

SYMPATHETIC SAINTS



TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

INTRO.: A. In South America there is a tribe that glories in pain and persecutes any member of the tribe who doesn't "enjoy" pain – so they will learn to do so. It is no doubt some kind of demonic obsession and it is an exception to a universal rule that men love joy and despise pain and sorrow.

B. When God saves a person He doesn't dehumanize him, in fact He increases his sensitivity to others and their pain and suffering and He imparts & implants the Comforter within him so he can sympathize, empathize and experience compassion for others. Paul is an excellent example of this fact.

C. In this passage of Paul's letter to the Corinthians we see a vivid example of the Apostle's compassionate heart. He had dealt with the sin in the church previously and had been insulted by some of the people there who questioned his apostolic authority and credentials, in spite of the fact that he had personally led the founding members to the Lord and had established the church. He was going to revisit them, but in these opening verses explains why he hesitated...

I. HEAVINESS: V.1

A. Paul's "Second Coming" Postponed:

1. His intention was to come and deal with the problem head on.

QUOTE: "It is never love to pass by sin. It is no true love that touches the sin too lightly and gives inefficient and unworthy apprehensions of it...Love, feeling sorrow for the sinning member and for the dishonored church, cannot be satisfied without earnest warnings about the sin and efforts to remove it." Unknown author

2. The concept of "heaviness" implies the great sorrow the Apostle had for those who doubted his authority or who questioned his right to discipline.
 - a. Again Paul was grieved that the church he had founded & the converts he had fathered in the faith would insult him.
 - b. It is always grievous when those for whom you do the most, return cursing for blessing.

II. SORROW: V.2,3

A. Paul's Sorrow Turned to Joy: v.2

1. Paul expects the church to discipline the one living in incest w/his stepmother
2. He has already addressed this sin in his first epistle.
3. His desire is that they would sorrow instead of boast about the sinful situation
4. If they responded properly to his disciplinary instructions, they would have joy not sorrow.
5. If they did right, they would be happy & so would he.

B. Paul's Letter Substituted for His Visit: v.3

1. Paul was sparing them the grief of a personal disciplinary visit by writing to them instead.
2. He was hoping that his letter would be sufficient to enable them to correct the sin in the camp.
3. If that did not happen he would have **"sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice."**

2 Corinthians 7:8-10 *For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made*

sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

4. He knew that there were detractors in the congregation, but he refused to believe that anyone would prefer to condone the sin in the church over doing right. ***"...having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all."***

ILLUS.: It is a source of great grief to any true man-of-God with a pastor's heart to see those in the church who have been properly taught & scripturally instructed fail to side with right over wrong. Yet it is nearly always true that a few will side with wrong, even when it is obvious. They base their decision on emotions or friendship rather than Scripture or principle.

The purpose of church discipline is true unity and spiritual harmony, not divisiveness & disharmony. But it only happens when all clearly see the scriptural principles involved and the purity of the church is at stake. It is NOT personal, & if it becomes such the Lord is not pleased and disunity is the result.

III. TEARS: V.4A

A. Paul's Deep Sorrow & Broken Heart:

1. Paul uses very strong words to express his emotional attachment to the church at Corinth and his subsequent pain at having to deal with such open sin.
2. The word ***"affliction"*** means "burden" or "tribulation."
 - a. Paul took the "infection" in the church very personally.
 - b. He was genuinely burdened over both the circumstances and their response or lack thereof.
3. The word ***"anguish"*** means "distress."

ILLUS.: Every pastor knows the "knot" in the stomach about a brewing problem in the church. He is in great anguish or distress over what is going on. He is always torn between moving quickly to defuse the situation or correct it or to deal with it decisively and quickly. But until it is resolved one way or the other, he is in anguish or distress.

One of my major mistakes in the ministry was in refusing to deal quickly and decisively with sin in the church. Instead of the scriptural 3 meetings (personal confrontation, confrontation with witnesses, and a church disciplinary meeting) I (we) had a total of 19 meetings before ending up with biblical discipline. That failure devastated me and the church. By the time we dealt with the problem the offenders had lined up their forces & we had a split! So sad.

The pressure in the ministry (***"distress"***) is relentless. You want to do right, but the people to whom you minister are your friends and your own "sheep." You want them to do right, but hesitate to force the issue.

4. The words ***"many tears"*** are filled with pathos.
 - a. Here the Apostle reveals his heart.
 - b. He shows that the discipline he recommended brought him no joy.

QUOTE: With all his strength of mind, and all His courage and readiness to face danger, Paul was not ashamed to weep; and especially if he had any occasion of censuring his Christian brethren, or administering discipline; compare Phil 3:18; Acts 20:31. This is also a specimen of the manner in which Paul met the faults of his Christian brethren. It was not with bitter denunciation. It was not with sarcasm and ridicule. It was not by emblazoning those faults abroad to others. It was not with the spirit of rejoicing that they had committed errors, and had been guilty of sin. It was not as if he was glad of the opportunity of administering rebuke, and took pleasure in denunciation and in the language of reproof.

It is proof of genuine friendship for another, when we faithfully and affectionately admonish him of the error of his course; it is the highest proof of affection when we do it with tears. It is cruelty to suffer a brother to remain in sin unadmonished; it is cruel to admonish him of it in a harsh, severe, and authoritative tone; but it is proof of tender attachment when we go to him with tears, and entreat him to repent and reform. No one gives higher proof of attachment to another than he who affectionately admonishes him of his sin and danger. (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)

NOTE: Paul never hesitated to publicly denounce those in scriptural error or heresy, but when it came to dealing with the sins of the saints he was profusely sympathetic.

IV. LOVE: v.4b

A. Paul's Tenderness Toward His Friends:

1. Love is not indulgence!
2. Love demands discipline.

QUOTE: O. Greene: "The father who spares the rod hates his son (Prov.13:24). Likewise, the minister who spares the rod in the spiritual sense does not love the church over which the Lord has placed him. He does not prove his love by allowing his congregation to indulge in practices that are not in keeping with the Scriptures."

CONCL.: What a beautiful portrait of the great Apostle Paul. In his letters he sometimes comes across as being harsh and stern, but here we see something of his great heart. In western society where men are taught never to show tender emotion, how refreshing to see one of the most powerful preachers who ever lived display the compassion of a **"SYMPATHETIC SAINT!"**