

December 4

2 Corinthians 1-9

Today we have moved forward into Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and I am set to cover the first 9 chapters. Rather than try to give a really fast overview of these 9 chapters I am going to just zero in on one question - what is it that makes Paul tick?

Paul was chosen by God to write a huge portion of the Bible he wrote half of the books in the New Testament and well over 30% of the actual text in the New Testament. So it's a fair question to wonder what made Paul tick and we will get some glimpse of that in 2 Corinthians.

Let me start by giving you a quick overview of what's going on when we get to 2 Corinthians. As you should already know from reading 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul has been addressing some serious struggles with this group of Believers in the Corinthian church. He had set up the church in Corinth and he himself lived there for 18 months. After he left the city, evil things happened in the church. So Paul wrote them a letter we call 1 Christians to help them.

Between 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul visited them and he said it was a very "painful visit." Apparently he was going to visit them a 2nd time but his last visit was so painful he wrote them a scathing letter.

This is a letter we don't have but he calls it a "severe letter" in chapter 2, then again in chapter 7.

So now Paul wrote this letter we call 2nd Corinthians because there were false teachers in the church and they needed to deal with it.

These teachers spoke very badly about Paul. They said he kept changing his mind. They also said he was not a genuine apostle. This is where we start to see what kind of a man Paul was – what made him tick.

The first thing to notice is that Paul was a soft-hearted, loving man. I have often thought of Paul as a left-brained, type-A kind of personality which in our world is usually somebody who does not show their feelings. Yet it is clear from what we read today that the problems in the Corinthian church and the antagonism that had been roused in the hearts of some of the Christians there toward Paul -- hurt him deeply.

It caused him "great distress, anguish of heart and many tears" because he loved them. Sometimes when people wrong us this way we are more likely to fight back and harden our stance towards them – rather than break down in tears. But we see Paul deeply loved people and had a soft heart for his fellow Christ-followers

This brings us to the second thing we see in Paul – he was a very forgiving man. In chapter 2 he tells the Corinthians that once they have dealt with the person who has been causing all of this terrible trouble they "ought to forgive and comfort him" and that they should "reaffirm their love for him."

Wow! With the way things work in our world today usually we separate from people who have caused us great pain; we go our different ways, find a different church, or move to a different city. We often leave conflict, especially severe conflict, unresolved.

Yet Paul sets a great model here for us – he urges forgiveness and we see that Paul was the very model of a very forgiving man.

A third thing that stands out to me is Paul's amazing commitment because of where he was headed. Paul worked under horrible conditions and we get a good list of those in chapter 6 -

"Troubles, hardship, distresses, beatings, imprisonment, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger, genuine but regarded as imposter, known yet regarded as unknown, dying yet living on, beaten but not killed, and more..." The point is that Paul is used to ministering under rather adverse conditions and he has no thought whatever of quitting.

How could Paul do this? The secret, I think, is that Paul was absolutely focused upon the fact that he was living every moment in the light of eternity. He was preoccupied with this. In chapter 4, Paul says, I do what I do because I know that "The one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence." I can live with difficulties in the here and now – because I'm looking at the finish line!!

One sentence later he clarifies it even more pointedly: "We do not lose heart (even) though outwardly we are wasting away ... for our light and momentary (that's a key word) troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen (that's temporary), but on what is unseen (that's eternal!)."

There is a great life principle here: eternity will last longer than time.

Make your choices in light of that fact.

Ok, those are just a few of the many things we see in these chapters about what makes Paul tick.

Maybe as you are reading, be on the lookout for these like I've been and see how you might apply them to your own life.