

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 13 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Faith in Jesus is built and lived in community.

Many of you know that I did not have the most successful experience in law school - hence I am not a lawyer today - but this week I was reflecting on one of the key reasons I didn't succeed as the light of 2 Corinthians illumined my memories.

One normal piece of the law school experience was the study group. Three or four students pushing each other, keeping each other accountable to reading assignments, and serving as the sounding board for ideas and answers to the tough questions. If you had a committed group, you were sharpened by it and it kept you on track. Well, I wasn't fond of studying, let alone study group, so instead going it alone, or merely floating along, didn't work. It was a disaster.

By the time I was in seminary, I had learned my lesson and I sought every opportunity for Havruta (groups studying Scripture together).

This is what it looks like to live out our faith in Jesus. Christianity is a team sport.

Closing out 2 Corinthians we see final exhortations that reveal the importance of community, we want to look both at what Paul is saying and the context in which he is saying it.

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Faith in Jesus is built and lived in community.

All of the warning we have encountered in the last three chapters leads here - to the danger of ex-communication. Real discipline will be had if there is no repentance. There were false teachers who had infiltrated the church and were drawing people away from the gospel. This letter is the correction and the promise that on his next visit Paul would set things right.

"It is because Paul believes passionately that God's own spirit is at work in both his life and that of the Corinthians that he cannot let them go, cannot walk away

and found another church somewhere else, cannot simply bask in the happy relationship he enjoys with his beloved Macedonian churches, but must hash things out, must let partnership, participation and fellowship have their full expression." Wright

He is direct with strong language. But this gravity to his words reflects a deeper commitment. We can have a hard time seeing it because we read these epistles (letters to the churches) with the vision of the modern church which many people treat as a loose affiliation networking opportunity rather than a committed family.

This is the only church in town, and given their culture they must stay together and serve one another like family - especially when many have lost their biological ones in coming to Christ. Underlying all this is the Apostle's lasting commitment to the church and the stick-to-it-ness he has modeled is the expectation on the ground.

We want to get at this stickiness today.

1) Faith is built in community

This is the apparatus of Christianity and the Kingdom of God. People as ambassadors, appealing to one another and being formed by Jesus into family - children of God. Making those that were not a people into a people, given identity and purpose, fellowship.

Individuals brought together by the Savior of the world. This is where faith finds its genesis and establishment.

It is founded in truth. All of Paul's interaction is summed up in verse 8, "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth." This is against the false teachers that reject the truth of sin and salvation, replacing it instead with idolatry and sensuality.

This church was founded from what Paul taught them, what he proclaimed as the word of God - Jesus. The truth of the gospel, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah who was ushering in the age of his Kingdom. Forgiveness of sin, righteousness, strength to live, and the promise of eternity.

This is what anchors the church and the truth that Paul is calling those still wayward in the church back to. We don't graduate from the gospel but we mine deeper into its depths, the very words of life.

We are meant to see the inception of our faith in Jesus in the good news about him. As well as the ongoing strengthening of our faith, the value of it is in the gospel. In truth.

Faith built in community is also under authority. We wrestle with this one but the biblical model stands, Jesus has called under-shepherds to guide and protect his church. Paul is exerting his authority here being direct and calling them to repentance. He does so because he wants the church to thrive, he wants those drifting to be restored. **2 Corinthians 13:10** "For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down." (ESV)

Harder still than understanding the deep commitment of the body of believers, when you mention "authority" in the modern church we shutter. Paul is modeling not an overbearing hand for his own gain, but a firm grip on the shepherd's staff to protect and correct the flock. Draw them back into the sheepfold.

Our flesh may prefer an anti-authority individualism that spends time compiling resources or media detached from real life - preachers that you will never meet, who will never witness your life as you never witness theirs. We have these collections of celebrities that we can discard whenever they say something we dislike.

That is what the false teachers advocate for in Corinth, leading people away from authority to abuse and disregard for what is right, but the rooted church looks different.

There are varying layers of authority, but we are meant to be known, seen, engaged with. So that we can be encouraged by each other, and so we can be challenged by each other. We have to submit to that. We have to give ourselves over to it. Paul says it gives us a clear view of Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:3–4 “since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. [4] For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.” (ESV)

So the faith that is built in community is founded in truth, under authority, and tested.

A friend who is studying a new language being tested but forgetting what he has learned. We do this, our focus is distracted, and things we think we know don't shape us.

2 Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (ESV)

Here Paul is calling the church to introspection and evaluation of what they believe. There is no assuming going on. To be prone to the deception of the false teachers, there was an absence of confidence in the truth or it had been forgotten and he calls them to make sure they are in.

Just last Sunday four young people in the church were baptized! What a joy. But in asking to be baptized, especially when the pastor is the father of a couple of them, you want to make sure that their profession of faith is genuine. So you do some testing, asking questions, watching their lives. This is what Paul is encouraging.

This is where the “Jeep of faith” leaves tracks in the mud of life... And this is a timely exhortation, a lot of claiming Christ but not a lot of fruit these days.

Profession of faith and possession of faith are two different matters.

"Because we are prone to sin, it is our responsibility regularly to examine ourselves for evidence that the gospel is working itself out in our lives (v. 5). [**2 Corinthians gives us a good test**] Am I experiencing and sharing the comfort of Christ in affliction (1:3–11)? Is the forgiveness I have experienced leading me to forgive others (2:1–11)? Are the permanent promises of God more important to me than momentary afflictions (4:7–18)? Are my affections for

other Christians restricted by my sin (6:1–13)? Am I eager to give sacrificially in response to Christ's becoming poor for my sake (8:1–15)? Does the "one husband" who gave his life for me hold preeminence over all other suitors (11:1–6)? To the extent that we see the fruit of the gospel in our lives, we ought to rejoice (13:11). When we spot sin in our hearts, it is to a self-sacrificing God of love and peace that we can freely run (v. 11). For Christ was crucified for us (v. 4)." GTB

Done in community as evidenced by Paul's willingness to be tested as well. Hoping they will find out that he hasn't failed the test...

The model is of authority, or other believers, glad to bear with each other, to sacrifice for the flourishing of the family. **2 Corinthians 13:9** "For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for." (ESV)

Founded in truth, under authority, and tested. Faith is built in community. But it doesn't stop at the possession of faith, it is lived.

2) Faith is lived in community

Paul's purpose in his ministry toward the church is building up and not tearing down. He doesn't want to have to be severe, he wants for them to turn back to Christ.

It is the biggest decision we make in life, and it is a decision that we make every day. Where do we place our trust, who do we serve, who do we count as family? And what Paul has presented is not the "easy way," it takes sacrifice, investment and longsuffering, but it is the good way.

"The God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' – the God, in other words, of both creation and new creation, of covenant and new covenant – has shone his brilliant light in our hearts, giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the King (4.6). Once that light has begun to illuminate the world around you, enabling you to see everything and everyone in a new way (5.16), the choice is clear. Either you must go forwards, at great cost, into that grace, love and fellowship; or you must step back into the darkness." Wright

From examination to life. The invitation to take on the hard things for the glory of Jesus and the good of his church. This building up requires the one another of the church. We need each other to live out the faith that transforms us.

This whole book has been church-oriented, how to live, and exist together. Here it rolls on. **2 Corinthians 13:11** “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” (ESV)

Each of the commands, given in rapid-fire, requires a lot of us, an ownership of our faith that persuades us to these things. From Christ, his work, our identity in him. We live this way.

Having joy because of whose we are! Repentance to rejoicing.

Living out the agents of reconciliation bit with the aim for restoration - that those fallen away would be welcomed home, that relational tensions would be mended. That we would take the first step toward it, not happy to live with a grudge but seeking restoration.

Standing with each other in difficulty, extending comfort. As Christ has comforted us in our afflictions so that we can comfort others in whatever affliction.

We become a people that agrees with one another. Oh the opportunities we have had for this one in 2020!

"Agree with one another" was not a call for harmony for the sake of harmony, but for unity in the apostolic truth that Paul has been teaching in this letter. They were to agree with one another on the main things, not everything. This meant that God's word must be the standard and the source of unity." Hughes

Keeping Jesus as our center, our anchor, our hope. Living in peace. Not in opposition to one another. Not jockeying for privilege or place. Not leaving injured souls in our wake. But choosing peace.

It is this faith lived among others. Us walking together through life, ups and downs being built together.

Romans 14:19 “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (ESV)

And this is where God meets us. Living for each other, for these things.

The church becomes noticeable for our love for one another. We greet each other differently, with sanctified affection for those sharing in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit by the love of God and grace of Christ.

"God has poured out his Holy Spirit upon us, and the result is a stunning unity of fellowship. The Apostle John later testified, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The fellowship of the Holy Spirit includes fellowship with the Father and the Son - Trinitarian fellowship - and then a profound fellowship with others who share in that fellowship. The benediction falls like refreshing fragrance. The grace: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," grace upon grace, exponential mercy and goodness. The love: "The love of God," infinite and unending. The fellowship: "The fellowship of the Holy Spirit," a fellowship with Heaven itself. What greater things could we wish?" Hughes

Paul's exhortations and invitations in this letter and when he came to them worked. We know on his third visit he would minister among them and write the letter to the Roman church. And the fact that we have this to read and study indicates that it was accepted by the church, cherished and responded to with joy.

It is proof there is always a way back, from repentance into community. By the grace of Jesus.

Faith in Jesus is built and lived in community.

Be Tested - With others in the word. Find people that know you and are committed to you enough that they will be truthful and loving. Mine the depths of the gospel together. Apply the mercy and grace of Christ upon each other.

Get to the place that you can ask one another: "When you look at yourself in the mirror, do you see someone in whom King Jesus is living and active, or someone

who once knew him but now seems not to? When you listen to the sort of things you yourself say, does it sound like words that might have come from King Jesus himself, or are you simply talking the same way everyone else does? When you find yourself with your brother and sister Christians, do you respond to them as brothers and sisters, as people in whom you see King Jesus also living, or are they just 'other people'? And when you settle down and quiet your mind and heart, to pray and wait for God, do you know and sense the presence, the life and the love of King Jesus close to you, within you, warming and sustaining, guarding and guiding, checking and directing you?" Wright

Rejoice that these questions lead us to the answer and embrace of Christ.

Live for each other - "If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together." I know we are just a ragtag group of misfits who love Jesus. And we are going to live for each other. We can't live verse 11 without each other. As long as we are family, endeavor toward these things together.

Ways I have been encouraged by Reservoir living this way.

Ephesians 2:19–22 "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." (ESV)

Elsewhere Paul will use the imagery of an athlete training his body as how a Christian is to live before Jesus. Like study groups, training alone doesn't produce quite the results that you gain when training with others.

If you want to improve your mile time, run with someone else a little faster than you. If you want to push more weight than usual, lift with someone bigger than you. If you want to keep going, find a friend to keep you accountable, better than any app...

This life in Christ is a race - we run it looking to him, and we know, the race is better with friends.