not want to hear, and instead of going to them and blasting them straight out he said, "I'm not going to do that. I'm going to write to you because I want you to understand my heart: that I love you. So that when I see you the next time I believe you're going to respond and when I see you the next time it won't be sorrowful. It will be a time full of joy."

Well, he shows, and we won't get to it today, in verse 6 what they did and they did discipline this guy evidently to extreme. Paul said, "You've done enough." They obeyed and dealt with the one causing all the trouble. They finally exercised church discipline which

should have been done way before.

So far what we've got is the evidence of one who is convicted as guilty of being a believer can be tested out when people don't appreciate him. He keeps right on keeping on when people misrepresent him intentionally based on a little bit of knowledge, a false perception, assuming it's a flaw in his character. He's a person that keeps on keeping on knowing that Christ in him validates him. He is his defense; and he keeps on keeping on even though he has to say the hard things to people that he loves.

Father, mother, have you been there? When you've had to tell your children stuff they didn't want to hear? And they didn't appreciate the fact that God has given you as a gift to them, and they misrepresented you because they didn't like what you were doing? Trying to pitch mother against father or father against mother, but you had to keep on keeping on because you knew Christ in your heart was not condemning you. Your conscience was pure and clear because you have only the good things for the child in your heart, even when you had to say the hard things.

One of the beautiful things about this is there's another evidence but it will have to come in the next message. You know what Paul says? "You've done what I've asked you to do." That's why he wrote 2 Corinthians, in response to their response to that third letter. They did, they responded right, they dealt with him. He said, "Now you've done enough, but I want to tell you, go back to the same individual, put your arm around him. Comfort him and forgive him and get him back on his feet."

Isn't that awesome? How do you know a person has enough evidence in him to prove him guilty of being a believer? Church discipline is not kicking him out of the church; Church discipline is restoring them to usefulness in the kingdom. But that's our next message on what forgiveness and what Paul's talking about is all about. So let me ask you the final question again today.

In the way you live your life, is there enough evidence, if you were on trial today at your job for being a Christian? You're not appreciated there for being a believer and they constantly try to misrepresent you because they are jealous or threatened by the Christ in you, is Christ validating you? And are you even willing to share the hard things with them out of the love in your heart? Is there enough evidence in this congregation today out there, if we were put on trial for being a Christian, would be found guilty. If the answer to that question is yes, we are ready now to reach the world for Jesus. But if it's not right in here, it'll never be right out there. Missions begins right here in my walk with Jesus Christ. That's where it starts and it touches the people around me.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11

Church Discipline and God's Forgiveness

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2:6-11. We're in a little mini-series here and I'll be doing that throughout the book study. "When Your Walk Matches Your Talk." We got into that in verse 12 of chapter 1, and this is part 3. Today's message is specifically called "Church Discipline and God's Forgiveness."

Now, to get you into that, living grace is my term, that's all it is, for Christ living in and through a believer. Now, that's nothing more than the gospel message. I'm so saddened that we live in a day that you even have to explain it, because this is what the Bible teaches. Christ said, "I come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." He is that life and He lives in us. Now Christ in us, when He's allowed to live through us, purifies our hearts, and what happens is He radiates sincere motives in all that we do.

You see, in short, Christ gives us; He is the evidence that convicts us as guilty of being a believer. That's Who He is. Now the evidence is unmistakable. In 2 Corinthians 1:13-2:5, we saw that evidence that was manifested in the life of the apostle Paul. Now, in fact, we looked at it in areas where most people would not commonly look. It's marvelous when you see this surface and to see what this evidence is. For instance, we saw in verses 13-14 of chapter 1 that Paul kept on keeping on even when he was unappreciated. Christ in Paul kept him keeping on. There will always be people who call themselves believers who do not appreciate us nor do they appreciate the message that we want to share. But Christ in us keeps us keeping on. That's evidence that He lives there. That's evidence that we're believers.

But also we saw in verses 15-18 that when we are intentionally misrepresented by those who never seem to give us the benefit of the doubt, that's okay, we keep on keeping on. Now Paul had promised the Corinthians that he was coming to see them on his way to Macedonia. He was going to stop there and after he did his business in Macedonia he was going to come back, stay some time with them, perhaps even stay the whole winter with them. But he didn't. Now we know from Scripture that he had a good reason, but he didn't; instead of going to them he wrote a letter to them as a church to deal with church discipline with an individual who had caused Paul all kinds of problems and had stirred up doubt even towards his apostleship.

Now because he didn't follow through, no matter his reasons, and he didn't follow through and come to see them either time, he

didn't go, people that hated Paul used this as if it was a flaw in his character and they chose to intentionally misrepresent him by saying that he was not a man of his word. They didn't care if he had a good reason not to come. They were looking for anything, something, anything that would help demean the individual; that could tear him down. They even used this fact—this is so sad—the fact that he said he was coming and he didn't come, they even used that to say, "Well, you can't trust his word, so surely you can't trust his message." Tear the man down, tear the message down, and that's just nothing new under the sun. But Christ in Paul kept him keeping on. That was evidence that he was proven guilty of being a believer.

In verses 19-24 it shows us that he knew that Christ in him would validate his life no matter what people had to say about him. In fact, Paul showed that as Christ was true to His word, Paul was true to his. What he meant by that was that since Christ is faithful and Christ lived in Paul, then they could trust what Paul said because it was under the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we also saw in chapter 2:1-5 that Paul kept on keeping on even when he had to say the hard things and he knew in his heart that when he wrote this letter the guilty would hear it, but so would the innocent. He knew that, and he didn't even want to bring sorrow to any of them, but he had to say the hard things. The reason Paul hadn't come to them was because Timothy had come Paul and said, "Paul, you don't want to know what I'm about to tell you. You don't want to know how the church is acting in Corinth, how the people have stirred up others. There's one individual has stirred up others and they've caused doubt and they're beginning to accuse you falsely."

But the problem was not really even that. The problem was that the people that were innocent and the people that were right and knew the problem would not stand up for the apostle Paul and so it had become a real mess. You know, they had Matthew 18; they had the gospels at that time. And Matthew 18 clearly states the "one another" commands of what we do when we see a brother who is intentionally sinning and causing disruption in the body of Christ. If any one of those individual believers would have gone to him and followed the plan already given to them, they could have solved this whole situation.

Well, long story short, this became a church-wide issue in Corinth. It should not have been that. Paul should not have ever had to write that third letter. If they would have handled it the way biblically they were supposed to have handled it, it wouldn't be the problem that it was. Well, Paul chose to write them instead of going to them and he said, "I do this to spare you of much sorrow." To put it in my terminology, it would have been a hot time in the old town tonight if he would have gone there. Buddy, he was hot, and he had a message and he said, "I didn't want to cause you anymore sorrow than was necessary, so I thought that writing the letter would have been the softer approach."

Paul had been tested and shown himself to be guilty of being a believer. Now they get this letter, now they are going to be tested. Are you going to do what God says for you to do? And guess what? It worked. Praise the Lord, the church finally brought the man that was causing all this problem with Paul, spreading all the lies and deceit about him, they brought him forth and they disciplined him. And their obedient response to Paul's third letter, which we do not have, is what we have in our Bible called 2 Corinthians. Paul responds by writing this letter. It's really his fourth letter to them because there are two letters, one mentioned in 1 Corinthians and one that we've just seen here mentioned that we don't have. They've been lost. So it's four times he's written them.

Now today what we're going to see is yes, they have disciplined the man, but what we're going to see today is how to do it right. It's amazing, I can just sort of laugh at this because we're all this way: we either under-do it or we overdo it. And Paul is going to have to say, "Okay, yes you've dealt with him, but there are some things you need to do now to make it right." We're going to see that church discipline, when it's done right, always involved the forgiveness of Christ and always has as its purpose to restore the individual back into usefulness. If it doesn't involve God's forgiveness, then what it does is it can go too far. And what it ends up doing is destroying the sinful individual.

All of us have sinned, thank God that we haven't done what some other people have done and when we deal with it, we have to deal with that approach. And understand but by the grace of God, we're next. But when it's overdone, it can overwhelm the individual and destroy him. Christ in us will not allow us to cast a sinful believer aside. His love in us will not do that. Christ wants us to forgive him and Christ wants us to restore him. Forgiveness is evidence that we truly are believer and we are who we say we are. Christ and Christ alone can enable us to forgive when we have been treated wrongly by others. Never think of church discipline that you don't think of forgiveness and restoration. But never think of forgiveness and restoration unless you think about Christ. If you're trying to forgive somebody, Ephesians 4 says, "You are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us." No possible way, you have to go back to chapter 3 and understand that Christ has to enable that forgiveness.

You cannot forgive another person, even though we're commanded to, but anything we're commanded to do Christ lives in us to enable us in the process. So when you think of forgiveness you have to look to Him. He is the only one in you that can forgive someone who's treated you in a bad way.

Well, today we're going to look at God's discipline and how it's to be laced with Christ's forgiveness. It's never right unless the two have been put together. Four things I want you to see. And, you know, this is a part of studying Scripture. You don't ignore the hard

parts; you just deal with it as it comes. We do verse by verse; this is what's next and that's where we're going. And it will balance us by the time we've finished this book.

God's discipline involves confrontation and consequence

God's discipline involves confrontation and consequence. You don't ignore that. It involves confrontation and it involves consequence. Verse 6, "Sufficient for such a one," speaking of this man who's been disciplined, "is the punishment which was inflicted by the majority." Now that word "punishment" is the word *epitilmia*. It's only used right here in the New Testament. It refers to the actual penalty that was inflicted upon the guilty one.

Now involved in that is a confrontation. He had to be rebuked; he had to be confronted with what he had done. And he had to come to that point of acknowledgment. Then there was a consequence. All that's involved in this one word. There's a confrontation and there is a consequence. It could be translated "censure." And it has to do with whatever consequence was assigned. We used to have a sign in front of our church that said "You're free to make any choice you want but you're not free to choose its consequence." And the point of that sign was consequences are always going to be there to wrong choices. Even to right choices there are consequences.

Well, it implies the rebuke of the wrong done. Evidently the church called the guilty one on the carpet and confronted him with what he had done. The consequence of what he had done possibly was that they dismissed him from the fellowship. We just don't know what those consequences were. "Sufficient," he says in verse 6, "for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority." The word "majority" refers to the fact that there were a solid number of believers who knew what to do before but wouldn't do it, but had finally come to the point that they were willing to obey God and do what was needed to be done.

He goes on, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority." The word "sufficient" is the word *hikanos*. It's the word that means "that's enough, stop, don't go any further." That's the idea. Paul had to be proud of the Corinthian believers because they followed through. They finally did what God had told them to do, and he was the apostle through whom God was speaking and writing the New Testament. Whatever they did worked, because it caused the errant believer to grieve over his actions.

In verse 7 it says, "otherwise such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." And that word "sorrow" there is the word *lupe*, which refers to grief. It refers to a person being seriously troubled over a wrong that he has committed. So it worked, but from what Paul is saying in this verse right here, they were a little too gung-ho in disciplining this individual. Paul is telling them that they have done well, but they have gone far enough.

Isn't it interesting how we are? We either don't do it or we overdo it. Have you ever noticed that? It's either people not obeying God or when they do they take it to the extreme. So often we have people that will take up an offense for a brother and they'll overdo the whole process. They'll kill the individual who's done it simply out of their own flesh. Christ's love working in us toward those who treat us wrongly, always involves confrontation and always involves consequences, but Christ's love in us is what keeps us from going too far.

You see, Christ gives us discernment about how much discipline is enough and enough is enough. With God's discipline, laced with Christ's forgiveness, will never deny confrontation nor will it erase consequence. So we see then immediately forgiveness is not just doing away with it. Oh, no. There's an acknowledgment, there's a confrontation, there are consequences to it, but enough, like I said, is enough. That's why it says in Romans 12, "'Vengeance is mine', says the Lord." The word vengeance is *ekdikesis*. It means "out of righteousness I judge." Only God knows how much enough is enough. Only God knows that: men do not know that. Men will go out of their feelings, out of their hurt, and they'll either overdo or they'll under do. But, God's forgiveness and church discipline never denies confrontation nor does it erase consequences.

God's discipline goes beyond what is humanly expected

Well, a second thought I want you to see here is that God's discipline goes beyond what is humanly expected. Rebuking a simple brother, assigning consequences is one thing, but there's so much more. If that's all it is, it has nothing to do with God. Here's what God's forgiveness is all about. This is where it's clearly seen is when you are dealing with a brother that has wronged somebody, that has sinned. The way you go about it says everything about whether Christ is doing it.

In verse 7, "so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." Now, instead of inflicting more grief on the errant brother, I mean, my goodness, how far are you going to take him? He says, "on the contrary," in other words, radically different, "forgive and comfort him." Now that word "forgive" may surprise you. It's a beautiful word; it's the word *charizomai*. It means to do a favor for somebody who in no way deserves it. It comes from the word *charis*, which is the word for grace. Here it means to show him what he does not deserve.

Now this is where the Christ in us really reaches out and touches the people that are in pain because of their own sin. This is where we understand that we're believers. When our heart has been tenderized, it will reach out and be sensitive to other people. You know, the apostle Paul was a champion of this even though the Holy Spirit leading him, but in his letters he wrote many things about this. He talks about the weaker brother and he does all these other things to champion this idea.

But in Galatians 6:1 he says something almost exactly like what he's saying here. He says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass," and there's a double meaning to that word "caught." You see, before I became a believer I chased after sin. We all chased after sin. But after I became a believer and you became a believer, sin chases after us. And I want to tell you, folks, sometimes it catches us.

Let me just ask you a question and see if you'll be willing to be honest. Did sin catch anybody besides me this past week? We're all in the same boat, aren't we? But what it means here is a double meaning; not only did sin catch the brother, but somebody caught the brother being caught. That's the bad part. Now, if you could just be caught by sin and nobody know about it, that's awesome. But that's not what he's referring to here. Somebody caught him. In any trespass—and he opens the door to anything—he says, "You who are spiritual," and if you study Galatians he tells you how to be spiritual. He's not talking about the elders. He's talking about people that are willing to walk filled with the Spirit of God. And Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of His Spirit is born in their life. You who are spiritual, you who are filled with God's love, you who are letting Jesus be Jesus in your life, "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself so that you, too, will not be tempted."

Restore, that's what the whole thing is all about. Yes, you have a brother that has sinned. Yes, the people are devastated. Yes, it hurt the apostle Paul here in the situation. But the key is yes, you confront him, he acknowledges, there are consequences to it, but it doesn't stop there. You put your arms around him and say, "Listen brother, I know I could have been there myself. Let me come alongside you. Let me help you. Let me get you back on your feet."

The word "restore" in Galatians 6:1 is the word that means to "heal or to mend a broken bone." Let me ask you a question. Is it painful when you set a broken bone? Absolutely. Does it take some pain involved? Yes, the confrontation, the consequences are painful. And it's in the present tense which means it's a process. Man, you don't do it one day and one hour. You come along beside this guy and you stay with that individual until he can get his feet back on the ground.

The favor. You say he doesn't deserve it. That's exactly right, and I stand before God every day and I don't deserve a thing He does in my life; nor do you. And it's that attitude that consumes us and reflects itself out to the people that we're dealing with. The favor that is to be shown to the sinful believer who has been confronted and possibly removed from membership is now that they come alongside him and help him and restore him. He says, "so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him."

Paul adds the word comfort. That word "comfort" ought to grab everyone's attention if you've been with us in 2 Corinthians, because we have seen it over and over and over again in chapter 1; same word. As Paul was mistreated and God comforted him so that he could turn around and comfort the church of Corinth, now they can turn around and comfort this errant brother that's in the fellowship. It involves coming alongside to instruct and to give guidance. The word parakaleo it's a form of the word that we've been looking at, "to be called alongside, to come alongside the individual."

Once a believer has sinned and now has been confronted, he's involved in the consequences of his sin—and, by the way, God's mercy is what helps us bear up under the consequences of sin—he says now the believers come alongside him, and prop him up and get him back on his feet. Help him to be useable again. This is God's love and His forgiveness that works through those who allow Christ to be Lord in their lives, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him. Why? "otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."

You see, if we don't forgive and comfort the sinful believer, if all we're going to do is confront him on his sin and give the consequences to his sin and we're going to walk away as if the job is done, what we'll do is we'll overwhelm him with what he calls "excessive sorrow." The word "overwhelm" is the word that means to swallow something up in one gulp; to be overwhelmed, to be swallowed up by something, to be consumed in an instant by something. And what is it that swallowed it up? It was excessive sorrow.

That word "excessive" is the word perissos. It's the word that means "over and above, more than enough." The word "sorrow" is the word we saw awhile ago, lupe. It means grief and trouble. I mean, when a person has sinned it's bad enough. I mean the guilt that already is on him if he's a believer. It's bad enough when he has to be publicly accused of that sin. It's bad enough when he has to deal with the consequences, but, man, when you walk away from him and you don't show him the grace and the mercy of God, you have swallowed him up in grief and trouble.

And I wonder how many people today will not come to church because they messed up and the church messed up in the way they dealt with them and kicked them out. And today they're out there somewhere, overwhelmed by excessive sorrow because they've

been looking for the mercy of Jesus and they haven't seen it anywhere in anybody that they know. It's rampant. You wonder sometimes why people have a bad taste in their mouth about churches. I'll tell you why: they look at us and they don't see Jesus. They see we can be right about something, but we can also be right and be wrong in the way we deal with it. When the love is not there, the forgiveness is not there, somebody is swallowed up by excessive sorrow, by some Pharisee, by some bigot who doesn't understand it's only by grace he breathes when he wakes up in the morning. It nails that individual and has no love or compassion whatsoever to see them put back on their feet.

When a believer is allowing Christ to live through him, then Christ enables him and initiates that forgiveness. This is the scene when once a sinful believer has been rebuked, it is seen in the way in which he's treated once he's been confronted, once the consequences have been assigned, that's where it's seen. What this does is to encourage him that he's still loved, no matter what he's done, no matter how much he has to pay for, no matter what the consequences are, he's still loved and he can still be useful in the body of Christ.

Verse 8 says, "Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him." The word "reaffirm," kuroo. It's the word that means to establish something as valid, to confirm it. Do you really love him? Then prove it to him. Go to him, come alongside him. Help him to get his feet back. Maybe he's a deacon and he's committed adultery and now he can't be a deacon anymore. That's alright: he can be used someplace else. Take him and help him understand that yes, the consequences will be there. God's mercy will help him bear up under it, but my goodness, don't just kick him out. Help him understand. Help him get his feet back on the ground.

God's discipline laced with Christ's forgiveness rebukes and doesn't negate consequences to the action, not at all. But it also does a favor that is not deserved by coming alongside and instructing one in how to be useful again.

Now I want to put this in parental form. Okay? Because sometimes we miss it when it comes to a church. Let's put it in a family context, same thing. The way God disciplines me every day in my life involves all of these things we're talking about. The way the church disciplines its members, the way an individual holds another accountable, but the way we raise our children also fits this.

If you ever have a child and that child errs, he disobeys, sins, and all you do is punish it, then friend you have missed it. And I'll tell you what: you can count on one thing. That person, when he gets old enough to get away from the home, he'll never come back. There's a rebellion that builds up inside of him and a resentment that is incredible. But you know what the thing I remember most about my Mama? Is after she had spanked me, the consequences were there, the tears were there, the remorse was there, and she'd put her arm around me and just cry with me and say, "Oh, Wayne Allen, I love you, but son, you can't keep doing this." And she would help me understand that I could do better.

That's what it is: if you're not instructing that child, if you're not loving that child once it's been confronted, once the consequences have been assigned, you've missed the whole point because God doesn't treat you that way. How in the world would you treat your child that way? It's the same thing in the church. You don't kick them out. You come alongside them and seek to restore them. You may take their name off the fellowship. So what? Matthew 18 says to treat them as an unbeliever if they refuse to repent. But you don't give up on them. You just keep coming back, trying to restore, to get their feet back on the ground.

God's discipline is a test of our obedience

Thirdly, God's discipline is a test of our obedience. This is a real interesting thing. You remember those teachers that used to say "Take all the books off the desk. Take out a clean sheet of paper." What he says here is he says to this church, "I want to tell you something. I'm going to test your obedience right here. Take off all the books on your desk; take out a clean sheet of paper." You see, Christianity is not a cafeteria line. We don't take what we like and then reject what we don't like. You have to take it all. You buy into every bit of it when you become a believer. You're a brand new creature and every word of God becomes important to you.

In verse 9 he says, "For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." In other words, you might be obedient in a few things, but are you obedient in all things. The word "test" is the word dokime. It comes from the word dokimos. It means to be proven genuine, to be proven to be true to what you say you really are. You want to call yourself a Christian, let's just see. Paul says, "I'm going to see."

Church discipline is not a comfortable subject—by the way, if you enjoy confrontation and church discipline in the raw form, not in Christ's form, you're sick. That's all I've got to say. It's just not a comfortable subject. Nobody wants to talk about it. I can't help it. This is what we have to deal with. Once the fact that a person is disciplined, there are consequences, and a person is willing to stick with them, and the individual can feel God's burden to help that individual get back on his feet, that proves that the people are what they say they are and that they're obedient in all things.

This is not one of those things that is optional. This is not one of those things you just push aside. It's part of it. In fact, it set the standard among the people and sends a signal. You don't get to the church; it doesn't come to the elders, until the very last thing. And when we were there, we finally had a guy that he would not repent, and that's what you bring before the church. Not his sin, but

the fact that he's unwilling to repent. He's unwilling to acknowledge. And so therefore we finally had to bring it before the church. Nobody knew who it was because love covers it, builds a roof over it. You don't tell everybody what you're doing until it's time to do it.

And I made the announcement one Sunday morning. We had about 100 and some kids sitting over to my right. And I made the statement, "We're going to have church discipline and an individual is going to be removed from our roll on the next night we have the Lord's Supper." My son was sitting among the group and he said, "Dad, you wouldn't believe what happened. Every one of those kids turned around and said, 'Oh, they found out! Oh, no! They know what I did.'" They all thought it was them! I don't know what had gone on that Friday night, but whatever it was, it wasn't good. And they were sweating. They were sweating. They thought the whole church is going to know about it now.

It wasn't any of them, but you know what it did do? It sort of raised the standard. "We're not here to play games to make people feel good. We're here to be equipped to be the believers God has told us to be." And it sent that signal very clearly: You don't live like you want to live and then walk around telling people you're a believer, bringing a reflection upon the church and upon Christ.

Had a man come to me and he said, "If a church had been obedient enough to do this years ago, I would still be married to the only woman I've ever loved. Because I had committed such heinous sin they treated me in such a way that I felt like there was never any hope for my life. I lost the love of my life because of stupidity in my walk. But nobody would deal with it and I fell in the cracks."

None of us, but none of us like confrontation unless we're sick, but it's a part of it. I don't like it. I'll go ten blocks out of the way; anybody can tell you that. I'm a peacemaker. I love to put my arm around somebody and encourage them. But I wouldn't confront them, but that's part of it. But I'll tell you the part I like about it is after they're confronted I want to put my arm around them and help them back. Just get them back on their feet. They're useable to God. Let them be a vessel for Him.

Well, the test is not in the confrontation; no, sir—there are some very fleshly-minded people who enjoy that—it's in the fact that we're willing after the confrontation to now come alongside and walk with an individual to see that they're restored in the body of Christ. Their feet are back on the ground. Verse 9 again, "For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." I want to see if you're genuine. I want to see if you say you're Christian you really are what you say you are. That's why he wrote to them. His letter to them which demanded that they deal with the sinful brother who had lied and spread disrespect was a test. And they passed it; they passed that test.

Now, the next part of it is if they're willing to forgive and to restore. Let me ask you something. I'm going to apply this this morning—I don't know anything. Every time I say this somebody thinks I'm referring to something. No I'm not. Before God I'm not. If the shoe fits I guess we'll just have to wear it—Let me ask you a question. Who is it in this body right now that you're aware of, that is in sin? You know it, not from hearsay, but you know it. And you know that since you're aware of it, the Bible says don't take it to the elders, you go to them and make sure you've got yourself in line with the Spirit of God and that He's filled your life because you have to go in a spiritual condition. You know that. Because if you go to the elders, that's gossip. But you as a brother or sister in Christ, you're aware of somebody right now.

See, what I'm trying to say is, this problem could have been handled in Corinth but it wasn't. It had to become a church wide thing because the believers would not do what they knew to do. Is there enough evidence in this body right here, right now, to convict us as guilty in all matters that we're going to obey in every area? Is there enough evidence here to where we could actually go to our brother and expect our brother to come to us if we're in sin? And we go in love, we go humble, and we go willing to put our arm around him to take that individual and help him get back on his feet and be restored in the body of Christ.

God's discipline protects us from Satan's schemes

God's discipline does not deny confrontation nor erase consequence. It goes beyond human expectation: it forgives and it comforts. And it's a test of our obedience. But there's one more thing I want you to see today. God's discipline protects us from Satan's schemes. You want to be protected from the schemes of the devil? When Christ in us leads us to discipline an errant beloved brother and to show forgiveness and to comfort him by coming alongside him to see him restored, that's a protection against the schemes of the devil.

Verses 10-11, "But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes." Now, once bitterness takes root in a believer's life, it's going to spread like cancer. If you've been wounded by another believer, for whatever reason, and that's deep inside of you and there's not been a short term account, there's not been somebody go to him and there's not been any of that done, then bitterness begins to set in. It's like the acid in your stomach, you want to spew on somebody else but they're going to eat you alive before you get the chance. That's what bitterness is. There are a lot of bitter people in the body of Christ.

Paul had been offended. Paul wants the Corinthians to know, “I forgave this man and I did it in the presence of Christ and I did it for your sakes because now that I’ve forgiven him, I’m the one who took the brunt of the offence, now you turn loose and you forgive this individual.” They stood at the door of having to forgive him and go the second mile. Now, if they did it, there would then be no advantage that Satan could have in the body of Christ. You see, bitterness, unforgiveness, lack of God’s love, taking up an offense for a brother, is one of the schemes that is empowered by the enemy of our souls. When people are divided for whatever reason, and they’re not willing to confront, they’re not willing to sit down, they’re not willing to deal with the problem, what happens is that division begins to start and that’s the way the devil does.

The word “schemes” is a simple word. It refers to a well thought-out plan. It’s well thought-out. It doesn’t have to be the devil with horns and a tail walking around this building. No, he doesn’t even have to be here. You get a believer who will not be obedient in all things, will not deal with the sin that’s in his heart or the offense that’s come to him; you’ve already played into the devil’s hands anyway. And it’s like you become a part, you fall into that trap of one of his schemes.

You see, what happens is when people are not willing to deal with something biblically, and in love, with God’s forgiveness, what happens is they fall right in the trap of the devil. And the word for “devil,” not “satan,” but the word for “devil” is the word “the one who divides.” It comes in between, diabolos. Dia means between and ballo means to cast; to cast in between and divide God’s people.

And it’s his scheme. He’s the adversary of our souls. We take offense for a brother who has been wronged. Instead of dealing with it biblically, Matthew 18, instead of going to Galatians 6:1, instead of following what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, we just bail and go someplace else: I’m tired of the whole thing. And we’re not obedient in all things. The word “satan” means adversary.

So what have we learned? Well, if there’s going to be evidence in our lives that we’re believers, part of that evidence is our willingness to go to a brother and confront him on a sin and if there’s consequences, help him to understand the mercy of God that helps him bear up under it. But we come alongside him, “Now, you’ve sinned. Alright, let’s get past that. Let’s get you back on your feet and let’s help you understand how not to do that again. And let’s get you to a point that God can use you again.” That’s evidence, that’s real evidence.

God’s discipline does not deny confrontation or consequence. It goes beyond human expectation; it’s a test. And it’s a protection from Satan’s schemes. I want to tell you something: you and I are not proven by what we say. That can be fine. It’s how we go about what we say. It’s the way we treat people, not what we say to them. Talk is cheap. It’s the way we deal with them. Is it in God’s love and God’s forgiveness and God’s mercy, understanding, by the grace of God, that we would be there ourselves?

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Experiencing Christ

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2:12-17. Now, we’ve been in a little mini-series. As we work through this book I’ll do this right along. And what we’re talking about right now, this is part 4 of “When Your Walk Matches Your Talk,” and I want to entitle today’s specific message in verses 12-17 as “Experiencing Christ.” I wonder how many times all of us, we’re all in the same boat, how many times do we have to hear it before we finally get it?

I know when I took algebra in school my teacher was so excited when she saw the look on my face when I finally got it. You know, teachers look for that; the “aha.” I remember my Spanish teacher never had that look on her face because I never got it.

I’ve told you this story many times but I want to tell it in light of this very same thing: when are we going to get it? About the two moose hunters that were going up to Alaska to hunt. They were flying in a pontoon plane. And as they were landing on this lake there was this serene beautiful cabin there with smoke coming out of the chimney and it was going to be two weeks of just heaven.

And so when they got up to the dock the guy flying the plane said, “Listen, I’m coming back to pick you up in two weeks. Each of you has a moose tag. You can take the antlers out, but you can’t take the carcasses of two moose on this plane because it won’t fly. It’s too heavy, too much weight. Do you understand?” “Yes, we understand.” Two weeks later he’s coming back in to pick them up. There’s a front coming in and as he circles the lake looking down at the dock he sees the hunters and they’ve got all their stuff out there and there are the carcasses wrapped up of two moose. And he’s thinking, “Oh, man.”

So he lands the plane and pulls up and says, “Guys, don’t you understand anything? You told me you understood when I left that you can’t take two carcasses out of here. It’s too much weight.” One of them spoke up, there’s always one, and he said, “I was here last year and the pilot told us exactly the same thing. Now come on man, there’s a front coming in, we’ve heard this spiel before.” And so sure enough they talked him into it. They put one carcass on one pontoon, tied it to it, took the other carcass and tied it to the other pontoon, put the rest of the stuff in the plane.

He gets up to one end of the lake; he's got to have so much speed because he's got to clear the trees and he's spitting screws out of those engines. He's got those things running so hard and so fast, and as he comes down that lake he pulls back on it and it looks like he just might make it. It's coming up, it's rising, it's rising. Well, you know the story, it hit the trees and they crashed. They were lying around, beat up, bruised up, bleeding. One hunter looked at the other hunter who had spoken up and he said, "Where are we?" He said, "I don't know, but I think we're about 200 yards from where we crashed last year."

Isn't that the way it is with scriptural truth? You think about what I'm telling you. How many times have we got to hear something? Let me ask you a question. How far are you from where you crashed the last time you heard this truth? You see? You hear it, we hear it, we hear it; when are we going to as individual believers get it? You see years ago Henry Blackaby and Claude King put together a series called "Experiencing God." My wife happened to be in a woman's study and they found out about it. She read through it, she couldn't wait to get home and she said, "Wayne, this is what you've been preaching for twelve years."

I looked at it and I said, "Well, look at this, letting Jesus be Jesus in you. How novel." And this is all about joining Jesus and what He's already up to: this is what the Christian life is. So we trained about 2,500 people in that particular course. But here's the thing that got me: the people that were going through the course would come to me and say, "Did you hear what they said in that book? Jesus is our life. Jesus wants to live His life through you." And I just looked at them and I thought to myself, "I've been preaching it for twelve years." And it showed me something and it proved it again and it's been proven over and over again: you teach it, you teach it, you teach it. But it's not just taught: it has to be caught.

The Holy Spirit has to reveal that truth to our heart. And I'll tell you when it will come. It will come in a moment of desperation. You see, if you're not desperate you'll not understand what I'm talking about. There's too much of "us" to understand it. But when we get to the end of ourselves, that's when it becomes clear to us we can't, God never said we could, He can, He always said He would. Experiencing God is what Christianity is all about. It's not some cold manufactured religion: it's a relationship. And walking with Him, enjoying the journey, that's what it's all about.

When you and I as believers finally see and admit—and this is the hardest thing for our flesh—admit what we can't do. We live in a society that says you can't say, "I can't." And Jesus said you better say you can't, because until you come to that place, you'll never recognize how He says He can. And the moment we come to that place, that's when we get to experience the life that's been there all along. We get to experience what He can do through us as opposed to what we cannot do for Him. Only then will our walk match our talk. That's what we've been talking about. That's when Christianity takes root. That's when people begin to understand what we really are.

This is what Paul's referring to in Ephesians 4. For three chapters Paul taught them about who and whose they were. If you ever want to know who you are in Christ and whose you are in Christ, study Ephesians. And he comes down and shows them how to appropriate it by faith. He said, "Be strengthened in the inner man. Let Christ dwell in your hearts by your faith." And then he says in 4:1, they've heard it and heard it and then he says this, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [the word "calling" means everything that is involved in your salvation] with which you have been called." The word "worthy" is *axios*. *Axios* simply means "to balance something."

We can walk around and sing about all these truths. We can tell other people about these truths, but until they get out of our head and down to our heart we haven't balanced the scales. It's too heavy on the talking side. It's not balanced on the walking side. That's what he's talking about. Live a life that is worthy of your calling. I can't make you walk in a manner worthy; you can't make me walk in a manner worthy. We can encourage each other, but I'll tell you one thing, by studying 2 Corinthians, we can all be challenged by a Type A personality: Paul. I mean you talk about a driven man, a man who came to the end of himself and how God transformed him and allowed him then to become the apostle of grace in the New Testament.

We can learn about him. We have seen in 2 Corinthians already examples of how he's experienced Christ in his life. You know, the Corinthian church had really frustrated him. Frustrated him; disappointed him, with their false accusations, their unwillingness to deal with sin in the body, particularly this one individual that was causing so much division and bring all kinds of deceptive things against the apostle Paul, even questioning his apostleship. Paul experienced however, Christ, when he ran to Him for comfort. He experienced the comfort of God in 1:5-8, the cruelty of their flesh inside that church and what that had done to Paul. It ran deep, but Paul ran to Jesus, he ran to Him, and experienced the comfort only Christ could give.

The difficult circumstances of his life—over in Asia; he talks to them about it—drove him to the point of desperation. He thought he was going to be killed, and in verses 8-11 of chapter 1, at that moment of total weakness, expecting to die, he experienced Christ. He experienced the delivering power of Christ, of how Christ drew him to Himself. And he said, "Not only did He deliver us here, He will deliver us and yet one day He truly will deliver us."

He experienced God; he experienced the power of a pure conscience in verse 12 as Christ in him purified his heart and his motives

before all men.

In 1:13-2:6 we saw how he experienced Christ to keep on keeping on. That's the hardest thing in the world, when people don't appreciate you; and yet Christ in Paul kept him keeping on. And when people intentionally misrepresented him, took a situation that he said he was coming to see them and he didn't, but he had good reason, but they never gave him the benefit of the doubt, even in the midst of that he kept on keeping on. He experienced Christ in him. He experienced the assurance of Christ. Christ continued to show him that He'd validate his life. Don't worry about it: Paul didn't have to defend himself. Christ in him would be his defense. He experienced the boldness of Christ when he had to say the tough things out of love to the Corinthian church so that they could get it, so that they could then be set free to experience God in their life.

And in verses 6-12 of chapter 2, he experienced the sensitivity of Christ. You see, this whole letter, this whole epistle of 2 Corinthians was written in response to how they had received that infamous third letter that we don't have, it was lost. Actually 2 Corinthians would be the fourth letter that he had written to them. Two of them are lost. And he was so excited that they had gone on and dealt with this errant brother in the church that he wrote in response. But they experienced Christ in him. The man they had disciplined had not hurt them as much, yet he had hurt them, but he had really hurt Paul. But Paul, with the love of God in him, experiencing Christ in him, was led to write to them and say, "Listen, you've gone far enough. Now forgive him and comfort him. Come alongside him; get him back into the kingdom's work. Let him be useful again."

Experiencing God: knowing and participating in the fullness of the Christ-life is what Christianity is all about. It's not about trying to perform for God in some cold, religious decree hanging over your head so He might be impressed. That's not Christianity. The Christian life is all about being conquered daily so that we can come to that place of saying, "Not I, but Christ in me." That's what Christianity is all about.

Well today we're going to look at little deeper into that in 2 Corinthians 2:12-17. Let me read the text for you, then we'll come back to it. Verse 12, "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like man, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

We're going to look deeper today and find three things in Paul's life, and you could make a list so long in Corinthians of how, when we experience Jesus, what are some of the things we're going to experience. We're going to see this in his life today. When we choose to say yes to Him and allow Him to overcome us, what do we experience?

When we experience Christ we will see doors open for ministry

First of all, when we experience Christ, we will see doors open for ministry, doors that no man can close. It's so awesome when we start experiencing God because we don't have to come up with ministry anymore. I don't know how many of you grew up a different way. I grew up to where if you don't come up with it, God can't get it done. I want you to know that is not biblical, but that's the way I was taught growing up. In Christ, ministry is received from God, not achieved for God. Verse 12, "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord."

Paul, led by God's Spirit, went to Troas for the purposes of the gospel of Christ. That was his whole life. The gospel of Christ does not mean just for lost people; it also means for saved people. That's what he said to the church of Rome: "I can't wait to get to you to preach the gospel to you." The good news doesn't stop when you get saved, it continues on. But Paul had been to Troas once before and if you know that story from Acts, when he was trying to get into Bithynia, trying to get into Asia, and God squeezed him down to Troas. It was there that he had the Macedonia vision. And thank God he said yes to it, because he crossed over that sea and when he got to Macedonia that was the first church, Christian church, in Europe, because of his willingness to obey.

And that's a story within itself in the book of Acts. But this time when he went to Troas he went to minister to the people and when he got there God opened the door for him. Paul didn't open it; it's in the passive voice: "a door was opened for him." God opened it. It's so interesting to me how many people, how many believers, don't understand this truth. "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it." "I can" is the mentality of the so-called Christian ministry in the 21st century. "We built my business from scratch. Let me at it, I can help God out. God is so proud to have me on His team; I just can't wait to get to work for Him." That's the mentality of so many people.

But God's Word says entirely the opposite. We can't do it but He can. Experiencing God's opening doors of ministry is an awesome thing. The door opening for ministry in Troas wasn't the first time this had happened to the apostle Paul. If you'll carefully look at his life, this statement has been said over and over and over again. This is the philosophy of his whole ministry. When he returned from his first missionary journey, when he went into southern Galatia and Antioch of Pisidia and Lystra and Derbe and Iconium, he came back and he called the church together to make a report. He doesn't relate what he did, he relates how God used him and what God

did.

Acts 14:27, when they had arrived and gathered the church together they began to report all the things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And Paul understood that. He says the same thing about his ministry in Ephesus and you know he spent a lot of time with the Ephesian church and remember on the island of Melitus when they came and the elders of the church were so grieved that they wouldn't see Paul again. I mean, there was a love relationship here, a lot of teaching went into the church at Ephesus. And he says in 1 Corinthians 16:9 concerning that church and ministry, "for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." He didn't open it.

When Paul was in prison he wanted so much to be used of God. He didn't strategize how to do this and how to do that. In Colossians 4:3 he says, "Praying at the same time for us as well that God will open to us a door for the Word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been imprisoned." Now, this is not some mystical thing. This doesn't deny ability or human abilities in that sense. God's not trying to discredit anybody. But what it is is reality. When we surrender to Christ He opens doors of ministry. We get to join Him in what He's already doing.

In our text of 2 Corinthians 2:12 the verb there, "a door was opened," "was opened" is in the perfect tense. You say, what does that mean. It means it was opened and since God opened it, it was going to stay open until God chose to close it. In other words, you don't have to worry. When God opens something up He keeps the door open. It stays open. In other words, ministry that is received from God doesn't have to be sustained by man. God keeps the door open. Like in Revelation 3:8 when he says, "I know your deeds. Behold I have put before you an open door which no man can shut." There's no man that can shut the door. When God opens it, man cannot close it.

Now, why is this so important? Why am I bearing down on this truth right here? I want to tell you something, folks, and I hope you don't miss this. In verse 13 Paul had to walk away, now listen carefully, from an open door of ministry. You say, "What? You're kidding me. God opened a door and he walked away?" That's right. Do you know why? He was concerned for a brother whose name was Titus. He was concerned for him. Verse 13 says, "I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia." You see, that third letter, that infamous third letter that we don't have, was most likely sent—and everything points right to it—by Titus. Titus had to take that letter to the Corinthian church. Remember, Paul said, "To spare you sorrow I wrote you a letter instead of coming to you." And Titus took that letter to them. That's when Paul went to Troas; the door of ministry was open. That's where he was going to meet Titus.

Journeys back then were dangerous. There were robbers everywhere. It's pretty much like today. There are certain parts of the city I'd rather not be at certain times at night. You just sort of learn to be smart. And when you get on those open roads in those days, if they thought you had any money you were a target for the muggers and the robbers of that day. Paul had been taking up an offering for the hurting churches and people over in Judea and Titus had been helping him take that offering. And Paul didn't know that maybe somebody had found out that he had money on him and mugged him along the way. He didn't show up at Troas.

So in verse 13, "I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother." God in Paul gave Paul no rest. It's interesting how God stirs your heart when a brother is hurting. Everybody doesn't get the same stirring for the same brother, but God will put on your heart the brother He wants you to be stirred about. Because of his concern for Titus, and as a result, Paul felt it necessary, God in him, to walk away from a door of ministry to take care of perhaps a hurting friend, a friend that might be in trouble. Christ in Paul made Paul sensitive to people around him that he could actually walk away from a door opened unto ministry and go find him.

"I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia." You say, what am I saying? I don't want you to miss this. I don't want you to miss this. When we open doors for ministry ourselves, then my friend, we have to keep them open. The ministry is up to us. What we initiate we now are bound to sustain. No matter what it costs us. And I'll tell you part of the expense. Part of the expense, and this is the sad thing about fleshly ministry, the sad thing is that our family, our friends, go by the wayside. Why? Because we can't leave that ministry. We have to stay and keep it propped up at the expense of everyone else around us. That's what this world calls being "driven."

Our family can fall apart, our friends can fall apart, but we stick to the course as we hold the doors of ministry open that we opened. I had the privilege of speaking to one of the largest Christian business men's organizations in the world. They had their leadership teams from all over the United States and they asked me to come in and speak on the grace message. I didn't know it until my second message that these were people; the whole group had been started by Ian Thomas, the saving life of Christ. I didn't know that. So what I was doing was not teaching them something new. What I was doing was rehearsing where they came from. And I had men in that ministry walk up to me, tears streaming down their face, they said, "Thank you, you're sent, God has opened our eyes to realize we spend all of our time in meetings. We spend all of our time around the table strategizing and coming up with a plan and we spend very little time on our face before God, knowing that if God opens the door, God won't close that door." No man can close it. God can close it, but no man can close it. And they said they have to come back to where we began.

I'm speaking to you today who have that Type A personality. It's all up to you. You drive everything. You control everything and you take that mentality into ministry, you have just hit a brick wall, and your relationship will fall apart. People will be devastated. Why? Because you're having to prop up that which you came up with. But when God opens the door, no man can close it.

I've been there; I can't point a finger at anybody today. I've been there. I remember the days when I was in church recreation. All I knew was 16 hours a day in order to build, regardless what was going on in my family; I had to be there. We had to make the building debt free in two years, and I had to do it. You can do it, Wayne, you can do it, you can. And I look back at it and my heart breaks. My wife had to be at home with those two little children. Where's Wayne? He's holding up the ministry that he initiated. See, those who walk with God can rest in Him. And they can understand that if God opens that door, no man can close it. As it says in the book of Job, "No man stops the purposes of God." When God initiates something, God sustains it.

That doesn't mean we abandon our responsibility. That's not what I'm talking about and you know that. But what I'm talking about is relationships—that are more important to God than what we call ministry—can begin to be what they ought to be when we start trusting God instead of our own flesh to make something happen. He walked away from it, folks; he walked away from it. God opened the door of ministry and he walked away from it for the benefit of a friend that might be in trouble. You want to achieve ministry today? Is that what people want in the 21st century? Is that what makes everybody happy? It's the same price tag in the church as it is in the world.

I know a lot of businessmen that are successful, but oh, listen to me: at what expense? And so we see that when we experience God we see doors open for ministry. You say you're not quite with me, because if he walked away, how could God even use him?

When we experience Christ in us, His life will be a sweet smelling aroma

Well listen to the second part of this. The second thing is when we experience Christ, His life in us will be a sweet smelling aroma.

I got to go out and eat with two guys not long ago. We had the best time, and this lady that was the attendant at the table kept walking by and she kept sniffing. I didn't know if it was the food we were eating or what it was that was getting her attention. And finally she just stopped and she said, "I've got to know who's wearing," and she named a cologne. I don't know if the other two guys were wearing it or not, but I remembered the name of it and went home and it was what I was wearing! My wife bought it for me. I didn't know what it was. But she picked up that fragrance and every time she walked by our table she'd walk right back and she wanted to know who was wearing that.

It was a fragrance that was a sweet smell, a sweet aroma to a person who is experiencing Christ. Will we allow Christ to conquer us in our attitudes; will we allow Christ to conquer us in our agendas; will we allow Christ to conquer us in our selfish desires? The sweet aroma that now emanates as we meet people in life. Verse 14, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place."

Now he's telling us something here. The most beautiful picture is drawn here from the Roman culture of Paul's day when he says, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." In Roman times when there was a great victory, the victory procession was absolutely a thrilling spectacle beyond anything you and I have seen in our day. The procession was granted only by the Senate when they realized certain conditions that had to be met. The victory had to be total and it had to be complete. There had to be at least 5,000 people slain in that victory. The territory of Rome had to be extended because of that victory and what it meant to that country.

Going before the triumphal procession they were decorating with flowers everywhere: decorating all the temples, there were flowers everywhere. Matter of fact they took the petals of the flowers and put them on the streets to where you had to wade through them, so that when the horses came down the streets they would step on those petals and a fragrance would emanate from that. Incense from burning spices was shaken all around and on the doorposts and in the temples, adding to the aroma of the flowers, filling the air with a sweet smelling fragrance. It was the sweet smell of a victory that had been won.

The sweet smell announced that great victory, and when people smelled that aroma they knew the general had conquered somebody and they all came out and gathered around the streets to witness the procession. All the spoils of war, the gold, the silver, the precious art, all were openly displayed as to what was taken in that battle. The conquering general was the focus of it all. The conquering general was put into a special kind of chariot, drawn by four horses, he had a robe on that was embroidered with gold and laced with flowers. In his right hand he had an olive branch, in his left hand he had a golden scepter which was a picture of who he was as that general and the power that he had. But chained to his chariot were the generals that he had conquered in that battle who would later be taken to a public place and executed.

Paul says that God always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus. And what Paul is trying to show us is that we are the conquered, we are those, when we have allowed Christ to conquer us, we are the ones chained to His chariot. Christ, when we have bowed before Him, not only has us captive but He has our gold and He has our silver, everything that we own now is His. He leads us in His

victory. Can you imagine? You say, "Wayne, I don't like the idea of me being a chained captive." Oh, my friend, I love it, because everywhere He would go, it was triumph. We are led in His victory. He's our Lord and our Master. We're not our own, but we have been conquered by His love and by His grace.

And when a believer allows Christ to do that in his life, to conquer him, to capture him, Paul says that God manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. When Christ conquers our attitude, when Christ conquers our agenda, when a believer is willing to allow Christ to break him as a horse is broken by his master, it's the sweet thing. He gets to experience Christ and that aroma of knowing Him flows out and touches others.

He says in verse 15, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Do you realize whether they're lost or whether they're saved, they still smell that fragrance? They understand the sweetness of a life that has been so tenderized; a life that has been so conquered by the Christ that lives within him that people say there's something different about that individual.

How many times, flying on planes you see people with an attitude that has an aroma that's sour and full of death? Someone told me about a time when he was standing behind a person at the counter. And that person was just chewing out that little old ticket agent who had nothing to do with anything. And he stepped up and said, "How in the world do you put up with people like that?" And that little agent said, "Oh, it didn't bother me. I just checked his bags to Hong Kong."

That's not the way you handle it, but I tell you one thing: if you peg people as being Christian and how they acted in places like that, then you'd understand quickly what this passage is talking about. You see, he's being led. He's chained to his chariot. You say he walked away from ministry. I say no, I said it wrong. He was led away from ministry to look for a friend, because when you're chained to the chariot you don't tell the commander which way you're going. You're chained to him and wherever it is, Christ in you touches people around you.

What does it mean to experience Christ? It means to understand ministry in a whole different way. The doors are opened by Him, not by us. And we don't have to sustain it; He does. And relationships are important and the way we treat people is important. But we also become a sweet-smelling fragrance, an aroma of the Christ that lives within us. You may see a pagan person somewhere and they have no clue who you are, they have no clue what you represent. They know only this; you're different and like that sweet smelling perfume.

When we experience Christ we experience the pain and the joy of people's response to the fragrance that's in us

Thirdly, when we experience Christ we're going to experience something we never have before. We're going to experience the pain and we're going to experience the joy of people's response to that fragrance that's in us. Second Corinthians 2:15-17 says, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." And then Paul, overwhelmed by this whole truth, says, "And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

When we're experiencing Christ, His message of grace that has tenderized us and made us a sweet smelling aroma of one that is conquered by His Lordship, chained to His chariot, will reach out to many and many will receive it. But many will reject it. This twofold consequence of walking with God: there's the joy of one receiving; there's the pain of one rejecting. To some it will be a message of life; to others it will be a message of death. Paul says "to the one an aroma from death to death;" they're already in death, they'll spend eternity in death, they'll die twice. "But to the other from life to life." They'll not only know physical life, but they'll know spiritual, everlasting life.

To those who are the living, it's a sweet aroma of life everlasting, but to those who are dying it's the sour odor of death. And Paul realizes the sobering responsibility of one who shares the gospel and he recognizes how it's either going to be received or it's going to be rejected. He said, "Who is adequate for these things?" This has to be God's work; there's no man that can set this thing up and make it a program. When we experience God in our lives, we experience the greatest evangelist that ever lived. Did you know that?

You know, I know that all the training and all the different things for evangelism are wonderful, but I want to tell you something you cannot give an individual, and that's the passion and the burden to want to do anything about it. But when we have Christ living in us, the heart of the greatest evangelist that so loved the world that He came to die for us, that burden gets hold of us and we can't help but share. All of a sudden evangelism is no longer a cause. All of a sudden evangelism is a consequence; and wherever we go that aroma is flowing out of us. A lady told me last night, "You know, I can't even walk anymore that I don't want to stop somebody and asked them if they're saved. I've never been like this before." That's what it's like.

Those who experience Him are not like the ones who peddle the Word of God. There are a lot of people in it for themselves. The word "peddle" has the idea of hawking in verse 17. "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as

from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” The phrase “peddling the word of God” refers to those false teachers which evidently were just rampant in Corinth. And it was some of these false teachers that were questioning his apostleship that he spends the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians defending. Paul is drawing a line between himself and them and he says, “I want you to see the difference. They might even be saying the right things, they might even be going through the motions, but I want you to know that what we say is in sincerity, it’s in Christ. It’s His word just emanating out of us, we can’t help it. We’ve been conquered by Him. We’re chained to His chariot. It’s His message that we bear wherever we go.”

He lives experiencing Christ in his life. Can I ask you today, are you experiencing Christ in your life? Are you seeing doors of ministry open to you? I’m not talking about necessarily ecclesiastical ministry. I’m talking about just ministry with a neighbor. Do you see doors of ministry? Do you see others respond to the fragrance of Christ in your life? Are you seeing that? Do you feel the pain, but also the joy of people who either reject or people who respond to the gospel we share? A man said years ago, “We live such subnormal lives that when we see something that’s normal from scripture, we think it’s abnormal because it throws our understanding.”

Well, let me just leave you with this: when you come up with the idea, and when you want it done your way, you’re going to have to do it. Relationships are going to be ruined at the expense of a door you opened. And there’s a bad aroma that will flow out of your life: sour, of death. It’s not of the fragrance, the sweet smell, the fragrance of one conquered by Christ. And the pain that you feel will not be the pain that comes from the righteous pain. It’s pain that we inflict upon ourselves because we are number one in what we do.

What’s the middle letter of the word sin? What’s the middle letter of the word pride? There’s your problem right there. And until “I” is conquered by Christ, we can’t experience the Christ that lives in us. It’s still up to us; we have to prop up what we come up with.