

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Feilding Baptist

19.4.26

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

These verses should bring us great joy!

Romans 8

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The love of God is immense!

But what about us? How are we to love? Last night we remembered the verses about loving God and loving others.

Jesus said, Matthew 5

43 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

We are not just to love our mates and pray for them. But those we don't like, those who annoy us. Because no one is to be separated from God's love.

Father God, what joy these verses should bring us. That your love is so powerful, so immense! What a marvellous thing it is to be able to rest in your love! Thank you for your interest in us, your concern for us. Thank you for the evidence of this in Jesus, sending Jesus. Thank you that despite the evil we can recognise around us, and in the world, you are victorious, that it is evil that is on the slippery slope.

Holy Spirit, please help us to be thankful about this time together this morning, please help us to appreciate this time of worship. Please help us to leave here even more grateful for Jesus.

Please bless this time, and this space, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Message - Unwavering Conduct

As Jesus models to us, and as Paul, Timothy and Silas model to the people of Corinth, the Spirit enables us to live consistently, expressing the grace of God.

So there was this builder, who began building when they left school, and never left. They got to 65 and they were still with the same company, still building. And this old builder, as you would expect, over the years had learnt a few tricks of the trade. But they had also learnt some short cuts.

On the last job before they retired, they used all the tricks they had learnt in the years they had been building. They also cut every corner possible, a few less shovels of cement in the concrete, a few less purlins in the roof, a bit less bracing here, fewer nails there.

As it happened, the house was completed on their very last day of work, before the builder retired. The house looked magnificent, all the plastering and painting completed, landscaping all done. The boss of the company, the owner and

the managing director all turned up for a few drinks to honour the builder. And as a gift for their fine service, they handed over the keys to the house!

They had been pondering, what would be a fitting way to honour the builder, someone who had worked for them for so long? There was really only one way...

Integrity, the integrity of Paul is what is being called into question in these verses from 2 Corinthians. It seems that some people felt Paul needed to show some. They felt he was lacking. So he fights back, showing, that actually, his integrity, is intact. Let's read;

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 (NIV - UK)

Paul's change of plans

12 Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity[a] and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. 13 For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 14 as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

15 Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to let you send me on my way to Judea. 17 Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no'?

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No'. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us - by me, Silas[b] and Timothy - was not 'Yes' and 'No', but in him it has always been 'Yes'. 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

1 I call God as my witness - and I stake my life on it - that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. 2 1 So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. 2 For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? 3 I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. 4 For I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

Footnotes

2 Corinthians 1:12 Many manuscripts holiness

2 Corinthians 1:19 Greek Silvanus, a variant of Silas

A fortnight ago, I turned over the page in my daily Scripture Union Bible reading notes, to find, that for the next fortnight, we were in Leviticus. Oh no! I said. What's the point?! So I grumbled my way through the first week's readings into this week. And on Tuesday, in frustration, said to God, please show me something in these readings, just one thing today that I can take out of these verses.

And turned to Leviticus chapter 19, that was titled in my Bible, Holiness in Personal Conduct. I didn't see the personal conduct bit, just holiness, it leapt out at me as if it had lights on, because here, in 2 Corinthians, this is what Paul says in the first verse today, v12 they have conducted themselves in holiness. Oh, it doesn't...

Well, it does, but the NIV interestingly uses the word integrity, where most others use holiness. Let's go with them being similar, for it does take us back to Leviticus, sorry!

Look at what holiness is. This is what I read;

Leviticus 19:1-4

The Lord also said to Moses, 2 “Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

3 “Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father, and you must always observe my Sabbath days of rest. I am the Lord your God.

9 “When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. 10 It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.

11 “Do not steal.

“Do not deceive or cheat one another.

12 “Do not bring shame on the name of your God by using it to swear falsely. I am the Lord.

13 “Do not defraud or rob your neighbour.

“Do not make your hired workers wait until the next day to receive their pay.

14 “Do not insult the deaf or cause the blind to stumble. You must fear your God; I am the Lord.

Here is holiness, here is integrity! And it is to be in all of our lives, woah to go, not just where it’s convenient. Not just when it is our advantage. Which is Paul’s point in v12, it wasn’t just in the world that his conduct has been good, but also with the church. That’s often the opposite today isn’t it? We’re wonderful in church, but appalling at work. Wonderful at work or school, but awful at home. Paul is making clear, he is consistent. He has holiness, integrity, wherever He is. He wants to be known for it.

15 “Do not twist justice in legal matters by favouring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly.

16 “Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people.

“Do not stand idly by when your neighbour’s life is threatened. I am the Lord.

17 “Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin.

18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

Did you see the three references to how to treat those close to us, our neighbours? Remember Jesus talking about what matters most, loving the Lord your God, and loving others as you love yourself.

Before we finish with Leviticus, see the last few verses;

32 “Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged. Fear your God. I am the Lord.

33 “Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. 34 Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

35 “Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or volume. 36 Your scales and weights must be accurate. Your containers for measuring dry materials or liquids must be accurate. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Surprisingly, there are even seams of gold in Leviticus! Can you see in this list of how to be holy, integrity? This is community building stuff. But this isn't for just when we're dealing with our mates, these are standards that apply to all our situations, with whoever we're with.

So where does this leave Paul, with the accusation that he doesn't have holiness or integrity? Well, he looks to Jesus. Jesus who is the fulfilment of all that is Yes. The Corinthians, or some of them, have been criticising Paul for saying he was going to visit, and then didn't. Paul explains, it's not about him being fickle, saying yes, and then no. He's not like Jim on the Vicar of Dibley.

Paul says yes, and means it. Trust me guys, my integrity is intact. I go where God leads me. If there is an issue, blame the Holy Spirit! The same Spirit that the Corinthians have, is leading Paul, v22.

And to get the message across even more clearly, that Paul does hold the people in high regard, look at the last verse, thank goodness, we're nearly there, where Paul says, I love you guys! I would never do anything to hurt you. And of course we think, oh, that's lovely! But once again, we have to stop. We have to think. Which love is Paul talking about? Remember, in Greek, there are different words for different types of love.

Which of the loves is this:

Eros - intimate love

Storge - affection & empathy

Philia - friendship & loyalty

Agape - unconditional & sacrificial

Which one does Paul use here? Surely brotherly love, the love of mates? But no! Here Paul uses agape! God's love is unconditional sacrificial love, agape love. Imagine the impact on the listeners when they hear the extent of Paul's love! If they believe that his integrity is intact, then they are called to believe in his astounding love for these people. A remarkable love! A love that is to be the feature of church communities, the love that Jesus expect of us.

Prayer of Confession

O Lord,

listen to our prayer of confession,
for we would speak honestly before You.

We confess that we haven't always done what is right;
that some of our attitudes and actions have hurt others and ourselves,
and have grieved You.

Forgive us.

In Your mercy, look deeply into our hearts.

Examine our thoughts and our actions.

Test our motivations.

Bring to light all the things in our lives that dishonour You.

We want to follow You with integrity,
to obey the commandments You have given us,
and to walk in ways that bring honour to Your name.

May we remember, that God is faithful,
our God never fails to hear us when we call to him.
Trust in his forgiveness and unfailing love,
and be at peace,
for he rescues all who take refuge in Him.