

The Weak Apostle's Warning

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of October 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled The Weak Apostle's Warning and is based on 2 Corinthians 12.11-13.

Whenever you have visitors around, there is a lot of preparation to do. I find that you need to vacuum the house, wipe the benches over.

I'm usually sent out to the backyard to clean up all the toys and to make sure the garden's looking okay and that everything's in order. You need to make sure that the pantry cupboard and the fridge, well, there's enough food to cope with the visitors that come.

We've had two sets of grandparents stay with us over the last month. One staying for a week, nearly a week, and the other staying for half a week. And I've noticed that with some visitors, you need to prepare in different ways.

[1 : 1 1] With my father, with my parents, when they came to visit us, I noticed that there needs to be a lot of preparation done on myself. That is, I need to go out and do some training on the bike and running because my dad loves riding and running and that type of thing.

And any chance that he sees a weakness in me, he will take the opportunity to try and beat me on the bike. So I find I have to make sure I do enough exercise just to make sure that I can just keep ahead of him.

That's one thing I've noticed in the preparation. I've noticed that with Michelle's parents, when they arrive, that we need to make sure we have pineapple juice. They like pineapple juice for breakfast.

My parents, it doesn't matter what orange juice they have or not, but for them, pineapple juice. My father, he likes his own pillow. And so he'll bring his own pillow. Michelle's parents, they don't care what pillow they want to use.

We need to make sure there's the right cereal there for both sets of parents. We've also noticed that when Michelle's parents come, they often bring a big load of stuff in the back of the car just in case we haven't prepared well enough.

[2 : 2 3] Like a lamp. Obviously, we don't have enough lamps in our house, but they thought they'd bring a lamp just in case they needed a lamp for reading at night. But it's always pleasant when family arrive.

It's a great time. A great time to catch up. A great time to spend with them doing all sorts of fun things, including bike riding. But I've noticed that perhaps I'm not actually the focus when they arrive.

You can help me out here later on, those who are grandparents. I think they're actually there to visit the grandkids myself. Just a hunch. I'm not quite sure about that, but it seems to me there's a lot of carrying on with the grandkids.

And, well, anyhow, it's lovely to see them. Paul, in this final passage of 2 Corinthians, talks about his visit and the preparations that need to happen when he arrives.

Now, he's not asking for the Coco Pops to be ready when he arrives in this passage. He's not asking that the Corinthians would get out the double-sprung straw bed.

[3 : 26] He's not asking for that either. He's not asking that he gets the church cleaned or that the proper meals should be laid out.

He's not interested in any of those things. But Paul is interested that they be prepared for his arrival. Because Paul, when he arrives this third and final time to the church in Corinth, it is not going to be a pleasant trip.

Paul comes this third and final time to bring judgment on those who will not repent. You see, we've been looking at these final chapters of 2 Corinthians, starting at chapter 10 through to chapter 13.

In these chapters we've been looking at, Paul has been vigorously defending his apostolic authority. He's been defending his right to be called an apostle to the Corinthians.

The Corinthian church have had these false teachers come in and they've said, Paul, he's weak. He's not a true apostle. We are the impressive apostles. We are the super apostles.

[4 : 31] We are the ones who should be following, not Paul. And the sad thing is, there's a minority in the Corinthian church who are following after these false teachers. Well, Paul wants to put a stop to that.

And over these final four chapters that we've been looking at, including today, we see Paul defending his ministry. Well, he's not defending it because he wants their approval.

He's not defending it to build himself out, build himself up, as though he needs that. No, Paul understands that there's actually a more crucial issue here.

By rejecting Paul and his authority, what they're actually doing is they're actually rejecting Paul's gospel. They're following a different Jesus, a Jesus that suits them and their ego, rather than following the true Jesus, the true God.

As I read through the letter of 2 Corinthians, and particularly these last chapters, it's hard not to see that in between each of these lines, eternity is at stake for some of these Corinthians.

[5 : 40] Well, as we look at the passage, it would be good for you to have it open. As we look at this, page 944, 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, through to the end.

Chapter 12, verse 11. Between verse 11 and to the end of the chapter, Paul again gives his final appeal about his authority.

What he does is he's trying to pull together the threads of all that he has spoken about in these last chapters. Tries to bring them together to highlight what are the central issues about who they should follow, whether they should follow Paul, the apostle, or the false teachers.

And Paul brings these threads together. He brings them to highlight and reinforce to them what is at the centre of this debate. In verses 11 through the 13, Paul reminds them of the foolish speech that he has just finished.

In many ways, these three verses are in many ways a transition from what Paul has been speaking about the foolish speech to the issues that he is about to raise in a moment or two.

[6 : 52] And so he says, I have become a fool. We see there in verse 11. If you remember, Paul's fool's speech that we've heard the two times prior to this, beginning at the beginning of chapter 11, this fool's speech that Paul is engaged in has been a place where Paul has actually had to boast about himself, boast about his personal distinctives and his private revelations.

But Paul knows that this is foolishness. Having to boast in your own credentials is something that is a worldly pursuit. But Paul knows that desperate measures call for desperate actions.

No one has come to his defence in Corinth. Look there in verse 11. You forced me into it. Indeed, you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super apostles, even though I am nothing.

No one stood up for him. They should have known from what they saw in Paul's ministry that he was a true apostle.

He makes that point in verse 12. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. And then he goes on in verse 13 to talk about not only did his actions in the past, when he first set up the church should point that he is a true apostle, but also the way that he conducted himself by not burdening them.

[8 : 21] Look there in verse 13. How have you been worse off than any other churches except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me in this wrong. Paul here again picks up that whole debate that he had about the financial issue.

The false apostles claimed that Paul was an amateur, that he wasn't a professional at all. How could you be a professional if you didn't actually claim money?

You see, part of that culture was you had to pay the people who were good, but Paul refused to take their money. We saw that argument in chapter 11. Paul refused it.

And so Paul says, look, have I burdened you more than given you anything else other than actually not allowing you to pay for me? And then he gives this mock apology at the end.

I am so sorry. But forgive me this wrong for not actually burdening you in this way. Well, in these verses we see that Paul's actions speak of his integrity, speak of him being a true apostle.

[9 : 30] His actions there speak out very clearly. Well, in verses 14 through to 18, Paul then highlights his integrity.

His integrity to be a true apostle. You see, just as he didn't burden them in the past, Paul will not burden them when he comes again at that third and final time.

Here I am ready to come to you this third time. And Paul says there in verse 14, and I will not be a burden. Paul will not burden them then when he comes to them that third and final time.

He didn't do it in the past and he won't do it again. Why? Because he's a man of integrity. Paul gives three reasons why he will not burden them.

The first we see in verse 14 is he doesn't want what is yours, but he wants you. Paul doesn't want their three-speed donkey.

[10 : 26] He doesn't want their money, their finances. He wants them. He wants them to follow the true and living God. He wants them to repent of their sins.

We see there the second reason in verse 14. The second reason Paul doesn't want to burden them is because as a parent who has a love for a child, the parent provides for the child.

Not the other way around. If anyone is to be paying money and caring for, it's Paul who should be caring for the Corinthian. Paul saw the Corinthian church as his child, as family and he cared for them deeply.

So much so that we see there in verse 15 that Paul is happy to sacrifice himself, to totally spend himself for their welfare. I will most gladly spend and be spent for you.

In verses 16 through to 18, Paul gives his third reason why he will not burden them. It's because he is not crafty and deceitful.

[11 : 37] He is not a person there to trick them. He is not going to come along and have a hidden preaching tax that's going to be there in the background. He's not there to, when he's preaching, get Titus, one of his co-workers, to zip around the back and grab a hold of all the all-wheel terrain chariots that are sitting in the parking lot and take them away.

He's not there to trick them. He's not a deceitful person. And we see that in verses 16 through to 18. Not only is he not deceitful, nor is his workers.

Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urge Titus to go. And sent the brothers with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he?

Did we conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? Paul wants to highlight very clearly here, he is a man of integrity, which is an important part of being an apostle.

Well, we've seen his actions speak loudly. He's a man of integrity. And in this final section here to the end of the chapter, Paul concludes by expressing his fears about his impending visit.

[12 : 54] have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God.

Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up. For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish.

I fear that there may perhaps be quarrying, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced.

Paul is not doing this for his own prestige or protect his own reputation. he's concerned for them. He's concerned for them and building them up.

He wants them to repent. Yet his great fear is that some will not repent, that some in the end will reject Paul and reject in the end the true and living God.

[14 : 11] In the news last night, there were two women who were walking around Mount Stirling, Kate and Sharon, and they got lost. They had to spend a night out.

Fortunately, they had in their backpacks supplies of food and a tent and a few other things and they survived the night. In the interview on the television, crossed to the mother and the mother at that point was so grateful that her daughter, Sharon, was still alive.

But she said, it's only when you think that you've lost them, that you realize how precious life is. I think Paul feels that. Paul feels a deep love, a love of a parent to a child for the Corinthians.

And Paul's concern is he fears that he has lost them, that some have turned away and they will not repent. Well, in chapter 13, verses 1 through to 10, Paul gives his final appeal for them to repent.

He tells them very clearly that they need to prepare themselves to get things in order before he arrives there in Corinth. In verses 1 through to 4, he tells those who have not repented of their previous sins that they must do so, that they must repent of their sins.

[15 : 35] this is the third time I am coming to you. And look there in the next part of verse 1, he gives a quote from Deuteronomy chapter 19 where he gives the legal requirements for accepting evidence in a trial.

Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses. Paul puts this right at the very beginning because he's indicating what's going to happen when he comes. When he comes, he's going to set up a trial.

He's going to bring judgment. This is not going to be a pleasant trip to come and catch up with the grandkids, to go bike riding, to have picnics. He's coming to bring judgment.

Paul is not prepared to tolerate gross sin in the church. He is coming in to bring sweeping reforms, to take the broom out and to sweep out those in their midst who continue in sin.

He will bring discipline. We're not sure exactly, Paul doesn't indicate here how he's going to bring about that discipline. We're not sure whether he's going to bring it about by supernatural discipline like the other New Testament apostles, like with Anna and Sapphira.

[16 : 52] At the very least, it seems clear that Paul will excommunicate those in the church who will not repent. He speaks of great power coming in, great power that he will bring.

I warn those who sinned previously and all others, I warn them now while absent as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not be lenient.

And Paul then goes on in verses 3 and 4 to give the reason why he won't be lenient, where the power comes from for him to exercise this authority. Since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me, he is not weak in dealing with you, but he is powerful in you.

Christ is the one who will bring about the discipline. Paul's authority is coming from Christ. Here we see again Paul bringing up the notion of power through weakness, that it is through weakness great power, God's power, is shown.

For we Paul goes on in verse 4, verse 3, he is not weak in dealing with you, but he is powerful in you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.

[18 : 08] For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we will live with him by the power of God. Paul points out that in the cross we see weakness, we see shame, but it is through Christ's resurrection.

We see that Christ is glorified and risen in power. And Paul says, I reflect this. In my own life, I appear to be weak, but it is God who works through me, this risen Christ who reigns in power, who will bring about the authority, to bring about the demonstration of power against sin in the church.

Paul in the past has postponed bringing judgment, but he makes it clear here that he will not postpone it forever. He is coming a third and final time to deal with sin in the church.

Therefore, in verses 5 through to 9, Paul asks them to test and examine themselves. That is, look at their lives, test their lives, test that Christ is in them, that they are living by the Spirit.

I think in the end, Paul is saying, test whether you're actually following what I teach you, or test whether you're actually rejecting me and following the other apostles. Again, Paul is not trying to build himself up here, because Paul is saying he represents Christ.

[19 : 33] He is Christ's ambassador. Therefore, Paul says, test yourselves. Are you willing to listen to what I say?

Paul's hope, in verse 6, is that they will see that he has passed the test, that he is a person that has trusted in Jesus, that he is a person who has passed with flying colours.

In verse 7, he prays that they will understand this, that they won't do anything wrong. Paul's hope and his prayer are grounded in the conviction of verse 8, that in the end, that they will understand that the truth comes from the truth of the gospel.

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. And in verse 9, he rejoices, for we rejoice when we are weak, and you are strong.

That's when he rejoices. When his weakness ends up helping the Corinthians see that they ought to be trusting in a powerful God, a trusting God, God, they ought to see that that is where their trust ought to lie.

[20 : 51] And so Paul prays for them, this is what we pray for you, that you may become perfect. Paul prays that God's spirit will be working in their lives, helping them in that examination process, to work out areas of sin in their life, areas of ungodliness, areas that do not match up to God's word.

And so we get Paul concludes in verse 10, so I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come I may not have to be severe in using authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

That's what Paul wants. He wants that they may repent, that he will not have to come with severe authority. The elections are coming up this weekend.

Who are you going to vote for? It's a bit of a tricky one, isn't it? Election time is always a bit of a tense time in our household. Michelle loves the elections. She loves election nights, sitting up there watching the tally room, you know, who's winning at this point, you know, what areas are doing well for the Liberal, the Labor, you know, the Democrats and all this type of thing, and she gets all excited.

It just doesn't do it much for me. But it's interesting all the different promises they're making at the moment, isn't it? All their claims of integrity and all their actions that they speak about, you know, that they should be voting for them.

[22 : 25] This is who you should be voting for, you should be voting for me because it's been great watching all these promises and all their things that they're talking about. in many ways, there's election coming up for the Corinthians.

Paul's saying, who are you going to vote for? Are you going to vote for me or are you going to vote for the false apostles? Two candidates, we've got the two candidates here, whose party are you going to align yourself with?

Are you going to stick with me and the promises that I make or are you going to stick with them and not repent? Paul talks as we've seen throughout this book about some of his policies.

He's covered the finances. He said that there's no hidden taxes. Paul's not in there to bring about hidden taxes or anything like that. He's covered the whole thing about being integrity and not being a person who lies about different issues.

He's a person who's not going to trick them. He's open handed. Paul has also shown that he has a proven track record. A proven track record not only in their church but right across many many churches.

[23 : 37] He promises life with God and changes in their life. Who are you going to vote for? Who is it that you'll vote?

Are you going to go with the false apostles or are you going to go with me? When Paul comes after the election he's going to bring sweeping reforms.

Paul lets them know very clearly this in this letter. Paul closes the letter in the final four verses.

In these verses he gives his final appeal for them to amend their lives. Finally brothers and sisters farewell. Put things in order.

Listen to my appeal. Agree with one another. Live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

[24 : 37] And then he concludes with what is a very familiar grace that we often say here in church. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

God God God It seems to me that one of the clear things that this passage is saying to us is that God expects godliness in our lives.

Paul is making it very clear about who they should be following and what teachings they should be listening to. He makes it very clear in the way that they should conduct their lives. That it should match up with what they believe.

God Paul expects there to be godliness a growth in godliness in our lives. As we look around our world there are many who are not godly in their lives.

It sickened me and saddened me so much to hear about the child pornography racket and the way that Anglican ministers are being involved in it. Saddens me at no end.

[25 : 51] Paul says he will not tolerate that. Paul expects us to be godly in our lives and the way that we live our lives.

It ought to reflect the character of Christ but often that's hard. It's easy when we're here in church but then we go out and live our lives out in the world.

We feel like it's so hard to live a Christian life. They're areas that we struggle with. There seems to be three things that this passage says to us.

The first thing is that growing in godliness takes a lifetime. It's a thing that we need to be progressing in over a lifetime.

It's not going to happen overnight. the word is called sanctification, that growing in godliness and holiness. Therefore we ought to be people who are striving for the long haul.

[26 : 57] The second thing I think is that this passage says is that God's patience does run out. There is a time where we will have to give an account of the way that we lived our lives.

That the true mark of a true Christian is the one who perseveres to the end. We ought to be people who persevere to the end, knowing that there is an end and that God's patience will run out.

The third thing is that change is not going to happen by our own religious moralism or belief in our own human potential. Change in our lives comes about by God's grace, the power of God's spirit working in our lives.

Bringing about change, godly change. Therefore I say to you, be aware sin is real. Be aware that there is a real judgment coming.

Be aware that there is a real redemption found in Jesus Christ. And also realise the power of prayer.

[28 : 09] prayer. Praying that God will work in our lives individually but in our church as well. I have a prayer here that I'm going to read out.

It's a prayer that I haven't written but I've found of a person who wrote this prayer that seems to capture a lot of the things that Paul has in mind here. At the end if you'd like it to be your prayer then you could pray at the end.

Oh my Saviour help me. I'm slow to learn so prone to forget so weak to climb. I am in the foothills when I should be on the heights.

I am pained by my graceless heart my poverty of love my sloth in the heavenly race my sullied conscience my wasted hours my unspent opportunities.

I am blind while light shines around me. Take the scales from my eyes. Grind to dust the evil heart of unbelief. Make my chiefest joy to study thee.

[29 : 17] Meditate on thee. Gaze on thee. Sit like Mary at thy feet. Lean like John on thy breast. Appeal like Peter to thy love.

Count like Paul all things dung. Give me increase and progress in grace so that there may be more decisions in my character.

More vigor in my purposes. More elevation in my life. More fever in my devotion. More constancy in my zeal. As I have a position in the world, keep me from making the world my position.

May I never seek in the creature what can only be found in the creator. Let not faith cease from seeking thee until it vanishes into sight. Ride forth in me thou king of kings and lord of lords that I may live victoriously and in victory attain my end.

Amen.