

2Cor 26-10-25b

Let's resume our study now in the book of 2 Corinthians, and we have seen that there is a concern that Paul is beginning to address, and he opens this theme with this chiastic structure, and we say, okay, fine, what's going on here? We've covered now 24 verses, and so what? This is the question. It sounds harsh, but when we come to the scripture, and it is put before us, why is it here? What should I get out of this? How should I then live? Should I think differently, act differently? Paul is talking to these people in Corinth some long dusty time ago. He had some plans, and they changed.

Why do I care about this? I would like to offer you a couple of points of application on this, because we are all subject to disappointment, and the source of the disappointment is people. We have expectations. We have the idea that someone will be there for us, or will keep a commitment that they have made, and then things change, and it doesn't happen.

We are offended in some cases by this, and Paul says what you need to understand goes back to the opening of the book. He said, I am an apostle by the will of God, and I am writing to you in Corinth and in Achaia. These people are Gentiles and are located in Corinth and located in Achaia by the will of God.

Everybody is where they are by the will of God. You don't necessarily pick your location. Where you're born is certainly a function of your parents' decisions.

It oftentimes strikes me about how dominoes fall. We live on a piece of property that my dad selected in 1967 based on the location of a piece of property that my grandfather lived on that is nine miles from here, and I am here, and there is a lot going on here, all because of a decision my grandfather made back in the 1950s. Yet God works things together for our benefit and his glory, but he is the one, and this is why Paul emphasized again that it is God who establishes.

God is faithful in verse 18, and he establishes us in verse 21 with you in Christ and has anointed us. The one who establishes us and anoints us, the one who locates us, the one who decided when and where in human history we would appear in what family is God, and those with whom we are associated, those from whom we learn the word of God, those with whom we share in fellowship in the word of God and the faith that moves us forward as we endeavor to walk the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life. These are things that God has established, and that's a great foundation for handling disappointment, handling the unexpected, and we are tempted to react instead of respond.

Reaction is impulsive. It is not well thought out. It takes us by surprise in many cases.

We can have a flash of anger or impatience or fear or sorrow that can overwhelm our higher faculties. That's reaction. What we want to do is respond.

Responses are carefully thought out, grounded in truth and in reason and in faith for us as believers. What is our response? I don't want to be reactive. You've seen chemical reactions in your high school chemistry class where you put a couple of things together and suddenly there's a bunch of black ash or there's smoke or there's fire.

You put magnesium and water and watch what happens. We want a calculated, graduated, appropriate level of response. Everybody would agree, of course, we want to be reasonable.

We want to be balanced. We don't want to be thrown off our game. We don't want to be knocked off our feet.

How do we do that? Notice the foundation that Paul lays in this opening section of 2 Corinthians. God is the source of grace and peace. It is God who called Paul to be an apostle and positioned the Corinthian believers and the Achaean believers to be when they are and where they are.

All of this is part of God's design and execution of His plan and purpose. The things that happen and the people with whom they happen are a part of God's design. That should settle us down.

You've got a boss. All of us have had a boss that is terrible in some way or makes a decision that impacts us very negatively. We can be part of something even larger.

It's not just a single supervisor. It can be an entire company. It can be co-workers.

We can be undermined. We can be talked about behind our back. Our motives can be misconstrued.

We can be propagandized against by those who go to supervisors and say all kinds of unkind and untrue things and sort of put the fix in so that if we try to speak up we just sound like we're defensive and we're trying to explain away things that have already been treated as true because they were spoken by someone else who has it in for us. Dealing with people is sticky, especially in the realm of unbelievers or immature believers, baby believers who have no equipment in their soul. We should be the adult in the room.

All of us have been studying the Word of God. Every single one of us. Everybody listening to the sound of my voice.

You wouldn't be here if you didn't have a good foundation in your soul and an understanding of the way God's plan works. What it is to have faith and hope and love. How those work.

How the Holy Spirit sustains us and guides us and comforts us and encourages us through the Word. That is our safe space. That's where we go when there's a downturn.

When there is a surprise and it's not a good one. We are equipped. We have the armor of God.

We have the fortress. We dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91.

We don't have to worry about the snare of the fowler and the perilous pestilence. Unbelievers worry about that stuff. Somebody has said bad things about me to influential people.

My goose is cooked. I need to go on the defensive. I need to counter.

I need to respond in kind. I need to use the same tools that they are using. No, we don't.

We live a supernatural life. God is at work among us to will and to do for His good pleasure. His purpose.

We are not our own. We have been bought with a price and it was a precious price. The to God.

And God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and our labor of love, our patience of hope, and our endeavor to live a life that pleases Him and reflects His glory. It's a different thing. And woe unto us if we fall back and begin to worry about the election because propaganda is in the air and social media is being controlled and bots are posting and AI is shifting opinions.

And I don't worry about any of that. God is in His heaven. I am living my life as a faithful believer.

I examine myself regularly to see if I'm in the faith. I pray evening and morning and at noon and cry aloud. And I know God hears my voice.

He is my Father. He's looking out for me. He knows what is best for me.

And if there is a sudden negative surprise and the plans of other people change or the circumstances surrounding me change, I was expecting a benefit and now it didn't come. I want to look for somebody to blame. I want to look for somebody to shame.

I want to look for somebody to pay. I want to look for someone to inflict some sort of judgment on. That's not me.

That's not us. That isn't a healthy believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Somebody does us wrong.

Remember 1 Corinthians? Why would you take someone to court and sue them before unbelievers? We're a different kind of people. Paul, the same Corinthians that he wrote that first letter to, he is writing to here and saying, remember the foundation. We are the people of God.

I am an apostle by the will of God. You are Corinthian Gentiles and Achaean believers by the will of God and according to the word of God. So let's establish the foundation because we're now going to talk about a challenge, a problem and that is that someone is trying to use this change of plan to discredit Paul as a person and to discredit his message.

There are two parts and you will see this anytime there is disagreement and somebody in that disagreement is not a mature believer. It can be an unbeliever, baby believer, misguided believer, deceived believer. It is often the case that you can suffer worse at the hands of a fellow believer than from unbelievers.

We know more about each other. You haven't been hurt until you've been hurt by a fellow believer. But there are two components and so often it begins with what is classically called *ad hominem* against the man.

Your character is impugned. Your motives are questioned and suspicion is thrown on you that you are evil in some way and you're a bad person. You wouldn't vote for this candidate.

You wouldn't hold this position unless you were an evil person. If you support one side or another in some foreign conflict somewhere, that makes you an intrinsically bad person. I'm not arguing with why you think this side should prevail and that side should give way.

I am judging you to be evil because you support one side or the other. You think one way and not another. You believe one way and not another.

So I judge you to be an evil person and you should be punished. You need to be banished from talking. You need to go away and not be a part of things.

Your candidate should not be in the government. Your opinion should not be heard. Your Bible should not be mentioned.

Your Christ should not be held up as anything other than a nice guy that did some teaching way back 2,000 years ago to a bunch of peasants and goat herds and he sort of helped them with their oppression by the Romans. But he was just a nice guy. So was Confucius.

So was Muhammad. So was Buddha. So was any number of other guys that had a couple of good ideas.

He's nothing special. And if you believe in him, if you represent him, if you take him seriously, if you take the word of God seriously, you need to be punished. And your opinions and your beliefs need to be silenced and canceled.

That's what this is talking about. Paul changed his travel plans and evidently it had a significant impact. Expectations and provisions were in place and things changed and he didn't come.

And for whatever reason, we don't have all of the details, but it became a big deal. And one individual in particular split the Corinthian church over this. They're prone to splitting anyway.

Read 1 Corinthians. I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos.

I'm of Cephas. I'm of Christ. I hear there are wars and divisions among you.

It should not be so. So they healed up from that under Paul's instruction. And now this guy has a fresh line of attack.

He's found a different weakness, a different fault line that he can insert a wedge and start hammering away and crack the group apart. And this Paul is unreliable. He's capricious.

He's variable. And so is his message. And so is the Christ that he preaches.

And they begin to fluff this thing up. That's what he's talking about here. So I determined this, chapter two, verse one, within myself that I would not come again to you in sorrow.

Between the time that Paul said, I will come and see you on the way to Macedonia and I will come back through and see you again. He got word from Timothy and Titus and other messengers that had visited the church about this controversy, this attack on his character and on his message from this specific individual. And there is a time to jump into the middle of a conflict.

And there is a time to step back and wait for tempers to cool, for people to recover their better self, for emotions to settle down, for people to take a breath. And Paul recognized that if he made his planned and announced visit in the middle of this controversy, it would have created a lot of fresh trouble. He would be seen as coming in and stomping on this individual who was attacking him, that he had personal reasons for defending himself.

And it would draw attention away from the focus, away from the center, at the center of this chiasm, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. And rather than jump in and create subjectivity, eyes on people, Paul said, I'm not going to stop by. It will be an occasion for sorrow.

I want my visit to be an occasion for joy. You saw this up in verse 15. My original intention was to come to you so that there would be benefit, so that there would be joy, as he said in verse 24.

We're not trying to control your faith. We're not coming in and micromanaging who you listen to and what you believe. We are workers for your joy, for your benefit.

There's a very close connection between charis and charin. Charis, which is grace, benefit, and charin, which is joy. Only one letter is different.

They're very similar. And in some cases, there's even a textual variant where one is put in the text and the other is in a different manuscript. They're not that far apart.

Paul wants to come for benefit and joy, not for sorrow. And he recognized that because this conflict and because this attack and ad hominem, vicious undercutting of his apostolic authority was taking place, and this individual was drawing others away, it was not the time to show up in

person and throw gasoline on that fire. This is the wisdom of God.

How do we know if we should intervene? All of us have people that we think are not on a beneficial path, and we believe that we know what that beneficial path would be. It's intuitively obvious to the casual observer that this person shouldn't be living outside God's ordinances and God's commands and the exhortations and admonitions of Scripture. And these people are trampling all over that.

They are far from the Lord, and they need to be moving toward Him and not away from Him. And we know this, and we pray that God will enlighten them and open their eyes. And we think, if I could just go in and talk to them and get them to see it the way I see it, they could be on a better road.

They would be happier. They're in the midst of self-induced misery. I need to get in there.

If you want to know what the practical outcome of this passage is, how do we know when to jump into the middle of a thing personally and when to step back and be patient and let God's Spirit and God's Word do its work, to be an influence from afar and not make an issue of ourselves because somebody is making an issue of us? It takes wisdom. This is not for baby believers. As I said earlier, if we are going to be the stronger believer in a situation and function as a believer that is more versed in the Word of God, more familiar with how the Holy Spirit works and how God accomplishes His purposes, then we need to be making the responsible decisions many times.

It is a sacrifice to ourselves. We sacrifice so that others will benefit. Paul told them up in verse 15, I wanted you to have a benefit, but I realized that my visit, which was intended to be a benefit, was going to be the opposite.

It was going to cause sorrow. It's going to exacerbate the situation. It's going to exaggerate the problem, not mitigate it.

It's going to open a wound, not help to heal it. So, I changed my plan. So, chapter 2, verse 1, I determined this within myself, I would not come again to you in sorrow.

For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? This is a difficult thing to understand when you translate it into English, but in Greek here, the difficulty is made a little more clear when we re-translate it. Let me read you a more literal translation of this. Paul says in verse 1 here, so I decided not to pay you another painful visit.

For if I cause you sorrow, then who is to cheer me? If I come and make things worse, I'm not going to be cheered up and neither are you. If I cause you sorrow, who is to cheer me? Certainly not the person who is made sorrowful on my account. I wrote as I did, this is verse 3, I wrote what

I wrote to you so that when I came, I wouldn't be saddened by those who ought to make me rejoice.

And I was confident that my joy would be your joy. So Paul wrote a letter and it was a harsh letter and he wrote the letter instead of his visit. He didn't want to be harsh in person.

He wanted them to receive the letter, to think about the letter, to respond to the letter, to have time to calm down and think about what was in the letter without the complication of Paul's personal presence being there. It's not always best to be present. Sometimes people need space to process information.

This is why good parents will chide an unruly or disobedient child and then send them to their room. You go think about what you've done. You don't keep them in your presence, haranguing them.

Any parent that has done this for very long has seen the eyes of the child glaze over and all they're hearing is Charlie Brown's teacher and waiting for the tirade to be over. You give them the information and you send them to think about it. So Paul said, I'm not going to come into your presence and create more sorrow.

I sent you a letter. You process what's in the letter. There will be initial sorrow, but eventually you will see the benefit.

You'll see the need. You'll see the point. And when the crisis is passed, I can come and it will be a joyful visit.

We will be like-minded again. But they needed time without the personal presence. This is a point of application.

There are times when we have to communicate difficult information and then get out of the room. Get away. Don't try to bend somebody into acknowledgement.

Don't keep on talking until they break down and submit to your complete dominant logic of the situation and acknowledge that you're right. Express a point of view. They're going to be in defensive mode.

Leave. Give people space to process. Give them time.

We appreciate that when people do that with us. It is hard to hear criticism. Our fleshly initial reaction is always defense.

Wait a minute. That's not right. It looked right to me when I did it.

How can it look wrong to you? And we need time to recover our humility, to examine the criticism and say, I think some of this is excessive. Criticizing people are not always perfect either. They

can exaggerate.

They can overdo. They can press too hard and too much. But many times in criticism, there is at least a grain of truth.

There are some valid observations. We need time to sift and sort and say, well, that was beyond the pale. I think they said that out of hurt feelings.

But this point here, that has some traction. I know this about myself. That's fair.

You need time. And you can't do that kind of analysis while the other person is still sitting there talking to you. Do you see why this portion of 2 Corinthians is so valuable and so important to us? This is life skills.

This is people dealing with people skills. And we need to know that there is a time to speak and there is a time to remain silent. There's a time to be present and there's a time to be absent.

And when there is ad hominem in the air, when there is criticism and you are tempted to respond with criticism, as we saw in James, the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. And when emotions are stirred, you're not going to get to righteousness. We need space and we need time.

So Paul says, I didn't want to come and create sorrow. And I wrote this very thing to you in verse 3, lest when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy. I have confidence in you all that my joy is your joy.

Normally in the main, when we're not having particular issues, when there's not a sore subject that has come up, we celebrate together. You are my boast. I am your boast, as he said earlier, and we share in our joy.

But this issue has come up and it was better to write a letter and stay away. Now, what is this letter? It is not 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians is not a harsh letter and it doesn't address this individual who is attacking Paul's legitimacy as an apostle on the basis of him being changeable and unpredictable, fickle, untrustworthy.

And therefore, because the messenger is accused of these things, his message can't be trusted either. That's a new thing. That has happened since 1 Corinthians was written.

And Paul wrote another letter in response. The traditional view is that letter was not preserved. We have to reconstruct that letter by looking at 2 Corinthians.

However, there is a view and I share it. It's not original to me. There are many wonderful scholars who made the observation and drew this conclusion.

I have made my own observation and I share the conclusion. We do have this letter of which Paul now speaks. This 2 Corinthians that we have studied up to this point is a conciliatory letter.

He is sharing his heart and wanting to restore and renew the close fellowship that he has had with the Corinthians. And he is going to do that throughout the rest of this letter. If you skim the rest of it, there is triumph in Christ beginning at chapter 2 verse 12.

I came to preach the gospel of Christ and a door was opened to me by the Lord. And thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in verse 14. It's positive.

You come to chapter 3. We are not commending ourselves in verse 1. You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men. You are an epistle of Christ in verse 3. He talks about the spirit and not the letter of the law in verses 4 through 6. The glory of the new covenant in verse 7 and following. The light of Christ's gospel in chapter 4. We are cast down but not conquered in verse 7 and following in chapter 4. We see the invisible in chapter 4 verse 16 and following.

You don't have to take note of these. They are superscriptions in my particular New King James, but it's positive. This is a positive letter.

It's not a harsh and critical letter. The previous letter indicting this person that is attacking Paul was a harsh letter because the church has been tolerating this individual rather than removing him. In 1 Corinthians, there was someone who was immoral and they were tolerating him instead of removing him.

Paul said, you need to expunge that guy until he realizes the error of his way. I've turned him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. That was immorality.

That is not the individual in this letter that Paul is talking about. This is someone who is attacking Paul personally. We will see this further in chapter 7. If you want confirmation of this, you can see it in chapter 7 and those first eight or nine verses revisit this individual that is attacking him personally.

But in chapter 5, assurance of the resurrection, the judgment seat of Christ in verse 9, be reconciled to God in verse 12, positive, positive, positive. So where is this negative letter that he wrote that caused sorrow that they could recover from before Paul visits in person? I submit to you, and this is the view of many, that it is appended to this letter. The harsh letter of which he speaks is 2 Corinthians chapter 10 through 13.

The tone, the vocabulary, it changes at the end of chapter 12. I'm sorry, at the end of chapter 9. And chapter 10, 11, 12, and 13 are a completely different message. And it is the message that Paul alludes to here.

We will see this in detail because we are going to stop as Paul talks about this letter in chapter 2 and cover the letter in these four chapters. We'll do it rather quickly, but we will see that the content of chapters 10 through 13 is what Paul sent instead of his visit. And it's important for us to understand.

I'm not sure how it got displaced. I think the two letters were in the same envelope and they read the first one and then they read the second one. And when they put them back in the envelope, the second one ended up being first.

But what we are now covering beginning at chapter 1 and into chapter 2 and all the way down through chapter 9 is actually 3 Corinthians. And 2 Corinthians is chapter 10 through chapter 13. It's a fascinating come to pass, but you will see it's nothing to be disturbed about who messed up my Bible.

It's pretty obvious. And when we look at these chapters together, beginning next time, 10 through 13, you will see what the kerfuffle is about. And then the rest of our book, chapter 2 through chapter 9, will make a lot more sense.

We'll know what Paul is talking about. 2 Corinthians has been notoriously difficult to interpret because people were guessing at what the second letter actually said. We'll read the second letter in those final chapters.

And then this letter will be even more valuable to us for faith practice and application. What is our final thought for the morning? We are here by God's grace and according to God's divine plan and purpose. Whatever we encounter, whether it is the failures of people, attacks by people, God knew it ahead of time.

God has calibrated our challenges and our testing. This is why Paul begins by talking about him as the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction. We have nothing to fear.

We have nothing to worry about. We do need to manage our own expectations, our own attitudes toward other people. When we perceive failure or we perceive inconsistency, we are tempted to think that there's something wrong and it's their fault.

And I'm going to go wag my finger in their face and tell them about it. This encourages us to rest in Christ, rest in God and his grace. A word fitly spoken is apples of gold and pictures of silver, not done in wrath and anger, not done reactively, but done in grace with patience and love and in season.

There is a season and we pray and we ask God for wisdom to know when to speak and when to absorb unjust criticism and commit it to God. This is not for baby believers. This is a function of maturity to be the stronger brother in a situation and to act accordingly.

It takes the supernatural grace of God to enable us to do this because our nature is fisticuffs. Our nature is fight fire with fire. We want the divine nature to overcome our flesh and our fallenness.

And in so doing, God's glory is manifest. God's word is given its place and we become Christ-like who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame and all of the lies that were told about him. Where is he now? Seated at the right hand of the Father.

We want to be with him. We want to be like him. That's what this is going to help us do.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you that you have not left us as orphans. You have given us abundant provision in your word, the presence and power of your spirit, the example of the Lord Jesus.

We pray that we can truly walk in his footsteps and be enabled to perform your perfect will in our lives, just as he did, so that in all things he is glorified and your purpose is accomplished. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.