

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday after Trinity, June 30, 2013**

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 289, 283, 297, 288, 644.

Lessons: Jeremiah 9:23-24, 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4, Matthew 5:1-12.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:12-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You heard in our epistle lesson, which started with the verses of our sermon text, that Paul intended to visit the Corinthians but had not yet done so. We also sense that some tensions exist or at least have existed between Paul and the congregation at Corinth, for he feels that he has to defend himself.

He had not visited them as he intended and was being criticized for this. He is also hinting that in some way he has been accused of being insincere and untrustworthy. He apparently was being accused of not telling the truth, of being two-faced and not doing what he said he would do as well as being accused of double-talk in his written letters, of saying one thing but meaning something else.

We need to remember that Paul had written some strong words of admonition to the Corinthian congregation in his first letter. He had admonished them for the factions which had arisen among them. There had been differences and cliques in the congregation, which Paul addresses beginning in the first chapter of his first letter. Paul also had admonished them to take swift action in a terrible case of sexual immorality – of the kind that even the pagans would be ashamed of, incest – which they were allowing to continue in their midst without discipline. Christians were also going to court against Christians. In the famous chapter on love, he admonishes them for their lack of love. All these things – and more – were problems plaguing the Corinthian Christians.

So there were problems in the Corinthian congregation, and Paul had not visited them as he had planned. He wrote: *“I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.”* (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:1) So any face-to-face visit could be painful for them.

And, of course, Christians know, often from bitter experience, that Satan and his allies will continue to attack all who confess and teach about Jesus Christ, and that was Paul’s calling in life.

The words of our sermon text, then, show

**PAUL'S HONESTY IN DEALING WITH THE CORINTHIANS**

- 1. His conscience testifies that he conducted himself in the holiness and sincerity which are from God.**
- 2. He has been honest and communicated clearly to them.**
- 3. These facts will lead to mutual boasting on judgment day.**

Some in Corinth think that Paul has been what we could call fickle or two-faced. He writes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *“Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.”*

Some have apparently claimed him to be what we would call double-tongued, of talking out of both sides of his mouth, of saying one thing to one person, and saying something else to another. This kind of talking has also been called using “weasel words”, that is, words that are intentionally ambiguous and would allow you

to ‘weasel out of’ or deny you intended or meant what someone thought your words would be saying. The implication is that he has been deceptive and not completely honest, and that he has written and spoken half-truths, which are really lies. But he boasts – and this is not in the least a sinful boasting – that he has spoken truth, and conducted himself **“in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.”**

Many of us have grown up to realize that boasting about ourselves is not good, especially if it is done with haughtiness and arrogance. In fact, the words of our Old Testament lesson emphasize: **“let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD.”** (Jeremiah 9:23-24) We should not boast in our own wisdom, or strength, or riches. Instead we should boast in the Lord and in what he has done for us.

When we think of wicked, sinful boasting, we remember the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable who went into the temple **“and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”** (Luke 18:11-12)

But Paul boasts of his good conscience and his good Christian conduct. And he also boasts about the Christians in Corinth as well as about himself and his assistants. This is really one way of glorifying God for what he has produced in us and through us.

So Paul is rightly and properly boasting, and he is surely giving God the credit, as he did when he wrote to the Ephesians about how we are saved: **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”** (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is only through faith in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer that you are saved eternally, and get to heaven. That is the real heart of his message, and must be the heart of every truly Christian witness for Christ.

In 1 Corinthians Paul wrote, **“Your boasting is not good”** (1 Corinthians 5:6), when they were boasting about sin in their midst. That was wicked, sinful boasting. There is, however, such a thing as godly boasting. Later in 2 Corinthians Paul says **“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends”** (2 Corinthians 10:17,18).

Paul says his conscience is clear in the way he has dealt with the Corinthians. His motives have been pure. He has not acted in a self-centered way. Someone who is being guided and motivated by worldly wisdom and lusts, that is, by fleshly inclinations and desires, could rightly be accused of being deceitful and self-serving, but not one who is being motivated and empowered by God’s grace.

Paul writes that he has spoken, written, and dealt with the Corinthians **“especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace. For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 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.”**

His work as well as his character had been attacked. He had been accused of being a man who did not always mean what he wrote. From what he hints at we conclude that his opponents had not even carefully paid attention to what he did write, and that they spread false reports regarding what he had written, misled others by their talk, and when they were then corrected, blamed Paul.

Paul is absolutely honest with the Corinthians, knowing that his record is above attack. **“For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.”** He means what he says. There is no hidden meaning in his letters; and in all his other dealings with them he has not made use of ambiguity. The words of his spoken teaching and the contents of his letters agreed and are consistent. He hopes that they will continue in the pure truth of the Word of God.

For himself he is asking from God that he remain steadfast, continuing in the pure doctrine and in godly life. For them he asks that they might acknowledge with a grateful heart what God has given them through his work. For, as Paul says: **“we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.”** The Corinthian Church could well be proud of the fact that he had been their first teacher. And, on the other hand, they represented his reason for glorying on judgment day. Even before the throne of God he will boast of them. In their presence in heaven he wants to proudly exhibit them as products, as results, of divine grace.

***“For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.”*** Opponents misread or intentionally misunderstand even plainly written statements. They do not have to read between the lines to figure out what Paul really meant. What they are reading they can also understand.

The purpose of the writings that come from the pens of Christ's apostles is not to obscure the truth but to reveal it. One basic principle of biblical interpretation is to take the words in their simple literal sense unless the context and the words themselves make it very clear that they are to be interpreted in a different manner. For example, when Christ calls himself a “gate” in John 10, it is clear that this is to be taken metaphorically. He is not literally a gate. But the principle still stands: Take it literally unless it is amply clear that it must be taken in some symbolical way.

Paul has no secret meanings, no ambiguities, no weasel words, no tricks of language which allow all sorts of explanations and multiple interpretations and reservations. He is saying that ‘what you read and hear from my writings is exactly what should be understood.’

The fact that Paul did not write to the Corinthians anything that they could not understand does not mean that everything he wrote was easy to grasp. Paul writes about the strong meat of God's truths as well as the milk of God's Words. Some sections just might take a bit more prayerful, careful study than others. Paul makes reference to this when he says: ***“And I hope that, 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.”***

In 1 Corinthians Paul had said ***“Now I know in part”*** (1 Corinthians 13:12). This is true of every Christian. There will always be room for growth in understanding of the Word. That is why Peter urges his readers, ***“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation”*** (1 Peter 2:2).

It is Paul's hope that by a careful reading of his letters the understanding of the Corinthians will grow. His hope is that the Corinthians can boast of him and his co-workers just as they will boast of them in the day of the Lord Jesus. Ideally, on the Last Day, the day of the Lord Jesus, Paul will be the Corinthians' cause for boasting, and the Corinthians will be Paul's cause for boasting.

When the Corinthians stand before the one who will come to judge the living and the dead and there confess faith in Jesus Christ, they will be able to do this because of Paul's ministry among them. Paul will be their cause for boasting before the Lord.

And when Paul stands before the same Jesus, he will be able to point to the Corinthians as proof that he was faithful to his ministry. They will be his cause for boasting in the presence of the Lord. Paul had written in a similar manner to the Thessalonians: ***“What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy”*** (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20).

That everyone who hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be saved on judgment day is Paul's goal and purpose in life. That is the goal of every Christian, and every true Christian preacher today, too. May we always have God-fearing, believing, pastors, preachers, teachers, leaders and heads of Christian families who point us to God's truths. Amen.