

7/8/2018

ESF, Lord's day service message

A Winning Spirit
2 Corinthians 2:12-17

¹² Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, ¹³ I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? ¹⁷ Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

How can we keep fighting for the good cause and win in spite of stresses and discouragements? Here Paul gives us an answer to that question. Paul was physically tired and emotionally distressed because of all the problems he was facing when he was writing this letter. The Corinthian church, which he had founded and worked so hard for, was facing many troubles. He was really discouraged. But he found a way to continue doing God's

ministry with a winning spirit. Let's see how he could maintain a winning spirit in the midst of discouragement and stress.

With victory in Christ

When Paul was discouraged by negative results of his ministry, God reminded Paul that in whatever situation he was in, he belonged to the victory in Christ. God encouraged Paul by this truth: *Christ never fails, even if people may fail or your ministry may fail*. So, Paul realized that as long as he belonged to Christ, he would share Christ's victory.

How often? "Always." He says that our victory is not sometimes but all the time. We have moments of failure. We have the ups and downs of life. But Christ enables us to overcome all failures and downs with his victory. Jesus encourages us with this word: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 Paul proves that the resurrection of Christ really happened. Then, he concludes, *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:57). With the power of Christ's resurrection, we can always claim victory.

To make that point clear, Paul illustrated what happened when Roman soldiers won a battle with their general.

In Paul's time, there were special processions in Rome to honor generals and soldiers who won battles for the Roman Empire. The

celebration processions were awarded to generals and soldiers who defeated their enemies, gained new territory, and won a victory over a foreign power.

These processions were awe-inspiring. All the people of Rome came out to the street to see the parade of triumph. The people were carrying the flags of the various military units. They carried carts containing the spoils of war. Musicians were playing pipes. Captured kings and prisoners of war in chains were marching to their death or to become slaves. The priests were carrying pots of fragrance to celebrate the triumph. And all the people of Rome were shouting, "Lo! Triumph!" To all the citizens of Rome and the Roman soldiers, the smell of fragrance was the smell of victory. But to the defeated kings and prisoners, it was the smell of death.

The apostle uses the spectacle of a Roman triumphal procession to illustrate the glory of the Christian's experience in Christ. Believers who are following Christ are like the Roman soldiers in the triumphal procession. As the triumphal procession was given for fighting a battle and winning the battle, Christians must expect that there is a battle. If we want to share Christ's victory, we must fight with him and for him.

This battle is a spiritual battle: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Ephesians 6:12).

As we fight battles in Christ, we don't need to be afraid of anything because Christ has authority and power to conquer all "spiritual forces in the heavenly realm":

...The reason the Son of God (Christ) appeared was to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8)

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons...(Mark 16:17)

The victorious generals and soldiers of Rome might get one or perhaps a few triumphal parades in their lifetime. But Christians can experience "Lo! Triumph!" day in and day out as we trust Christ to lead us. Everyday, even though it might look like defeat, Christ leads us to His triumph. When things seem to be falling apart, Christians can still shout, "Lo! Triumph!" That's a life with a winning spirit. Keep believing that in Christ, you can win every spiritual battle. Fight evil forces with the authority of Christ.

With the fragrance of Christ

Paul was able to maintain a winning spirit by realizing that he had a fragrance. It was the fragrance of Christ.

Think about the fragrance in an air freshener. When we spray it, the fragrance expels any bad odor around us. That is the power of the fragrance. The fragrance of Christ is more powerful, influential and beautiful than any other perfume in the world.

The fragrance of Christ is the fragrance of God's love, grace, majesty, and holiness. It is the fragrance of the Spirit of Christ-joy, peace, gentleness, patience and self-control. It is the

fragrance of the mature and beautiful character of Christ. It expels all bad odors caused by men's sins. It turns everything, even the worst and ugliest smell of sin into something beautiful.

There was a man named Nabil Kareen who was a Muslim but was converted by the fragrance of Christ in Christians' lives. He and his entire family were Muslims. His father was very violent and abusive. His father frequently shouted and cursed. Nabil resented the severity of his father and the unrest of family life.

He was a truck driver in the army of his country. The army did not pay him much. He desperately needed some income. He was looking for a job outside of the army. One day he heard of a strange group of people who were doing a lot of building. They were building a road, putting in water pipes and building a College. First, he thought that group of people were from the government. But, instead of being a government project, he found out this group was religious. He was impressed by them and attended their church to see just what was going on in there. The sermon on the Word of God preached in the church impressed him so much that he went into the town and bought a Bible, and then he found shade under a pine tree and began to read it.

Nabil secured a job helping them with the construction and noticed that these peculiar people never cursed each other. Their language was pure. They loved and respected one another. All of this fit in with his reading of the Bible. God began to speak to him. Deep down in his heart, he knew he was a sinner. His first act of dedication was to throw away his pack of cigarettes. He told

his family about Jesus but they cursed him. He heard of some local Christian meetings and in spite of the warnings of his father that he would be cast out of his home if he was ever baptized, he came up out of the water happier than he had ever been in his life.

Good perfumes are very expensive. To make the fragrance, Christ sacrificed his life on the cross. The price of Christ's fragrance is His sacrificial death. But Christ gives the fragrance to all who believe in him free of charge. There are only two kinds of reactions to the fragrance of Christ. There are people who accept it as God's gracious free gift. And there are others who do not believe in the free gift and reject the fragrance.

To those who accept Christ as God's free gift, the fragrance becomes the smell of salvation. But to those who reject him, the fragrance becomes the smell of death: "*For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing*" (verse 15).

Also, the fragrance of Christ in believers never disappears. It remains in believers even if they fail. The fragrance of Christ still remained in the Corinthian believers although they were struggling with many problems. And the fragrance was strong enough to expel all odors coming from their troubles. The fragrance was graceful enough to be spread through all of them. That's why the apostle Paul was able to thank the Lord in restless moments caused by failures and problems of the Corinthian Church.

Although Christians are imperfect and still sinners, God lets the fragrance of Christ be contained in them and spread through them. No one can stop the fragrance of Christ from spreading through the believers' life.

Be sure that believers are not the fragrance, but Jesus Christ who is in them is the fragrance. Believers are the containers of the fragrance. When believers are struggling with problems and sins, look at Christ's fragrance in them. Think about the fragrance of Christ you have. Always remember that as long as Christ is in you, you are a container and carrier of his fragrance. Christ spreads his beautiful fragrance through you. So be proud of the fragrance in you. Use the fragrance to expel ugly smells by reaching out to people with the fragrance of Christ.

With sincerity

When the Corinthian people were attacking Paul with many negative accusations, he got discouraged. Yet, he was not defeated by the attack. Because while he was working for them with a sincere heart, he had confidence of winning their hearts eventually. He testified in verse 17: *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.* Here "sincerity" means "pure motive."

Paul never worked at the Corinthian church for his personal gain but with a pure motivation of God and for the benefit of their souls.

During China's Han dynasty, there lived a politician called Yang Zhen, a man known for his upright character. After Yang Zhen was made a provincial governor, one of his earlier patrons, Wang Mi, paid him an unexpected visit. As they talked over old times, Wang Mi brought out a large gold cup and presented it to Yang Zhen. Yang Zhen refused to accept it, but Wang Mi persisted, saying, "There's no one here tonight but you and me, so no one will know."

"You say that no one will know," Yang Zhen replied, "but that is not true. God will know, and you and I will know too."

That is sincerity!

Paul worked in the church with sincerity. He spoke before God. He carried responsibility for his work and his ministry before God, whether people saw it or not. He never served people for the sake of money or his power or fame.

When he worked with such sincerity, God provided him everything he needed. Although he did not live a financially rich life, he never lacked money for all his basic needs.

Eventually, the Corinthians realized Paul's sincerity and love for God and them. And they came to respect him as a true apostle and a servant of Christ. So Paul won their hearts.

To win people's hearts, you have to live with sincerity as Paul did. Put God first in everything you do. Put people ahead of

money. Ben Franklin said, "When you are good to others, you are best to yourself." When we bless others, we bless ourselves! Proverbs 11:25 says: *A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

When you put God first over all things and put others ahead of your selfish gain, you may suffer financially for a while. You may be misunderstood and even attacked by people. But eventually, you will see victory over all the sufferings and attacks. You will gain people and money too. That is a winning spirit.