

“The Great Digression and The New Covenant”
2 Corinthians 2:12-17
WBC Jerry Grey 2024
Message 5

Introduction: We come to a section of scripture today that reveals what I have been stressing to you about the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul reveals his heart in vivid details; if you have ever wondered how men who have been greatly used of God felt, and how they stuck with their callings and completed the task that God had given them, then listen up because Paul reveals his heart, and from the depths of his pain and depression comes a section of scripture that theologians call *The Great Digression*. In fact, as I have studied, I see it is really not a digression as much as it is a divine and serendipitous discourse on the theological differences between the body and the spirit. **From 2:14 until 7:4**, Paul tells us how God gives us the victory in our spirits even though the body is wasting away. From Paul's deepest depression came some of the greatest material we have in existence concerning victorious living in the bodies that we now have.

Context: Read verses 12-13

The context rests in what Paul experienced in Troas.

Acts 19:23-41

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.
24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. 25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our

trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. 33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

The riot in Ephesus that Demetrius the silversmith caused was due to Paul's Christianity and that had robbed Artemis of her glory and no idols were being bought. The preaching of Paul and Christianity was robbing the silversmiths of their incomes. Paul was preaching against these types of sinful idolatries and he was now paying the price for that. Because of the riot, Paul had to leave. He then goes to Troas.

Acts 20:1-6

When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at **Troas**. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at **Troas**, where we stayed seven days.

NIV

Paul did have to leave Ephesus but he had now moved on and was waiting for Titus. He went on to **Troas** to try and find Titus so as to find out how the Corinthians had received the “severe letter” he had written to them. **John MacArthur** notes this:

“The door that was opened at **Troas** represented a divinely prepared opportunity, the kind Paul longed for and prayed for. But he was so overwrought and burdened by the situation at Corinth that he found it difficult to focus on the opportunity; he had no rest for his spirit. The turmoil and discontent of his heart were debilitating and threatened to close the door that was open

for ministry at **Troas**. His intense concern for the Corinthian church raised troubling questions in his mind. Would they affirm their love for him? Or would they follow the false apostles? Would they deal with the specific issues he had rebuked them for: divisions, strife, incest, marriage, singleness, divorce, the roles of women, idolatry, spiritual pride, the abuse of the Lord's supper, misuse of spiritual gifts? Paul's heart ached because he did not know the answer to these questions, and as a result, he had no freedom to minister. Until he heard from Titus, the apostle feared the worst. He was so burdened by the situation at Corinth that he lost interest in the open door of ministry at Troas. Not finding Titus in Troas, Paul went on to Macedonia. He could wait no longer, he had to find Titus to hear about the response of the Corinthians. So he headed for the province of Macedonia, bordering the northwest shore of the Aegean sea, north of Achaia. This was a dark hour in the apostles life. He loved the Corinthians so much that his heart was torn apart by concern for them, to the point that he was actually depressed (2 Corinthians 7:5-6). But Paul did not quit. He was afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despaired (4:8). He was discouraged but not defeated, and he still held on to the hope for a good report when he met Titus. Until then he was dealing with serious fears. Relief came when he focused on his Lord.” How do we know that Paul was hurting. He tells us he was.

2 Cor 7:2-7

2 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. 4 I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.

5 For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the

outside, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

NIV

Paul was so relieved about the news that Titus had given him, he does what we all do when we're downcast, or at least what we all should do. Paul begins to praise, give thanksgiving, and he talks about how God brings victory to us. He talked about how God had helped him in the past; he then digresses divinely into a mini dissertation about how the new covenant of the spirit brings joy, victory, and eternal victory over all of our enemies.

Paul loved Titus and the Corinthians so much that he was depressed, had a broken spirit, and due to his wondering if the Corinthians had allowed false prophets to influence them into not loving him anymore, Paul writes the material of *The Great Digression* and teaches us the truths of the New Covenant (3:6). *Most times, out of our greatest sorrows, God uses us the most.* Some of the sweetest wine comes from the severely crushed grapes of the soul. Paul reveals the enormous heart he has and how much he needed Titus, as well as the Corinthians. Titus must have been a true friend and faithful witness.

Overview of The Great Digression

- **2:14-18:** Our victories over our enemies make us a fragrant offering to Christ. We are God's aroma in our weak bodies unto the world. The world cannot understand the enigma of the NT church. Though we are weak, we are strong. We are the smell of death to the world.
- **3:1-6:** Our competence rests in the New Covenant; our spiritual life in Christ gives us victory over the letter of the law. The Spirit produces life.

- **3:7-18:** The glory of the new covenant gives us freedom in Christ, even while we are in these vile bodies. Paul says that if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, how much more will the ministry of righteousness bring glory to God. The New Covenant is a ministry of revelation. We see dimly today, but we are seeing truth revealed at every turn as we are transformed.
- **4:1-16:** Here we have a most beautiful theology that teaches us how God put this wonderful treasure of the gospel in jars of clay. We are victorious in sharing Christ even in these weak, fleshly bodies. The New Covenant allows us the privilege of sharing the gospel- even in frail bodies.
- **5:1-10:** One of the greatest and only passages of scripture that speaks of what happens at death with the separation of the body and spirit. Paul is explaining to us the intermediate state.
- **5:11-21:** This section speaks simply of the theology of sanctification. This is the ministry of reconciliation and the motivation behind evangelism, eternal security, and the opportunity to see men become new creations in Christ Jesus.
- **6:1-13:** Paul speaks of his hardships in the flesh and the ministry of God's grace in all of his trials.
- **6:14-18:** Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the fight between the flesh and the spirit. Believers are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. One of the great sections in scripture that speaks of our need to be holy in a corrupt culture
- **7:1-4:** Paul closes this section and The Great Digression with a statement about holiness in body and in spirit. Paul speaks of the promises that we have in Christ and encourages the people to purify themselves. He tells them that he has confidence in them and he is encouraged that they would all overcome their trials and afflictions. In 7:5 Paul returns to his conversation about Macedonia.

The Victory of the New Covenant **Verses 14-17**

Verse 14: This verse reveals a stark change in Paul's attitude and the way that he begins to express himself. Paul finally did meet Titus as he says in 7:5-7. Yet, this was not all that brought Paul this great emotional relief. Surely finding Titus was key, but he had heard a word from the Corinthians that they loved him and cared for him.

It is clear that the false prophets were doing everything that they could to tear down Paul's reputation. They wanted the Corinthians to believe that Paul didn't care for them and that he had not visited or stayed with them because he didn't care about them.

In verse 14, Paul uses an illustration from Roman life. This description is from a Roman triumph in battle. To attain such a victory where the commanding general was allowed to parade his enemy and parade his soldiers, in such a procession, required that the general meet some requirements: Barclay-

- The general must be the actual commander in chief in the field.
- The campaign must actually be finished.
- The region must be pacified and the troops brought home.
- At least 5000 of the enemy must have fallen in the engagement.
- A positive or sizable territory must have been gained, not just an attack repelled.
- The victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not a civil war.

Then the general would be allowed to March through the capital of Rome.

- The general would be allowed to pass by the state officials and the Senate.
- Then the trumpeters would play.
- Then the spoils taken would be put on display, spoils, picture of the land, ships, citadels.
- A white bull was offered for sacrifice.
- The captured princess, leaders, and generals would be marched in chains in front of the victors.
- The lictors with rods and whips were there for torture and the musicians would play.
- The priests would be swinging sweet smelling incense pots.
- Then the general himself would come by, decked out in, in regalia. He would have an ivory scepter, which had a Roman eagle on top.
- The entire army would be shouting their cry of triumph.

This triumphal procession may last all day and may only happen once in a man's lifetime.

“Paul has this picture in his mind as he speaks to the Corinthians. He sees Christ marching throughout the world and sees himself and the conquering train. It is a triumph which, Paul is certain nothing can stop.” (Barclay In Loc. 183-84).

Key Words:

Always- Paul was thankful because he knew that in Christ, he would always be victorious. If you are in Christ, his defeated enemies are your defeated enemies. If you want a “win win” situation to be a part of in your life, then get in the triumphal procession.

Thanks- The word here is **charis**, which refers to favor, grace or a reflection of gratitude from the heart.

Leads us in triumphal procession (triamboeuo)– though the word leads is not in the text, the implication is that **he leads us in procession**. God is sovereign and therefore we follow. This is a noisy iambus (a metrical containing two syllables) foot. In other words, a song sung to Baccaus in victory. To make an acclamatory procession, i.e. (figuratively) to conquer or (by Hebraism) to give victory: KJV - (cause) to triumph (over).

Through us- The aroma of Christ is shared through us. We are not robots. God uses us to share His love. Jesus is in you and works through you. Brian shared in our staff devotion how a woman saw Christ in him at work and told him see saw Jesus in him. Now, that's what our Christianity is supposed to do.

There is nowhere our general will not lead us. We are victors in Christ. I have been in some strange places when I shared the gospel. I have shared Jesus with drunks, addicts, prostitutes, and rebels. I have shared while people drank and smoked pot. I have shared on the river banks and in parks. I have shared in the jail and in the pulpit. I have shared in stores, fast food restaurants, and doctor's offices. I have shared in my own home and with my own family.

The gospel is the fragrance of hope wherever you take it. The other day I was in Zaxby's and Christian music was playing over the speakers. I looked around and no one was singing but me. Seeds of the gospel falling everywhere. I was literally watching them fall on the hard path about which Jesus spoke. The soil was not prepared or moist. The hearts were hard and the minds were all closed. The Holy Spirit reminded me that it's my job to plow and leave sweet smelling aromas of Jesus behind when I leave a

room. We are encircled by the darkness of loneliness, sorrow, and lostness.

Illustration: How Dr. Bradley and Dr. Gray Allison would change the atmosphere of a room when they came into the room. You knew God came into the room with them.

Paul puts it this way...

2 Cor 2:14-15

14 But 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.**

NIV

Paul says that God, through us, makes manifest (**phaneroo**) the knowledge of God in every place with a sweet smelling savour (**osme**). The text says God causes this to happen.

Question: What kind of aroma of the knowledge of Christ are you? When you leave a room, what do people say? Let me be candid. Are you a sweet smell of Jesus or the smell of a dirty diaper. Are you spiritually toxic or septic, e.g., septic tank? Do you spiritually effect the heart or the nose?

Verse 15: I pray that we all tend to our witness properly because I have seen the effects of the smell of death and it's not pretty. Notice that verse 15 really says that we are to have the same smell around the saved and the lost. Our behavior has to be the same.

I want to tell you I have not always been the fragrance of Jesus. I have just failed miserably at times. We confess and try again.

Verse 16: Many will reject the message and think we are a stench of death. Others will find the aroma of life that leads to life. This year at WBC we are trying to reach God's people. Let's be a

sweet aroma of life wherever we go. The gospel is a fragrance of hope and peace. We carry the word of God into the vilest places. The boweries are filled with the smell of death. Never forget the fragrance that lives within you. Spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere you go.

Are we competent to do this? Paul asked that question. Who is sufficient to the task? I like the easy to read version here:

2 Cor 2:16-17

16 To those who are being lost, this perfume smells like death, and it brings them death. But to those who are being saved, it has the sweet smell of life, and it brings them life. **So who is good enough to do this work?** 17 Certainly not those who are out there selling God's message for a profit! But we don't do that. With Christ's help we speak God's truth honestly, knowing that we must answer to him.

ERV

If we say that we can't do this, we are saying that those who peddle the gospel for profit are better than we. Sufficient is **hikanos**. This word means able, worthy, ample, or good.

You may be afraid to witness but let me tell you that you have the knowledge and fragrance of Jesus inside you. Share the light and the love. You are sufficient.

Illustration: One of my favorite things to do is being on the golf course in springtime, and when the wind blows, the fragrance of honeysuckles come through the air and reminds me how beautiful God's creation is. When a fragrance, pleasant or unpleasant, comes to you unexpectedly, what do you do? Well, you start looking for the source. You wanna know from where that fragrance is coming, whether it's good or whether it's bad.

Illustration: I had a golf bag full of clubs that I kept in the garage. I left it there for a few weeks because it was winter and sometimes in the winter we go several weeks without playing due to weather. I had a tee time that Friday so I tossed the ole bag in the truck. I took off and it took no time before I began to smell the foulest odor. It made me start to gag. I could hardly get to the golf course so I could look for the smell. Let me shorten the story. A rat had crawled into my golf bag and died. The bag, the grips on the clubs, my gloves, and anything withing a yard or two was ruined. I was permanently effected by that smell.

Let's turn this upside down and make it positive. When a person smells life and the fragrance of life, I pray it comes from me. I pray they have to seek it out until they find out what it is. I pray they can't rest until they find the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

Think of the most dynamic Christian that you know. How do you feel after being with them? The fragrant smell gets on you and it lifts you up. You like the smell and love to be around it. I want to be that person.

Verse 17: By now you may be thinking that this task is a bit too big. You may smell like a Christian that missed their spiritual deodorant for a few days. So what is the qualifications for this task?

Look in verse 17 with me, it's right here. Paul uses the word **Eilikrineia**. This is the word for purity or *sincerity*. The root word refers to being tested by sunlight or something that has been judged to be pure or genuine.

This is important because it frees me up from being overwhelmed with guilt because I don't measure up at times. I have had people blame their sin on me before because I was a bad witness. Well, I

don't play that game. I am not responsible for your sin no matter how I act. That's on you. I want to be genuine, but I am not responsible for you, and I am not your excuse to be a failure. I am not in this for the profit, prestige, or fame.

I am not perfect but I am sincere.

The word **sincere** comes from a word that vendors use to write on the back of their wares. **Sincera-** This means “**sun-tested.**” Many crooks would have plates that cracked in the kiln and they put wax in the cracks and painted over the cracks and sold them as perfect. Sincerity means that the plate was held up to the sun light and was found to be “without wax.”

I might stink occasionally, but if you will give me a chance, you will find out that I am sincere. I have been held up to the light of Christ and I am without wax.

Some people are going to be turned off by Christianity. There will be lost men that go to hell, but make no mistake, it's their choice. I don't want to do anything to hinder you, but I am not your problem or your excuse. Sin is your problem and you have to deal with Jesus.

Paul was reminding the Corinthians that no matter what the false prophets said about him, he was genuine and pure in heart. Paul was overjoyed that they loved him and had responded to his rebukes.

Last important phrase for us. When I speak... it is as if is from God and in the face of God. I am before God and speaking His words. I am a sinner and claim no glory, nor do I proclaim perfection, but I speak as a man that has to stand before God. I am as sincere as I can be.

I am not here to rely on my own wit, talent, intelligence, or my own fragrance, to win you to Christ. We cannot start our own triumphal procession. No. How can we accomplish the task that is before us, how can we smell good?

2 Cor 3:4-6

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, **but our competence comes from God.** 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant— not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

NIV

All we can do is have integrity and be sincere.

“The false prophets try to get false profits.” JRG

The Greek word here is **kapeleuo**. This is the word for **huckster**, corrupt, or adulterate. They peddle the word of God for profit. This is a con artist.

Listen to me, and listen to me well, no one owns the gospel. It's not for sale. The gospel is not to be used to make men rich. As ministers of the gospel we are to have sincerity with pure motives. Paul says we are like men sent from God; we share, preach, and minister in the sight of God, and in Christ we speak. God is the one who calls men to speak for him, and we ought to do a great job at it. A witness, a preacher, a Christian, shares and serves as one Commission from God. This will give us victory in the new covenant.

“The hucksters are evil and the people ignorant. The people buy what God has made free.” JRG

Isa 55:1-11

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. 4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. 5 Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

NIV

Rev 22:17

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

NIV

As Paul opened his heart to the Corinthians with fear and trembling because he was so afraid that the false teachers had corrupted his sheep and thought they may have turned the hearts of the people away from him, so I fear the culture we live in may corrupt you. The reason that those who lead you are in such trials is because God is making them a sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ. The gospel is free. The truth is free. Just take it.