

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 5:12

Session 53: Was Paul a Fanatic?

As you know, in 2 Corinthians, we are going through the various categories of the sufferings of Christ. We are now in the fifth category of the sufferings of Christ and it is divided into parts. This fifth category started in 2 Corinthians 4:7 through chapter 5:8.

Just to refresh your memory, the accusation against Paul and his ministry is that it looked like Paul's ministry and Paul's message was one of promoting suffering and grief.

They were saying, Paul, you are making it look like God wants us to suffer. That is not the case. God does not want us to suffer. However, that was the accusation.

That was the accusation because what was Paul teaching? Paul was teaching that God is not putting his hand between us and suffering to stop suffering from happening. Almost the entire Christian world looks at suffering like that. Let's pray for God to ward off suffering before it happens. Okay, the second part of this was in chapter 5, verses 9-11.

This was the fact that Paul's ministry stressed holiness and was contrary to ungodly living. I know I am putting up two different things here, but that was the whole idea. Because Paul's ministry actually now attacked this ungodly way of life that was taking place with people, many folks did not like that. Look, let me give you a very quick illustration of that using the word spirituality.

Now, I use the word spirituality from time to time. You probably do too. However, we have something that we have in mind when we use it. It started decades ago where the world also started using the word spiritual and spirituality, and it had absolutely nothing to do with religion. So when you hear someone in the world talking about, being spiritual, or they are interested in spirituality, that means they want to be connected to something beyond themselves.

Usually it's something like, a life of love and peace and that kind of stuff. But it's not connected to God, and it's certainly not connected to the Bible. Because when the world uses the term spirituality, what they are saying is I want to be connected to something beyond myself, but I still want to live my life the way I want to. I don't want God telling me what to do, and I don't want the Bible instructing me. I still want to do what I want. That is not spirituality in the way that we talk about it. I think everybody gets that.

Now we come to the third part; 2 Corinthians 5:12-6:2. This is about accusing Paul of being extreme in his evangelistic efforts; being too much, over the top, going too far. As a matter of fact, a little bit crazy. That is actually the title of today's lesson: Was Paul a Fanatic? That was what they were accusing Paul of being; (beside himself, being a little mad, being a little fanatical). Actually, not a little, but a lot, and that is the idea.

Now, for Paul, in this particular attack, this one is a little different.

This Category 5 is saying, Paul, we don't like your ministry. It looks like it promotes suffering. We don't like your ministry because you're stressing this. Holy living way too much. We don't like your ministry because everywhere you go, you're giving the gospel of Christ. And that made people uncomfortable.

And so today I hope what will happen is that we'll be challenged in being extreme in our evangelism, but not just that.

As an aside, I remember this. When I was a young guy in college, we attended a church in Shreveport, Louisiana. That church eventually licensed and ordained me into the ministry. I had gone off to Bible college and I was working in a church in Salem, Virginia.

It was the first full-time position I had ever worked. We had been there for a while; the pastor, me and one other guy on staff. Some things happened in the church, and because of that, the offerings went to almost nothing.

The pastor called us in one day and said, we're not going to be able to continue to pay you guys, so if you want to go somewhere else, I'll write you a letter of

recommendation and you can do that; and if you want to stay and trust God, you can. Well, at that time, I didn't know about sonship. I didn't understand that God's not intervening and all that stuff. So I thought, well, I'm going to pray and I'm going to ask God what he wants me to do. Now, you know what? If God's not doing that stuff, you know what the problem is with that prayer? I am not going to get an answer. And so I kept waiting for God to tell me what to do. Now in about a week, the other guy was gone.

And so we hung on for a month and we hung on for two months. We hung on for three months and it was pretty tight. We lived by the generosity of people that were in the church.

But after three months, I got a call from my home church back in Shreveport, to come and be the full-time youth director. So, again, I'm trying to be spiritual, right? And I said, well, I need to pray about it. My stomach was saying, "Yep, God's will, let's go." I did wind up going.

Why am I telling you this? Because I built a pretty good youth department when I was there in Shreveport. In that church, 7-12th grade in my youth department, we had a little over 300 kids, and I love these kids. I want them to love Jesus and have a productive Christian life

There was a young man in the youth group name Steve, and he and his mom used to come to the church.

One day, Steve's dad, got saved. When Steve's dad got saved, salvation meant everything to him. He totally invested himself in giving the gospel.

Now remember what the accusation against Paul is. Oh Paul, you're just going overboard with this gospel thing. What in the world is wrong with you? Well let me tell you the story of Steve's dad.

When Steve's dad got saved; he started coming to church and he started trying to learn. He learned how to give the Plan of Salvation. He wanted people to be saved. He had people on his list that he was going to go witness to and he was always talking about the Lord. Here's what it was. Steve's dad was so invested in

evangelism, he bought an old hearse and he had the following painted on both sides of the hearse: *Stop and think as I go by. You may be the next to die. Are you ready to meet God?* He drove that everywhere.

Now, as you can imagine, the folks in the church, there was two different groups when they saw that. Some folks saw that and kind of went; I don't think I want to ride with you. Other folks saw that and they went, wow, that guy is after it, isn't he? Now, that is the way it was with Steve's dad. By the way, I'm not telling you that so that everybody can go out and buy a used hearse and paint a sign on it. You know what that would be? That would be a sonship decision.

My point is this. Even in our church, people who were saved by grace and were grateful that their sins were forgiven, looked at that and said, ooh, that's a little too much.

Here's the Apostle Paul and he's involved in giving the gospel. By the way, how do you think this church in Corinth got started? It wasn't there when Paul got there. He's leading people to Christ. And in order to do that, you have to be giving the gospel.

How many times do you think Paul is talking about the gospel? Over and over and over. He's finding ways to work that into the conversation, right? Remember all the gods they had, you know, all these altars, all these gods. And Paul sees they built an altar to the unknown God in case they missed one, and Paul goes, hey, the unknown god, the one you might have missed, I know him. You missed him. Let me tell you about him.

Remarkable how Paul gets invested in that. Now you know the accusation, I want to give you how I look at this doctrine that Paul is giving us and then I want us to talk about this doctrine and how it affects you.

That's where we're going in these verses today. We're not going to get all the way to chapter 6:2, but let's get started by reading chapter 5, verse 12.

2 Corinthians 5:12 For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to *answer*

them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.¹³ For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God. And whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

The Corinthians were under this constant barrage of attacks against Paul. There were some false apostles out there who put themselves forth as some kind of expert; some kind of authority in the Christian life. And Paul is having to defend his ministry by saying Look, the power of my ministry is not in anything I'm doing, it's in God.

It is not in outward showy type stuff, but it is in the heart. It's the work that really works inside people to transform them. So I want us to look at verse 12 from Paul's perspective, and as always, he's under attack by these guys. By the way, don't forget the context of verses 9-11 that we just came out of. I know it was weeks ago, so let me remind you of it. Everything Paul is doing is in light of the fact that he will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He will not only give an account for what he's done, he'll give an account for why he's doing it. Now Paul knows this and so he is laboring with that in mind.

Paul knows everything is going to be reviewed, and what he is trusting is that if he can stand before God with integrity in his ministry, the Corinthians will see that and they will know that Paul has integrity again. Now remember what we just read in verse 12.

Paul said I am not defending my apostleship to you again; that is not what I am doing. What Paul is doing, though, is giving them an answer to his critics because who is hearing the criticism? Not Paul, but the church at Corinth. Those critics are very clever. They're going to come in after the fact, and they're going to say, hey, look, Paul's kind of missed the boat. They're going to review. They've got a checklist they're using all the time. Paul's ministry? He's telling you God wants you to suffer. Eh, not true.

But Paul is telling you, you're going to suffer and there's doctrine that can comfort you and console you while you're going through that and actually strengthen you. They are going to go: Hey, Paul is all hyped up on this sanctification thing. He is not living in the real world. This is the way the world is and you just need to get

used to it, and we are going to carry on ministry in that. Wrong again. And now they're going to come and they're going to go, have you noticed how overboard he is? I tell you what, I was talking with some people the other day and Paul came up and started talking, and all of a sudden, he's talking about how Christ died for our sins. Oh, my goodness, I was so embarrassed. Can you hear that?

These are the guys that are coming in, and look, that's part of the accusation, right? We have not gotten there yet, but another accusation is he is so weak in his appearance.

We have to start looking at things the way our Heavenly Father does. One of the things that you already know is that our table of likes and dislikes is going to get changed to match His. And the more we are conformed to the image of God's Son, the more we're going to value the things that our Heavenly Father values and not think it's so important the things that He doesn't think are so important.

So let me just take you back to verse 11, because I said I don't want us to lose this context. But we are made manifest unto God. Remember, He's doing all this in light of the judgment seat. And I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. So Paul is saying, hey, If I have some integrity before God, I hope you guys can notice that and see that for yourselves. And then he writes in verse 12.

For we commend not ourselves again unto you...

He said, we've done this before. We're not trying to defend our apostleship to you. But what are you doing? But give you occasion to glory on our behalf. You know what? When Steve's dad pulled up at church in his hearse, and someone said, gosh, can you believe he drove that thing over here? If you were like Paul, you would have an occasion now to glory on his behalf. That you might have someone to answer them, which glory in appearance and not in heart.

You see that? So if you're standing in the parking lot, in a group of men and somebody says, I can't believe he drove up here in that. You know it might be okay to say something like this. "I can't believe that a guy that's only been saved that long cares more about lost souls than us who have been saved for a long time and have a little maturity under our belt." Maybe that would be the thing to

say. That does not mean I have to go out and buy a hearse, but it means this guy is really doing it, and it may be unorthodox.

And I've heard all those arguments. Well, more people are turned off by that than get saved. Yeah, what are the numbers? What research did you use to come to that conclusion? I'd like to see that. No, that's something you say because that made you feel guilty. And now you've got to defend yourself by doing what? Discrediting him.

Guess where that tactic is from? The Adversary. Christians can't get caught up in that. I am just trying to make this point about Paul that, he said, I'm not trying to defend myself. I am trying to give you guys a reason to defend what I'm doing.

So, when these characters come in and they go, that Paul, his bodily presence is weak, his letters are weighty and powerful, but when he shows up in person, he's just an ordinary guy. He's a little pipsqueak, something like that. There's an opportunity to say, you know what? If it were not for that little pipsqueak, I wouldn't be saved, have my sins forgiven, because that's the guy that led me to Christ. How does he do that? He does that by giving out that gospel.

Look, you got Romans, and what was Romans? Romans was the establishment doctrine, right? And then you get 1 Corinthians and 1 Corinthians was the warning and the remedy for Satan's phase one attack, and that is to attack the message, and that's what was going on with Corinthians.

Now we're in 2 Corinthians and that is going to be the warning and the remedy for the phase 2 attack, attack the messenger. And who's are the messengers? It's Paul and those with him.

If you know the attack, you can see the pattern happening.

Hopefully, the Corinthians are far enough along in their education that they can look at this and go, yep, that's the fifth category of the sufferings of Christ. What are the sufferings of Christ? It is the attacks by the policy of evil, and in this phase, it's attack the messenger.

Yes, there's another one. This completes your simple son education, and that is Galatians; and that is to discredit the messenger.

Then you go to Ephesians, which is now another foundation of doctrine. Then you go to Philippians, which is now the advanced tactics of the policy of evil.

And you kind of go through that again. I don't want to get too far into that, but I do want to say that when you understand what is happening then that gives you a context for what is going on with Paul, so that you can apply that to your own life.

Now, the question is going to be this. When you stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ, can you imagine that He would ever say to you, *I think you were a little overboard on trying to get folks saved*. Think that was a little too much? No, I do not believe that.

What I would like to do is expand this lesson a little bit more. I want to make sure that we understand what Paul is doing.

The doctrine here and his behavior in light of that third accusation is not to defend his apostleship or his authority as an apostle, but to give them a reason to defend what he has been doing and to be able to see his response to his critics.

So when you get to verse 13, you'll get to see those two things kind of separate out. So let's talk about the verse from our perspective.

When we're attacked, when things are said about us because of our unwavering commitment to the gospel. By the way, I'm all for being zealous with the gospel, but I'm also all for having some wisdom when we're doing it. It is true, you can be zealous, but you need some wisdom to go with that so that this opportunity that you're giving people to hear the gospel, will make sense to them and they will be more likely to positively respond to it, okay?

Why in the world would you talk about the dispensational change? You would be having that conversation with who? Okay, so the gospel is certainly going to unbelievers. The dispensational change could also be shared with unbelievers to explain that the way that people were looking at God before is not the way that

we are looking at Him today, but you would also want to say this to Believers who may be stuck in that old way, right?

And so this would be a message that you would want to talk about. The mystery of Christ, that's a message that you would want to talk about.

When you have an opportunity and you're talking about the gospel; or when you're talking about, let's say, the dispensational change or the Mystery of Christ, or the fellowship of the Mystery, when you're talking about these kinds of things, when you have an opportunity, if you're doing this for the right reason, (so they could be saved), is that noble enough? Yes.

What would be your motive for talking to, let's just say you are meeting with your family and they're saved people. Why would you be talking to them about that? Because you want them to know what God is and is not doing today so they can have the kind of relationship that has real meaning, that is truly a relationship. And they can become exactly who God intended them to be. It's because you love them and you care about that. Look, we have kids. Do we care when they go to school if they get their education or not? We do. Why? Because we want them to learn to read and write and count and do math. Why? Because it helps them in this world. If they don't learn it, living in this world is way harder.

So now let's go to the spiritual aspect. If you don't understand these things, everything is unclear. People are foggy about that.

I don't mean this in a disparaging way. I don't, but some of the biggest names in Christendom, people who are well known, not just in this country, but around the world, who have giant churches, and even bigger followings are writing books wondering why God isn't talking to them about the things that are going on in their life. And they're trying to be honest about it. Now, you know what? High marks for that. They're trying to be honest about it and say, and just searching for God to be able to tell me what to do with this.

Once you understand, what God is not doing, someone comes to you and they say, you know what? God told me we need to move, we are going to sell our place and we're going to move to wherever. Can I just tell you? God didn't tell

you that. God told me I need to quit this job and go do that. Maybe you should or maybe you shouldn't, but don't blame that on God.

George Whitefield, a famous preacher from the past used to say, God told me my son is going to grow up to be a very famous and influential preacher. But while he was still a small child, that boy passed away from disease. So now you have to wonder, well, what was that about? God told you? He did not. It was the proud expectation of a father who was a renowned preacher, who really wanted his son to do that, and he confused that as though God was, that desire, as though God was prompting him to say, this is what will be his future. Now, I know that's a sad illustration, but I'm just saying to you, look, when you're talking about these things, and you should.

Let me interject right here. This is the policy of evil's attack. If when it's attacking the message you know what it's doing; it's trying to get you to teach a corrupted version of the message, but when the policy of evil is attacking the messenger it is because the messenger would not go along with the corrupted message. It refuted the corrupted message and stood firm on the truth.

So the next round of the phase of the policy of evil is to attack the messenger; to make the messenger do what? That's right. Just stop talking altogether. So if he's not going to give the wrong message, then you know what let's attack him until he just shuts up. That way the Adversary can get rid of the truth that way.

Why was I saying that? Because I am going to say something that I didn't want you to take the wrong way.

So, this doctrine that we're covering right here, do I want everyone in this assembly to learn it? Yes, but it only applies to people who are engaged in talking about these kinds of things to the extent that now you are suffering an attack from the policy of evil to make you be quiet. When that happens, it won't happen by the Devil walking in the room and saying, hey, you need to be quiet. Shut that down. You know where that will come from? Somebody sitting in the room.

Now, they won't be the author of it. That's why we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; but when that attack comes, you

don't want to see them like they're the devil, but you want to understand what that is. When you begin to do it enough that people go, hey, look, you know, if you invite that person, they're going to talk about Jesus, let's don't invite them.

My point is to say, this remedy, is not for you if you're not doing that. So why am I saying that? Because number one, I want us to do that. Why? Because I believe that glorifies God more than not saying it. I believe it serves the purpose of getting the message out there more than keeping quiet. And if for whatever reason we have remained quiet, maybe because we're unsure of what to say, or maybe because we're intimidated by the audience.

And look, I get this. There's a lot of nuance. Satan uses it against us. But I'm going to suggest that you look at this the way Paul did. He wasn't concerned about which people would be mad at him. He was concerned about one day laboring so that when he stood before Jesus at the judgment seat, he could do that with joy.

How will we do when we stand there and say, well, Lord, I know I knew the truth, but I couldn't say anything about it because if I did, they'd be upset with me. Let me ask you this. How will you ever reach them unless somebody says something?

What is more important is the fact that we do talk about these things. If you want to be more than a conqueror, folks, you're going to have to get in the fight. This ministry that you're involved in is already there. All kinds of things get said about this ministry that are absolutely untrue. And they are pretty wild.

Some of those things are being said so that maybe we'll stop. Some of those things are being said because it's a discrediting tactic so that nobody will listen, and I realize those are going on. So as a result, as a result, I have to employ Paul's doctrine here.

That has to be working in me, because, yes, we are experiencing the sufferings of Christ in some areas. Not nearly what it was for the Apostle Paul, I'm not even trying to suggest that. But I am saying that if we can do that as a ministry, we should be doing that as individuals.

And that means rehearse.

When you're going to talk to a group of people, have it in your mind what it is you might say and know how to wisely inject that into the conversation and know how far to go with that and use a little discretion.

Discretion is a real thing. That is a character trait, which means you know what to say and how to say it and when to stop saying it. If you ever listen to Arturo talk about why he's in on what MBI is doing it's because of Rudy De la Garza.

The way Rudy got Arturo interested was to not overwhelm him with information, but to give him little bits and pieces: saying things that he knew would have an impact on Arturo, and then just be quiet.

And Arturo said it was like, well, wait a minute. You can't just say that and don't say something else. And, you know, he wanted to know more. That's the tactic that Rudy used on Arturo, to get him interested. Knowing what you can say, how you can say it, and then knowing when to stop. And let that work on people.

You know what our tendency is? We're so excited about Sonship. We want to throw the whole dump truck on people, and they're so overwhelmed by information, they don't even know what kind of questions to ask. So Rudy's a smart guy. He knows how to do that. We have other folks that do that too. He's not the only one.

Here's what I'm going to say. These are the kinds of things that ought to be in our conversation so that we can make these things known. By the way, that's in the verses that talk about those things to make all men see the fellowship of the Mystery. It's going to be hard to do that if you never say anything about it, and if we're going to have the gospel be known, we're going to have to be able to do that.

Getting back to Steve's dad; he is not in the hearse every moment, but you know what, that guy always had a pocket full of tracks. He was leaving those everywhere, giving them to everybody.

What I'm trying to say is, it would be an honor for the world to look at us and say those people are always talking about Jesus. Those folks are always talking about

the gospel. Those people are always talking about the Mystery. Those people are always talking about the fellowship of the Mystery. You know when you are really doing a good job? When your critics know what the fellowship of the Mystery is. When your critics know, they are always talking about the mystery of Christ. Someone would say to them one day, well, what is the mystery of Christ, and they will say, *Well, here's what they say*. And then they lay it out. You never know. That other person may go, well, that actually sounds pretty good to me.

If our critics know us like that, what a homecoming it will be at the judgment seat. So if we engage in that, are you going to suffer some for that? You are. All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

You cannot get around it. You're not supposed to get around it. But let me tell you, here in this passage is a doctrine that is meant to equip you to be able to deal with that so that you're not affected by that. And the people who are in it with you will be encouraged.

Sometimes you're going to be in a situation where you'll be the only one to do that.

In 2028, we're going to have a Sonship Conference in 2028 that is about godly character. And one of the subjects at that conference is going to be how to stand alone. Because every once in a while, you may be called upon to do that.

I would love for this doctrine to actually inspire you to think, you know what? I have to start putting more of this into my conversations with people because I love those folks and I want what is best for them. And I'm going to try to do it in not only a godly and loving way, but a very wise way where I can maybe have an effect on these folks and to give an answer for that.

Look, it may be that you will have to do that by yourself. Can I tell you what's at the core of being able to stand alone? It is the fact that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are never alone when you are doing that. Now you say, oh, okay, okay, I know the Lord is with me, I know the Lord is with me, but I'm talking about there's not any other kind of people there that are doing that. You're kind of missing the point.

It never has been about other people. Now, the good thing is, in this group, there will be plenty of people that will love you and stand behind you and cherish you because you do this. But you really are never alone. Here's the second thing.

Standing alone is not about how we respond to other people. It is about how much we love the Lord; that's really what's at the core of that, and I do want to talk about just another thing. If you are saying, I don't have the courage to do that; may I say to you that that courage can be obtained by every saint. It is sitting in Paul's epistles. It is available to you because that strength is not really you. It is Christ in you, and every one of us can gain the courage to do this. And God really wants us to have that kind of courage.

In addition, when learn how to stand alone you, one of the other things you will learn are there are three scriptural concepts that form the foundation for being able to stand alone. You'll learn what those are and how to get those working in your life. It will literally change your life.

The next time we meet we will talk about being able to have the spiritual ability to stand alone and to talk about these things that Paul is being attacked for in no small way.

Today, I've tried to lay out the vision of what is happening to Paul. And if we're truly going to be members of the body of Christ and we're getting our cues from Paul, then these are the kinds of things that we're going to be involved in and we're going to do them wisely. I gave you an example of how Paul did that, remember? Now, I did it like he just, but when they said, oh, here's the altar to the unknown God, Paul sees that as a way to turn the conversation right back to the gospel.

Who is behind all of these accusations? Satan. And you cannot become more than a conqueror if you are not involved in the attack. If you are just going to remain quiet, there is no attack. You are doing exactly what Satan needs you to do. Just be silent. You know it. He cannot undo what you know. He can try to keep you from putting it out there for anybody else to know.

So today, I have tried to inspire us to do that.

Next week, we are going to put the plow down in these verses, and we're actually going to look at the doctrine that Paul is going to give for himself. You know what they're saying about him. He is crazy. He is mad. He is off his rocker. He has gone too far. He is a fanatic. He is beside himself.

Is Paul okay with that? He really is. He really is.

Why? Two reasons, and we'll see them both next week. This is the doctrine that allows Paul to be okay with that. And then what he follows up with, is pretty amazing.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we love you; we do. And we want to be the sons and daughters that you designed for us to be.

You've given us everything that we need, every mercy, every spiritual blessing, everything that is ours in Christ is exactly what we had to have to become in practice the sons and daughters you made us to be positionally in Christ. Thank you for that. And now hearing your word are doctrines that will strengthen us in the midst of carrying out our own ministry.

Father, I know not everybody that listens to this is going to be a pastor or going to go into full -time service, but we have a responsibility as members of the body of Christ to be faithful ambassadors and share that gospel message. Then with the saints, to be able to talk to them about those things, which are really important, those things of the Mystery which Satan is working hard to keep hidden and to keep a secret.

May we let the cat out of the bag. May we, Lord, engage in conversations that constantly reflect where our heart really is, the important things of life: the spiritual aspect. All of these things, Lord, I pray we would look at and consider. We'd look at what Paul is going through here and consider ourselves. And like I want to do for myself, I pray this whole church would say, this is how we want to live our lives. This is how we want to stand before the Judgment. This is how we want to be known. It's only going to be for a while. So may we make the most of

the opportunities that are before us. And Lord, I say this because of my love for You, but I also pray this because of my love for these saints, that we would all come to the fullness of what You have designed for us to be so that Your glory might be revealed. And so Lord, we together would have the benefits of what You have provided for us. In the name of Your Son, we pray. Amen.

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The Most Important Decision