

Series: 2 Corinthians
Title: Power to Mournfully Rebuke
Text: 2 Cor 12: 20-13: 6
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Our subject is “The Power to Mournfully Rebuke.” The only way God’s minister can sharply rebuke while sorrowing over the sin of those Christ has sent him to minister unto is by God humbling him in power.

Everything God’s child does that is pleasing to God is by the power of God working in us through Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It is by the power of Christ working in us throughout the life of faith that we do anything pleasing unto God. And it is to his glory. The Hebrew writer prayed,

Hebrews 13: 20: Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21: Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We have seen that Paul’s spirit, the way in which he regarded Christ’s people and remained faithful to Christ’s people, was by Paul having within him the Spirit of Christ. Everything Paul was faithfully able to think and feel and do toward those Christ redeemed with his precious blood was by Christ dwelling in him in power.

Likewise, to faithfully rebuke those at Corinth who refused to turn from their ill treatment of their brethren would require the power of Christ working within him. If Paul will rebuke them as he ought, and do so mourning their sin in his heart as he ought, it will be by God humbling Paul in heart.

The only way God’s minister can sharply rebuke while sorrowing over the sin of those Christ has sent him to minister unto is by God humbling him in power.

2 Corinthians 12: 20: For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: 21: lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed. 13: 1: This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. 2: I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare: 3: Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. 4: For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

THE FEAR OF GOD

Notice, Paul said, “I fear.” *“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would.”* The “fear” of finding brethren refusing to repent included the fear of God that God had given Paul in his heart. Read the LORD’s word to his watchman:

Ezekiel 3: 16: And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 17: Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. 18: When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt

surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 19: Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. 20: Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 21: Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

This charge is very, very serious to God’s faithful minister. The man Christ has made faithful and sent to serve his people fears offending God rather than offending men. When Paul said, “*I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling*” it was a fear of offending God, a fear of not preaching the Lord Jesus as he ought. But it was not a fear of offending men. (1 Cor 2: 3)

When Paul said, “*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would*”, though it includes the fact that Paul was fearful they would be found yet impenitent, it also included that fear of God which made Paul reverence God and desire to be faithful to God in the way he dealt with those who needed rebuke.

How did Paul want to find them? The same as the apostle John wanted to find those to whom he ministered. John said,

3 John 1: 3: For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. 4: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

It is to the praise of the glory of God’s grace when a believer walks in truth. This is why it rejoices the pastor’s heart to find brethren walking in truth. It glorifies Christ. But Paul was fearful of how he would find some of the Corinthians because our sin never glorifies Christ.

What was Paul fearful he would find? He said

- “*lest there be debates*”—contentious arguments,
- “*envyings*”—jealousy between brethren
- “*wraths*”—anger at one another
- “*strifes*”—politicking by using a brother’s faults to promote one’s self to get others on one’s side which creates divisions between Christ’s people
- “*backbitings, whisperings*”—secretly speaking evil of a brother behind his back
- “*swellings*”—being puffed up in pride
- “*tumults*”—confusion, disorder
- “*uncleanness*”—impure motives of heart
- “*fornication*”—perhaps physical but spiritually they were playing the harlot with the devil and false preachers while professing to be Christ’s chaste bride
- “*lasciviousness*”—unbridled lusts which includes all of the above

These things are not walking in truth. These things are not the spirit of Christ but the spirit of anti-Christ. These things are the bondage of sinful, depraved flesh.

THE DEPRAVED PASTOR

The same sinful, depraved flesh that was in the Corinthians is in the old, sinful nature of God's faithful pastor. Therefore, it takes God humbling him for him to sorrow over the sins of his brethren and faithfully rebuke them as he ought.

When we read Paul write "*lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented*" it is obvious his sorrow over those who had not repented would be by God humbling him.

Yet, in order to rebuke it will be by the same power of God. In chapter 13, verses 2-4, he says, "*I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare: Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.*"

Christ, in power, humbles his minister. Paul says his mourning over the impenitent would be by God's humbling power—"when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented." Paul says when I rebuke, it will be by the same humbling power of Christ—"since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which toward you is not weak, but mighty in [among] you."

The sin-nature in God's preacher would make him wilt before the enemies of Christ. He would never sorrow over sin because our sinful-flesh loves sin. He would never rebuke the impenitent because it goes against his sinful flesh. Many would call this being meek and humble. But it would be disobedience to God while submitting to his own sinful flesh.

When we hear of Moses' meekness, we tend to have incorrect thoughts of Moses. It does not mean Moses was a pushover who never used sharp rebuke. It means God humbled Moses making him submit to God rather than submitting to his own sinful flesh or to men.

We see the greatest displays of Moses meekness when he submitted and obeyed God by sharply rebuking the children of Israel with sorrow over their sins. Everything about that went against Moses sinful flesh. Everything about that went against the flesh of those he rebuked. That is why they accused Moses of taking too much on himself. But everything about that was by the power of God humbling Moses.

True meekness of humility is submission and obedience to God produced by God's power.

CRUCIFIED IN WEAKNESS, LIVING BY POWER

The example of God's power that Paul gives is Christ in his humiliation. He said, "*For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God.*"

As God, the GodMan had all power over heaven and other even when he walked this earth in the human nature of his elect. He showed it on occasion like when they came to arrest him and fell backwards at hearing his name.

Yet, as Man, Christ, was subject to all the same weaknesses and infirmities as his people, yet without sin. When it says "*He was crucified through weakness*" it includes his entire work from the cradle to the grave. When tempted of the devil, he did not look to strength in himself, he hungered in weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. God sent angels to minister to him, "*And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.*" (Mk 1: 13)

Concerning the words he spoke and the works he worked, he gave God all the praise. Christ said of himself, *“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”* (Jn 3: 34) On another occasion he said, *“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”* (Jn 14: 10)

In the garden of Gethsemane, we see him experience the weakness of flesh: *“being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”* Yet he liveth by the power of God, *“And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.”* (Lu 22: 43)

On the cross, having been made sin for us, we see him crucified in weakness, *“For in that he died, he died unto sin once.”* (Rom 6: 10) Our Substitute really bore the sin of his people. We know that because he really died unto sin. Yet, having satisfied justice, having redeemed all his elect, having glorified God in the highest, he liveth by the power of God. Paul said oh that God might open your eyes to know

Ephesians 1: 19: what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20: Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21: Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23: Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Now, that Christ has all power as our GodMan Mediator, Paul says of himself and his fellow ministers, *“For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.”* Paul was weak in his flesh. God humbled him to keep him weak in his flesh, to keep him from being exalted above measure. Yet, when Paul was weak he was strong by Christ his Strength. Paul lived with Christ by the same power of God which raised Christ out of his weakness. (2 Cor 12: 7-10)

Everything about Paul personally, and everything about every branch of his work, was performed by the power of Christ dwelling in him. His ability to mourn over his own sins and rebuke his own self was by the power of God. His ability to repent and believe on Christ was by the power of God. His ability to mourn over the sins of his brethren and rebuke them sharply was by the power of God. All was by the power of Christ working in him, humbling him to submit to Christ, to obey Christ, rather than men and rather than his own sinful flesh.

THE ADMONITION

2 Corinthians 13: 5: Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? 6: But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

Having declared himself to be totally dependent upon the power of Christ working in him, Paul gives them this admonition. The proof that Christ was speaking in Paul in power was not to be known by them examining Paul but by them examining themselves. They claimed to be saved by Christ through Paul’s preaching. If that were really the case it was all the proof they needed that Christ was indeed speaking through Paul. As Paul said earlier in this epistle, they were the epistle of Christ because the Holy Spirit had written the gospel on their hearts through Paul’s preaching. (2 Cor 3: 1-6)

How do I know if Christ is in me working in power? How do I know if I am in the faith? The same proof that was in Paul is in each one in whom Christ dwells. Can you mourn over your own sins and rebuke your own

self because of your sins? Do you repent from yourself: from your will, your wisdom, and your works? Do you believe on Christ casting all your care on him, depending entirely upon Christ to be your Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption? Do you rejoice in your total weakness and rejoice that Christ is all your Strength, your only Strength? Brethren, the only way helpless sinners like us can do so is by power of Christ who dwells in us? It is by Christ dwelling in the new man he has created within his regenerate people.

Since Christ never fails to work this in his people by his power, Paul says, "*But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.*" Those truly born of the Spirit of God would know that Paul was not a counterfeit apostle. If Christ dwelt in them they would know that they themselves were not counterfeit. The man who trusts his will and his works proves Christ does not dwell in him. But those in whom Christ dwells know we are Christs by the power of Christ working repentance from dead works and faith in Christ.

God's true pastor confesses like Paul, I do not have strength to mourn your sin or mine; to rebuke you or myself, except Christ strengthen me to do so. But the one way we know Christ dwells in us is by his power making us able to rejoice that we are totally without strength in our flesh and that Christ is our only Strength!

Amen!