**THE HEART OF PAUL – PART 3**

We are in the middle of a 4-part study of Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth. Actually it’s the second letter that has been preserved for us in the canon of scripture. We know that there were at least two other letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers. As we’ve noted in our look at the first 5 chapters, Paul’s tone and message is completely different from that in First Corinthians. First Corinthians is a letter of correction. He addresses a lot of issues that church faced. Well apparently they repented because in Second Corinthians, written approx. one year later, Paul is much gentler and he shares with this church a word of personal testimony in which he talks a lot about his ministry. In Second Corinthians we see the heart of a pastor for a church he loved dearly.

This morning we’re going to focus our attention on Chapters 6 thru 9. Again, we don’t have time to study it all in depth so we’ll just hit the high points. There is a lot of great doctrine and so many deep truths in 2 Corinthians. It would be worthwhile to take more time and study it all. Unfortunately the quarterly material doesn’t allow us to do that. So for now I want to at least make you aware of the content of Paul’s letter, to see a side of Paul that you don’t see in any of his other writings.

I feel a need to review what we’ve covered so far. It’s been a couple of weeks and the points Paul has made are important. Quick review ---

* Paul reaffirms his claim to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. He says he was called to be an apostle “by the will of God.”
* He talks at length about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. One of the H.S.’s roles, which Paul emphasizes, is that of a Comforter.
* Paul mentions suffering and affliction in the life of a believer, including in his own life. God allows afflictions in our life: (1) “so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction…” (2) “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” In other words, to keep us from depending on ourselves and to keep relying on God.
* Paul talks about prayer. He says that the prayers of the saints in Corinth and in other places helped to deliver Paul from what appeared to be certain death. It’s something that’s hard to understand, but somehow someway our prayers work in conjunction with God’s will to effect change.
* Paul spends a little time defending his own character which had come under attack by some of his detractors in Corinth. They had spread lies about him. So Paul defends himself. He tells the Corinthian believers that he had written them harsh words oftentimes, but his message was always clear, understandable, consistent and from his heart. Never ever had Paul lied to them or purposely tried to mislead them. Upon careful self-examination of his recent actions (specifically in regard to the Corinthian believers), Paul felt he had acted appropriately and in a godly manner.
* Paul talks about the work of all 3 persons of the Trinity in our salvation. God the Father establishes us, places us on a firm foundation in Christ. It was the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God the Son, on the cross that provided the only way for us to be saved. It is the Holy Spirit who anoints us, commissions us, sets us apart for the Lord’s service. And it is the Holy Spirit who seals us. The Holy Spirit secures and preserves our salvation. The word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians is “guarantee.” He is given by God as His pledge of our future inheritance.

And all of that was just in Chapter 1!

In Chapter 2 Paul talks about restoring and forgiving the one who repents. He emphasizes that our enemy, Satan, would like nothing more than to destroy church unity and to create animosity among believers.

From 2:13 to 7:5 Paul digresses to describe several key aspects of his calling and ministry. These are personal words. Paul views his ministry of preaching the gospel as commissioned by God. God has led him and his team “to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere.”

In Chapter 3 Paul addresses attacks made against him that he was not a competent minister of the gospel (hard for us to imagine this). He says that the best testimony of Paul’s competence is the changed lives of the Corinthian believers themselves. As to his own abilities Paul’s confidence is not in himself but in God.

Several key doctrinal points are made. Keeping the law cannot save anyone. Only Jesus Christ thru the agency of the Holy Spirit to the one who believes can produce eternal life. He effectively contrasts the surpassing glory of the New Covenant in Christ to the fading glory of the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law).

In Chapter 4 Paul answers the question why doesn’t everyone who hears the gospel believe? Answer – because the god of this world, Satan, has blinded them “to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ…”

Paul sees himself as a weak, fragile, ordinary, replaceable vessel that held the light of Jesus Christ and it was his responsibility to share it despite persecution, suffering and even death that he might face.

From the end of Chapter 4 on into Chapter 5 Paul clearly views his own mortality. His own death is always at the forefront of his mind. But he does “not lose heart,” for he can see that the glory of heaven awaits him. He goes on to describe the transition that we will make some day from this earth to our heavenly home. Paul has no attachment to this old earth other than the relationships that he has with his fellow believers. Paul has a strong yearning to be at home with the Lord.

In Chapter 5 Paul says that a Christian’s motivation should be to please God. One day we will all give an account of our life. A good reminder for us all! Paul talks about his own motivation and ministry. He declares, “For the love of Christ controls us…” Paul is motivated by what Christ has done for him, His death on the cross for the sins of the world. Because of what Jesus did we are different than we were before. We are a “new creation.” 2 Cor 5:17

Because of what Jesus Christ did, reconciling us to Himself, He has given us “the ministry of reconciliation.” We have been entrusted with taking the gospel message to the world. Paul describes us as “ambassadors for Christ.”

Finally the last topic we’ve covered – righteousness. We have “imputed” righteousness. The perfect righteousness of Christ is credited to our account whenever we come to faith in Christ. This righteousness is not our own, it is not self-righteousness, not a result of anything WE do, but it is the righteousness of Jesus, all because of what HE did.

Which brings us to Chapter 6 – Any questions so far?

Vs 1-2 Paul describes his ministry. He reminds the Corinthians of the urgency of the gospel message. We are not going to last on this earth forever. The time to get saved is now. And he quotes from Isaiah 49:8. READ 2 Corinthians 6:2

Hebrews 9:27 reminds us, “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

In vs 3-10 Paul lists all the things he has personally experienced for the sake of the gospel message. READ 2 Corinthians 6:4-7

In vs 8-10 Paul gives a series of paradoxes that mark his ministry as genuine. READ 2 Corinthians 6:8-10

In vs 11-13 Paul shows his genuine love for the Corinthians and in doing so he defines love’s character. He says our heart is “wide open,” v 11. In other words, no matter how Paul had been treated by this group in the past (a contentious relationship for a while), he never stopped loving them.

In vs 14-18 Paul says that believers are not to “unequally yoked,” or bound together with unbelievers. READ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

We Christians need to be careful of our close associations, the ones we have some degree of control over. Dating, marriage, business partnerships, those you take into your own household, etc. He compares this to the same kind of separateness the people of Israel had with the other nations. This does not mean that you ignore them or have no dealings with them. It simply means you limit how close you get. Yes, you can have a positive influence on them, but the flipside is also true, that those who don’t know the Lord can have a negative influence on us. So be careful. This was a problem with the Corinthian church and it is a problem for us today as well.

Verse 1 of Chapter 7 really belongs in Chapter 6 because Paul is concluding his thoughts from Chapter 6 in this verse. READ it. How do we bring holiness to completion? It’s something we’re being encouraged to do. By separating ourselves from anything or anyone who would defile our body or our mind. The apostle John in 1 John Ch 3 says to “stop sinning.”

Chapter 7

Vs 2-4 Paul says, v 2, “we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.” This refutes what his detractors have been claiming about him. But despite the fact that the Corinthian believers had previously believed these false claims, Paul has a forgiving heart. He reminds them of his love for them and his readiness to forgive them. He is confident of God’s ongoing work in their lives. He tells them, v 4, “I am filled with comfort… I am overflowing with joy.”

V 5-16 Paul lays out in detail the restoration of his joy over the repentance of the Corinthian believers. His grief at one time for them has been replaced by overflowing joy. It was the wonderful testimony by Titus about them that was the catalyst for his joy. Paul closes his remarks in this section of his letter with these words of encouragement: “I have complete confidence in you.”

Can’t you just see Paul’s heart for this church? It was a wonderful church, despite all of its past issues and struggles, it was a church that Paul deeply loved. In 1 Cor there were problems, grief, anger, disappointment – But in 2 Cor (a year later) there is restoration, joy, encouragement. This is often the pattern we see in a Christian’s life.

As we get to Chapter 8 Paul shifts gears. The Corinthian church had previously made a commitment to collect an offering for the poor church in Jerusalem (the result of a famine). On his next visit Paul planned to pick up the monetary gift and take it to Jerusalem. Evidently, some in the church had questioned Paul and this had led some to not fulfill their financial commitment. In Chaps 8–9 Paul deals with this issue to make sure that everything is arranged when he arrives. He writes to motivate the Corinthians to share in what he calls the “grace of giving.” To accomplish his purpose, Paul makes 6 points.

In Chapter 8, vs 1-6 Paul uses the churches of Macedonia as an example of godly giving – the way it’s supposed to be done. READ 2 Cor 8:2-5. The idea here is this. Here you have this very poor group of believers in the region of Macedonia, several churches, who gave willingly, generously and joyfully. Paul says, “They gave first to the Lord and then to us.” He calls their giving an “act of grace,” v 6, and he encourages the Corinthians to basically follow their example.

In v 7-15 Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers who were not nearly as poor as the believers of Macedonia (in fact many were quite wealthy) to “excel in this act of grace also,” v 7. Paul says, “Don’t give just because I’m telling you to or out of a sense of obligation, though you did commit yourselves to do this at one time.” Give like Jesus did – READ 2 Cor 8:9. Our giving should be out of the overflow of our love for our fellow believers.” The principle is simple. Those of us who have more than we need (FBC Rockwall – that certainly describes us!) should help those who have far less than they need. *Example of our yearly mission offering.*

READ 2 Cor 8:15. Quotes from Exodus 16 and uses an O.T. example of the people of Israel collecting manna in the wilderness. Some were able to collect more than others and shared it. The principle here is the same.

In v 16-24 Paul gives his ringing endorsement of Titus and another unnamed “brother” (he was apparently well known by the Corinthians). These men have been appointed by the various churches to accompany Paul as he makes his rounds collecting money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul sees this as a positive thing. READ 2 Cor 8:20-21. Paul says that these men are “messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ,” v 23. Paul welcomes his close association with such distinguished men. There is a lesson for us here. To keep everything above board we must have accountability when it comes to carrying out the financial matters of the church. As we have seen in our day there are all kinds of abuses that can take place – even in the church – if we give too much power and financial control to one man.

In Chapter 9 Paul expresses his confidence in the Corinthians to give to the poor saints of Jerusalem, what he calls “the ministry for the saints.” READ 2 Cor 9:2

Paul knows the believers in Corinth and the region of Achaia are ready and eager to give. He is sending a small delegation of men, “the brothers,” v 3 in order to prepare the people spiritually to give with the right attitude. This offering, this “act of grace” is a big deal to Paul. So much so that he takes 2 chapters to address it.

Verses 6-14 tell us why it is beneficial for us as believers to give to the Lord’s ministry. These are important verses to read and apply in our lives.

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. The bottom line is that God blesses those who give generously and with the right attitude. God loves a heart that is enthusiastically thrilled with the pleasure of giving. God is the one who supplies all the needs of His work, of the gospel ministry and He does it through people. We get to have a part in what God is doing here in Rockwall and throughout the world!

Paul closes out the Chapter with a reminder, v 15, “Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!” And what gift do you suppose Paul is referring to? The gift of salvation which comes thru faith in Christ. Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” One of my former pastors had a saying whenever we took up the offering, “You can’t outgive God.” Our giving, our lives, our service, all that we do and say should be motivated by our love for Jesus, thankful for what He has done for us.