

Relationships: The Integrity Factor  
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2 Corinthians 1 and part of chapter 2

Have you ever had a time when you were doing the best you knew how, and someone with another agenda twisted your words and cast doubt on your motives? For their own advancement (or perhaps entertainment) someone criticizes and even lies about what you've said or done.

- How did you FEEL like responding to that? Did you want to lash out...defend yourself...run...quit?

The Apostle Paul had to deal with some of those kind of people in the church at Corinth.

When we think about the Apostle Paul and the churches he started, we tend to think in terms of great SPIRITUAL VICTORY. We picture Paul igniting the flames of the Gospel as he spreads it throughout the known world; then standing back with satisfaction to see what God had done through his work. And there WAS that side of the story.

But, there was another side. Not only did Paul suffer physical hardships, try as he might to do what Christ had called him to do, there were those who tried their best to discredit his ministry and malign his character.

Bob Deffinbaugh writes:

*Paul suffers the entire gamut of afflictions... He suffers from hunger, thirst, from heat and cold, from physical attacks, from illnesses, from constant threats on his life, and from betrayal and false accusations. His intelligence (or at least his wisdom), his homiletical (PREACHING) skills, and his apostolic authority are challenged and sometimes mocked. He is accused of being fickle and failing to fulfill his promises. He is said to be strong in his written words but a wimp in person. And if suffering at the hands*

*of men and nature is not enough, we are also informed that Paul suffered at the hand of Satan (12:7-10)...No epistle describes the afflictions of this great apostle more clearly than 2 Corinthians. When Paul speaks about suffering, he speaks from experience.*  
<http://bible.org/seriespage/why-bad-things-happen-god's-people-2-cor-11-11>

Billy Graham is a good modern day example of a Christian leader who has experienced opposition and betrayal. He has used Paul as his model saying:

*"...when it comes to all sorts of suffering, Paul was in the major leagues." He continues, "If any of you are leaders, you know the kind of pressure Paul was describing. Humanly speaking, it can lead to loneliness, depression, and often discouragement. Only God's grace and peace can carry us through times of trial."*  
*The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham [Hardcover] Harold Myra (Author), Marshall Shelley (Author)*

The book of 2 Corinthians is said to be the most INTIMATE letter Paul wrote. In it he "bared his soul and professed his abiding love for the Corinthians despite the apparent fickleness of their affection for him." The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty [New Testament Edition] John F. Walvoord (Editor), Roy B. Zuck (Editor)

This lesson isn't just for preachers, or teachers, or Sunday School leaders.

If you are a BELIEVER IN CHRIST who is trying to do what is right, get ready, because you will face some of the pressures and problems Paul faced.

That begs the question: HOW DO WE LIVE with INTEGRITY when faced with IMPERFECT RELATIONSHIPS?

Let's look into 2 Corinthians and find out!

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

## The God of All Comfort

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

- What does Paul do in the very first word of verse 3? He PRAISES God.
- Why do you think Paul began this letter by praising God?
- Also in verse 3, who does he say God is? Father of compassion (mercies)/God of all comfort
- The first thing Paul teaches us before he even gets started:
- When faced with pressures and trials, the first thing to do is take the focus OFF the problems and the troublemakers and put it on GOD.
- Paul refers to God as the “Father of mercies.” Question: When we say someone is the “father” of something, what does that mean? It originated with them.
- A quick quiz: What is the difference between MERCY and GRACE?
- Grace is when God gives us what we DON'T DESERVE (i.e. the righteousness of Christ)
- Mercy is when God DOESN'T give us what we DO deserve (sparing us from His wrath)
- Question: When someone has lied about you or wronged you, you want to give them...WHAT? What they deserve...what they have coming to them.
- Before his conversion what was Paul's FULL TIME JOB? Killing and persecuting Christians. What did he deserve?

- God's wrath. What did he get? God's MERCY.
- Paul remembered the MERCY God had shown to Him and that MOTIVATED him to show mercy to the troublemakers in Corinth and to repair the relationship with them.

Statement: Because God didn't give us what WE DESERVE...we must do the same for those who do wrong to us. Did you get that? Don't give them a punch in the nose, or a kick in the shins, or a piece of your mind...show them the MERCY that comes from God.

- Paul says God is the God of all comfort
- The word for comfort here is the Greek word "paraclete" [PAR uh kleet] (Not Parakeet!)
- It's the same word used in John 14:16 to describe the Holy Spirit (the comforter)
- This reminds us that God is ALWAYS DRAWING NEAR US when we are in trouble
- Verses 4 through 7 paint the picture of how God works through us to others
- What is a "conduit"? We typically call it a PIPE or a CHANNEL.
- Paul is saying that BELIEVERS are to be CONDUITS or CHANNELS
- He says: "God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."
- Verse 5 says our "comfort OVERFLOWS"

I've heard John Maxwell tell leaders:

"You cannot export that which you don't POSSESS."

- You may think that you have a "quiet time" with God JUST for your own benefit...but it's also to FILL US UP so we can be a CHANNEL of God's COMFORT to others
- One way we are a CHANNEL of COMFORT to others is through PRAYER
- When we lift up others in prayer it's like TURNING ON

THE TAP so God's comfort to us can flow to others

- Back to MERCY...How can I show mercy instead of giving people what they deserve?
- You and I can only show MERCY to others...ESPECIALLY those who don't deserve it because we first RECEIVED it from God.
- I can't show MERCY to that "so and so" who has lied about me and treated me unfairly, I DON'T HAVE IT IN ME!" CORRECT! You don't! I don't!
- The only way we have it in us to RECEIVE it FIRST from God and then let it OVERFLOW to others.
- To live with INTEGRITY in relationship to others we must LIVE FOR OTHERS as a CHANNEL of what God has done for us.
- How do we have the STRENGTH to live that way?

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

8We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our[a] behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

- Verse 8: How bad was the pressure Paul had been under? He despaired even of life.
- What does that mean? Things were so bad Paul thought he might just die!
- Paul didn't cover up his trials. He didn't blow it off with an "oh, it wasn't so bad."
-

Paul GOT REAL! Paul said it was so bad I thought I might DIE.

- Verse 9: Why does Paul say these terrible pressures happened to him? "...that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."
- Troubles are God's way of reminding us to RELY on Him and not ourselves.
- Sometimes it's the only way He can get our attention.
- Here's an engineering lesson for you:

Ever hear of the term: Plasticity?

Plasticity is the ability of a material to deform permanently without breaking or rupturing. This property is the opposite of strength. By careful alloying of metals, the combination of plasticity and strength is used to manufacture large structural members. For example, should a member of a bridge structure become overloaded, plasticity allows the overloaded member to flow allowing the distribution of the load to other parts of the bridge structure.

- If I was building a bridge I'd say "Make every piece as so strong it won't move!"
- When MY bridge got overloaded instead of FLOWING it would BREAK
- God knows how to use trials to BEND us without BREAKING us
- Ever see a piece of wood that has been carefully bent...for example, a beautiful Guitar
- That craftsman knows how to carefully BEND and SHAPE that solid wood into a beautiful shape...WHO WOULD WANT A SQUARE GUITAR?!?

God allows PRESSURE and TRIALS into our lives to SHAPE US not to BREAK US

- Has God ever delivered you from a terrible trial?
- If you're a human being you've had some trials. Maybe

- not to the point of feeling like you would die; but if you're walking and breathing...you've had some trials.
- Since you're here this morning...then God must have delivered you!
  - Verse 10: Paul AFFIRMS this again: "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he WILL deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will CONTINUE to deliver us." (Emphasis mine).
  - If God HAS delivered us in the past...He WILL deliver us in the future! So we can LIVE in HIS strength and not ours.

If we'll LIVE FOR OTHERS as a CHANNEL of God's MERCY and COMFORT; and if we'll LIVE IN HIS STRENGTH when we face trials; Then...we'll be LIVING SO GOD approves.

## 2 Corinthians 1:12

12Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

- Should Christians BOAST? I thought that was bad!
- Paul says it's okay to BOAST if your boasting about Christ.
- He said if we have a clear conscience that we've conducted ourselves "in the holiness and sincerity that are from God" we have a right to feel SATISFIED
- Paul says, the only way we can live with INTEGRITY in our relationships with others is not through "worldly wisdom but according to God's grace."
- But we won't have to BOAST about it if we live this way...it will be NOTICED.

## 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

14But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal

procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? 17Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

- Do you think you can tell the difference between a ROSE and an air freshener?
- As you get older, your sense of smell gets worse. Don't believe me? Get involved in eldercare.
- If your nose is at its best, you can tell the difference between 4000-10,000 smells!
- You can SMELL the difference!
- In verse 14 Paul describes a "triumphal procession" in Christ.

Warren Wiersbe tells us:

*The picture here is that of the "Roman Triumph," the special tribute that Rome gave to their conquering generals. It was their equivalent of the American ticker-tape parade.*

*The processional would include the commander riding in a golden chariot, surrounded*

*by his officers. The parade would also include a display of the spoils of battle, as well as the captive enemy soldiers. The Roman priests would also be in the parade, carrying burning incense to pay tribute to the victorious army. The procession would follow a special route through the city and would end at the Circus Maximus, where the helpless captives would entertain the people by fighting wild beasts.*

He goes on to say...

*Using this image of the incense, Paul pictured the Christian ministry. He saw believers as incense, giving forth the fragrance of Jesus Christ in their lives and labors. To God, believers are the very fragrance of Jesus Christ. To other believers, we are the*

*fragrance of life; but to unbelievers, we are the fragrance of death. In other words, the Christian life and ministry are matters of life and death. The way we live and work can mean life or death to a lost world around us.*

- How we live our Christian lives before others is a matter of “life and death”...WOW!
- Serious stuff.
- Paul asks the right question in verse 16: “Who is equal to such a task?”
- Paul later answers that question in verse 5 of Chapter 3: “5Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”
- How we live in relationship to others is also an aroma
- When you burn something there is always an aroma...burn a scented candle and there’s a pleasant aroma...burn tire and you get something different
- There’s a reason we have an expression when people talk about trouble in relationships. Sometimes people call it: “Raising a stink!”

Our Lesson Commentary reminds us:

*We’re responsible for our behavior in our relationships. We can’t control how others live and respond to us, but as Christians we can always act with Christian integrity.*

The Takeaway:

- When faced with pressures and trials, the first thing to do is take the focus OFF the problems and the troublemakers and put it on GOD.
- Because God didn’t give us what WE DESERVE...we must do the same for those who do wrong to us. Don’t give them a punch in the nose, or a kick in the shins, or a piece of your mind...show them the MERCY that comes from God.
- To live with INTEGRITY in relationship to others we

must LIVE FOR OTHERS as a CHANNEL of what God has done for us allowing His love, mercy, and comfort to OVERFLOW through us to others.

- God allows PRESSURE and TRIALS into our lives to SHAPE US not to BREAK US
- We're responsible for our behavior in our relationships. We can't control how others live and respond to us, but as Christians we can always act with Christian integrity...we can be a PLEASING AROMA to God and others.