

## 2 Corinthians 12:11-21, “Strengthening the Church”

11.7.21

As we begin this morning, I would like to state some things that will be patently obvious when you hear them. Ready? Parents want their children to obey them, coaches want their teams to win, and pastors want their people to be growing spiritually.

Those three statements are no-brainers. They’re all true...parents, coaches and pastors are all similar, we want to see those under our care growing! As it relates to this church, Pastor Dale and I have a passionate drive to see you growing in the Lord! Our job, according to Ephesians 4, is to equip you for works of ministry and in that work, to see you become spiritually mature!

### **Ephesians 4:11-14**

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds<sup>[c]</sup> and teachers,<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,<sup>[e]</sup> to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Isn't that what was happening in Corinth? Deceitful schemes being taught...tearing down sound doctrine...false teachers, carrying off the Corinthians into gross doctrinal error? You see, the Apostle Paul had the same desire for every church he planted...and that's the desire of any faithful pastor. The desire: that the people under his care are growing more and more like Jesus in holiness and maturity, being molded into His image.

Church family, I constantly say this: I see this place as a spiritual gym. A place you and I come to get better spiritually. Is that how you see today, or are you here more as a spectator...than a participant? Have you thought about what's going to go on here today? Do you have an expectation for you and your family of getting better?

Listen, if you have children, you should prepare them and yourself before you get here for what will happen in this place. Listen, spiritual transactions that effect eternity are happening in this place...and you aren't careful, you will totally miss it...week after week and you and your family will be stunted in their growth and we will stay the same! Church, this is a place where we experience the Lord God Almighty in Spirit and Truth and you and your family need to be HERE and be prepared to experience GOD! Are you and your children prepared?

Please hear my heart this morning. Yes, I'm most definitely concerned about your doctor appointment this week. I'm concerned about your aches, your pains and your physical issues. I'm concerned about your financial situation and your emotional well-being...believe me, I spend a lot of time praying for you about all of these important things, but the most important thing that consumes me and Pastor Dale is your spiritual health. That's where our real concern lies...because that's eternal...the rest isn't. And you see, for any pastor worth his salt, that's where his real concern lies: are the people under his care growing spiritually?

Today we're going to talk about: “Strengthening the Church.” That's my goal today.

### **2 Corinthians 12:11-21**

<sup>11</sup> I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. <sup>13</sup> For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did

not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! <sup>14</sup> Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup> I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? <sup>16</sup> But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. <sup>17</sup> Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? <sup>19</sup> Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. <sup>20</sup> For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. <sup>21</sup> I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

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The Apostle Paul was soon going to find out if the Corinthians had gotten their act together. Scholars tell us Paul likely came to Corinth within about 2-3 months of the church receiving this 2nd letter. This would be Paul's third trip to Corinth. I see it almost like parents coming back from a trip and picking up the kids and asking those who watched them, "How did they do?" What we're really asking is for an assessment of how much sin did they get into, right? ☺

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Think about this as a Christian. What causes your growth to be thwarted in Christ? Sin. SIN! It's sin that is the enemy of our spiritual progress. Sin keeps us from growing. We don't win living in sin. You might want to repeat that. **We don't win living in sin.** Are you living in sin today? I promise you...if you are...you aren't growing and you aren't living in peace.

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Listen, we need to be reminded...sin in scripture is anything that displeases God and is listed as such in the Bible. The Bible defines what sin is, not CNN. Never forget what our Heavenly Father desires for us. Paul told the church at Thessalonica:

**1 Thessalonians 4:3**

<sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification:<sup>[b]</sup> that you abstain from sexual immorality.

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Are you? Are you growing in holiness? You see, Paul felt like a father to the church members at Corinth. In fact, his concern had turned into fear. That's the first words of verses 20 and 21. "I fear, I fear." Those verses are the key to the passage. Paul was afraid. The word is "**phobeō,**" from which we get the English word "phobia." And this word is not talking about a superficial thing; it's talking about a deep-seated fear, a deep-seated anxiety, that wracks the mind and the heart. He was scared to death that when he showed up, he was going to find out that "the kids had been awful," and isn't that a reflection on the parents? Yep! What we allow in moderation, they take to excess! What are you allowing your kids to get away with? Are you scared of them? Paul wasn't.

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He wasn't afraid of the Corinthians...he was afraid for their souls. He was afraid they were being deceived like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He was afraid the Corinthian's minds were being led astray from the truth of Christ by this false teaching. And how does he know all of this? Because word had gotten back to him in Macedonia through Titus that they're turning on Paul. And this STINGS!!

Unfortunately, instead of coming to Paul's defense when this myriad of false accusations was made, many in the church had turned on Paul and what's even worse, many had simply distanced

themselves from Paul and ghosted him. It's NOT that they were taking part in the accusations...it's just that they weren't defending him. They were taking a "wait and see attitude." I've been there and I bet you have too, and it hurts.

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Here's Paul who had spent 18 months in Corinth planting this church, teaching them and leading them to Jesus. Saved...taken from Satan's kingdom of darkness, delivered from sin to freedom in the Kingdom of Jesus, but many have turned on him and distanced themselves, meaning they weren't going to "throw in" with Paul until they saw how the dust settled. You see, we all learn who our real friends are in the storm, don't we? They're the ones who ride it with you...not from a distance.

You know what church family, it's an honor to defend godly men. If they've lived a life that exhibits godliness, why would people choose to believe accusations to the contrary? You see, it should have been an honor and a duty of the Corinthians to have stood up for Paul against the lies of these false teachers and their unfounded accusations. But they didn't. And by their silence, they actually took sides against him in the court of public opinion. Listen carefully, to sit silent when accusations are being cast unjustly on good people and to do nothing when their character and their service to God is being assailed, is to become partakers of the guilt of the liars themselves.

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Church family, I want you to understand something. As this culture continues to follow Satan's path of deceit and sin...people who stand for Christ and stand on His Word are going to be maligned. Don't think for a second that you and I will go down in history in the court of public opinion as "good people" when we stand on the Word of God and the teaching of Jesus? I can promise you: We won't! Throughout history, those who persecuted for Christ go down in the court of public opinion as deserving to go down, to be quieted...then punished and ultimately removed from society! Let me show this to you:

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Do you know what I've settled in my spirit...the fact that as I continue to preach and teach this book in an orthodox and hermeneutically correct way, I will be seen as evil. I will be seen as a bigot, a hater, unloving jerk who deserves to be locked up or worse.

#### **Matthew 10:16-25**

<sup>16</sup> "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. <sup>21</sup> Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. <sup>24</sup> "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant<sup>[f]</sup> above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign<sup>[g]</sup> those of his household.

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Church family, I'm sharing my heart with you this morning. I want you to understand this. Already I see and hear so many things that aren't true about me and other men who stand on the Word of God; and yet, many people believe them. And you know what...I know there will be more lies and more accusations in the future and that's all it's going to take for some, (just an accusation...it

doesn't have to be true), and **they'll believe the accusation and eventually, over time**, that could lead to the loss (at least for me in this context) of this pulpit, and potentially the loss of my freedom...

And Church, I'm prepared for that. Because I am not above my master! And Paul felt the same. Paul endured being hated and maligned just like his Savior. Jesus died for telling the truth, because people couldn't handle it. So, I don't believe for one second, that if you and I stand on truth that we will go down in history as "good people," instead, the world will applaud when we're hauled off. Are you prepared for that? For being hated for your faith in Christ? Are you training your family for that?

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You say, you're being pessimistic! No, I'm not. I'm not a fatalist. I'm actually encouraged today by what I saw happen last week in VA...but, **I'm also realistic** and I know that there are those who will be even more emboldened to take down that which is good and of God. So, I'm trying to prepare us for what's coming! I'm trying to get us ready. I'm trying to get us into the gym and get us ready to face what's coming out there in the years ahead. I'm trying to point us to heaven...to get our minds off this life! And in the process to remind us of the JOY that's coming, and in the meantime, we'll have the grace of our Savior (like we saw last week) to sustain. Remember, there is joy in the suffering. His grace is sufficient! Never forget that!

You see, our reward is not here and we can't be looking for our reward here, we must be looking to heaven. Here, **NOW**, is the work, later (heaven) is the reward. Here is the effort, heaven is the honor. Here is the seed time, and heaven is the harvest. Here is the battle, heaven is the rest. Here is the cross, heaven the crown. This world can't reward us, because it doesn't have anything of value to reward us with...and the world won't reward us, because it hates our message.

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You see, I'm praying we'll stop this incessant chasing of the American Dream and the stuff of this life...and the futility in chasing the next fun thing, pleasurable thing and being deceived that the stuff of this earth is going to bring us joy. Paul was trying to get the Corinthians to see the truth!

YES, the Corinthians should have rushed to defend Paul against the lies of the false apostles, (that's why he's written this entire letter), but they hadn't; and so, he continues with his defense and his grave concerns... See it again...verse 11.

### **2 Corinthians 12:11-13**

**<sup>11</sup>I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. <sup>13</sup>For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!**

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Paul performed miracles...**AMONG YOU**...the Corinthians...and this was authentication that he was a true Apostle of Christ. These signs and wonders authenticated the fact that Paul was the real thing! That what he was doing: "mighty works," **dunamis** in the Greek, (we get dynamite from that word), it's all of God! Supernatural power!!

These miracles should have been like flashing billboards proclaiming: "He's a TRUE apostle." You say, "Maybe these false teachers faked miracles and signs?" Maybe they did. We aren't told. But I'll tell you this, you and I can tell who's real. For instance: In Corinth, if a guy in the community has been crippled all his life and Paul heals him, there you go. But, if the false teachers supposedly

heal some guy...I guarantee you it was a guy no one had ever seen, because it's fake. I guarantee he would have been paid! It's all false! So, Paul's coming to straighten it out...

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### **2 Corinthians 12:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup> I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

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Paul said: I'm not trying to take advantage of you. And yet, these false teachers, just won't quit...they're like CNN on steroids...they stay on the verbal attack of Paul... They say, "Oh yeah, Paul's coming to Corinth to cash in. He's just buttering you up and playing you for the fool...he's coming to get that love offering for the Jerusalem Christians and he's going to keep it all for himself!" **Lies...nothing but lies...but so were falling for the lies.** See verse 16.

### **2 Corinthians 12:16**

<sup>16</sup> But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit.

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Paul points out the lie, the accusation. Oh, I can hear Paul's heart: *"I've spent 18 months of my life with you. I poured out my soul for you and I never took a dime. I worked making tents, preaching during the day and sewing leather at night, and I did it because I love you. So, am I now to be loved less because I didn't take money from you, like these shysters, who are STILL taking money from you!"*

Remember, Paul had taken great steps to make sure that there was no look of impropriety regarding that love offering and he repeats it:

### **2 Corinthians 12:17-19**

<sup>17</sup> Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? <sup>19</sup> Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

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That last word is the key: "**Beloved**." Paul was saying, "I did all of this for you because I love you...I just want to build you up...like a father with his children...to see you grow, like children grow and mature." But, he's so afraid...

### **2 Corinthians 12:20**

<sup>20</sup> For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

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Paul says I'm afraid I'm going to find the kids are misbehaving and in his apostolic authority, with the heart of a father, his going to have to correct them and discipline them for their disobedience. And that's what a loving father does...you don't let your kids get away with disobedience, because that will set them up for failure. Did you hear that mom and dad.

You see verse 20 is a progression of sin: **Quarreling** with one another because they were **jealous** of one another...that led to **anger** and **hostility** that led to **slander** and **gossiping** (and what a tragedy that is for the world to see how Christians attack one another). **And all of this led to lies/conceit**, which led to the chaos and **disorder** in the church...which scared Paul to death...

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## 2 Corinthians 12:21

<sup>21</sup> I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

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“They have practiced.” Sexual sin had become the pattern...a lifestyle and it’s shouldn’t be lost on us that sexual sin is always the tip of the spear in any culture that’s decaying...you see, when a culture accepts sexual sin as okay, that’s **the beginning of the demise of that culture**. Read Romans chapter 1. Paul was afraid there were those who still had not repented, much like a child who refuses to obey and continues to act out and thumb their nose at their parents.

Listen, when a person can sin and feel no remorse...their conscience is seared and that is the beginning of apostasy, walking away from God. And so, Paul said, “I’m afraid that God may have to humble me when I come.” That word “humble” in the Greek means to be “brought low,” and isn’t that what happens, as parents, when our children don’t obey, it brings us low and that causes us to mourn, “**pentheo**” in the Greek...which means to grieve as at funeral.

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And Paul was grieved...grieved because IF the Corinthians were still living in sin, his critics could then claim that Paul’s message had failed and that he had failed. Paul refused to let that happen and he refused, like a father, to give up on the Corinthians! **In that way, he was like Jesus...he would not forsake them!** He loved them too much to quit on them; and so, he had to try to keep strengthening them! And that’s what men who love a church do. That’s how Pastor Dale and I feel about you. We love you and want you to grow SPIRITUALLY.

So, church family, let’s get in the gym! Let’s get into the Word. Will you read the Bible with your family this week? Will you prepare them for next Sunday? Let’s prepare ourselves to be spiritually fit...let’s have a plan mom and dad...get into the Bible together! We’ve given you all kinds of tools as a church to do that. The question is: will you take the time to do it. If you do...if we do as a church, we’ll strengthen this church!

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