Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – July 8, 2018

The Apostle Paul’s Second letter to the Corinthians

how the Cross changes everything

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:23–2:13 “Why? For your own good!”

The Background: When is it a good thing to change your mind?

It’s a virtue to stand your ground, and also a virtue to be open to a reasonable change in plans. But how do we know when to do which? Paul had made a change in his plans to visit the Corinthians, but it turns out, it was in their best interests for him to do so, not from any selfishness on his part. Where does such a decision begin? In the Cross, which pictures God’s justice meeting His love. Paul does what is right (as we can), not fearing for our reputation or appearances when we do so. Though the Cross made Jesus appear weak, God’s righteousness was never more clearly displayed. We need not avoid doing good, for fear of fallout. The Cross changes everything.

Our Compassion: The Cross enables compassionate firmness.

Paul could have stayed the course and gone to Corinth as planned. But had he done so, it likely would have short-circuited the Corinthians’ obedience and follow-through of correcting the rebellious member. Paul is helping this church see the compassion of Jesus. He does not demand “a pound of flesh” of the penitent, but on the contrary, demonstrates God’s attitude toward us when we repent. There is no condemnation to those in Christ, and we should extend that grace to others whenever it is possible.

The Narrative: (Reading 2 Corinthians is like hearing one side of a phone conversation. But we don’t really have to guess much, since Paul is both explicit and passionate. That said, we’ll be paraphrasing each section to sort out the argument and the not- so -hidden assumptions the Corinthians were making about Paul and his actions.)

(23)God Himself is my witness that I changed my plans so as not to create more sadness for us both! For it was with great heaviness that I wrote that painful letter to you, and still, it was out of love. My ultimate goal is your joy, and sometimes that means saying painful things. It was a difficult call, but my purpose is not to manipulate you, but to rejoice with you in Jesus.

(5) As for the offender, since he repented and is sorry for his actions, forgive and restore him, for restoration was always the purpose for the letter. This hurt you more than it did me (I am not easily offended), but now it is time to show him love, lest he be tempted to despair. I have forgiven him (to the extent he harmed me), and remember that when we fail to forgive, we open ourselves up to Satan’s attacks on our relationships.

(18) And even though there was a great opportunity to preach the gospel in Asia (Minor), I was so concerned about you, (because Titus had not returned with a report), I headed for northern Greece (hoping to find out about you there). That’s how I came to be where you did not expect me to be.

The Challenge: Do I know how to be both loving and firm?

***Memory Verse: Galatians 6:1***

1. Just as our love for others grows out of God’s love for us, so also our compassion should mirror His. Though He commands, He enables us to obey. He knows we are sinners who are weak. Psalm 78:36-39; 103:1-14 Do you exhibit compassionate firmness? Do you flex when conditions change?

2. We forgive others as we have been forgiven: freely, completely, and quickly. And we should be able to receive forgiveness as well. Failure to forgive and be forgiven can lead to broken relationships and depression. 1 John 1:9; 2:1; Luke 15:11-32