



Our United State Our Affections

2 Corinthians 6:1-13
November 1, 2020
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Well, Chapel Hill, we are one member larger. Monday morning at 2:14, Cecilia Grace Toone joined our church family, daughter of Cooper and Deb! 6 lbs., 4.2 ozs, 19 inches long...and she has the lungs of a longshoreman. And I'm sure you'd like to see a couple more pictures. Of course, Cecilia is the most beautiful, most brilliant, most exceptional, most promising baby ever born.

You grandparents understand, right? The minute I held Cecilia...I was flooded with emotions. Finger grab! I had never met her...but I adore her. She is part of my family. Part of ME. Without knowing her, I love her. I will always love her. Nothing she could do would change that. We Christians ought to understand this. We have done nothing to deserve it, but by the grace of God, we have been welcomed into his family. This sermon series, "Our United State," is a chance to remind ourselves what unites us as a Christian family...in a time of deep national division.

Wednesday morning, we will wake up and half of us will be sad...or angry...or despairing; convinced that the future is lost. And the other half will be convinced that God has answered our prayers and the future is bright. And we will continue to be a nation hopelessly and angrily divided.

That's bad. You know what's worse? The Christian community will be divided...including our church to some degree. I know from emails I have received in recent weeks, how passionately we hold differing views. Unfortunately, in a time when civility is nonexistent, it is becoming harder and harder ...even for Christian siblings...to hold differing views...and yet treat each other with kindness. Sweetness. Affection.

Last week at Alpha, two women discovered for the first time that God adores them. They received Jesus and became forever-members of God's family. It is a wonderful



and easy thing to receive the free gift of God's love. It can be harder to share that same love with each other. Here's the center aisle in our sanctuary. Half of us are sitting on THIS side of the aisle. The other half is sitting on THIS side of the aisle. If ever there was a time when speaking about those "on the other side of the aisle" resonated...it is now.

The Corinthian church was divided...including in their opinion of their founding pastor. And Paul urges them to get past those divisions and rekindle their affection for one another...and for HIM! He felt rejected! Listen to this raw, passionate appeal in 6:11-13, our text for the morning: We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

II Corinthians is Paul's most vulnerable letter. He lays himself open...in an attempt to be reconciled to this group of Christians with whom he lived for 18 months; a church he had planted! After he left them to continue his missionary travels, Paul experienced terrible persecution along the way. There were some jealous leaders in Corinth who thought that Paul's suffering disqualified him as an apostle. After all, real Christians never suffer, right? So, as Paul languished in persecution, he was doubly pained by the opportunists in Corinth who defamed him...and attempted to seize power.

This letter is Paul's rebuttal to their false teaching and power grab. He HAS been called by God to be their leader...their suffering leader...just as JESUS was a suffering Lord. In fact, beginning in verse 4, Paul makes his case for his love and faithfulness with a long list of proofs.

"...as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way." In other words, he says, "I'm going to list the ways that I have proven the genuineness of my love for you and of my apostolic call." He says, "I've proven myself '...by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger..." We certainly know something about riots and beatings these days, don't we? And I know something about sleepless nights these last months. Paul says, "I experienced all that and more...my endurance under these awful circumstances should prove to you the authenticity of my faith and ministry and my love."



Then, he heads in a different direction in verse 6. "I have also proven myself '... by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love..." This is an abbreviated list of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says, "My Spirit-filled behavior in the face of persecution ought to be further proof of my authentic faith and calling." He's not done.

Verse 7. "I have proven myself '...by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left..." This is Paul on offense. He says, "I have been courageous. Willing to fight for the sake of the Kingdom if need be; willing to go into spiritual battle for the gospel! Do charlatans do that?"

And he closes with verse 9: "Amid honor or dishonor, slander or praise—even when we are treated as deceivers and imposters—we remain steadfast and true" (The Passion).

Regardless of how others slandered him...Paul was steadfast and true...to God...and to his beloved Corinthians. In the face of suffering and rejection, Paul has shown endurance, a Spirit-filled, courageous life and a witness that was steadfast. In short, he says, "I have done everything I can to be reconciled to you. To prove my devotion to God's calling. To prove my affection for you. What else can I do? Nothing!"

Notice! Paul isn't talking to unbelievers. He's pleading with fellow Christians. We're not talking here about our relationship with the unbelieving world. We are talking about restoring relationship within the church. Jesus once said, "By this will the world know that you are my disciples...that you love one another." Paul was willing to do anything to rekindle the affection his Corinthian friends once held for him, affection that had grown cold, bitter and suspicious. Have any of you ever been a part of a cold, bitter and suspicious church? It is NO FUN! It is NO CHURCH!

So...after that long list of proofs of his love for them, comes the punchline in verse 11: We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return...widen your hearts also (Verses 11-13).



Paul pleads with the them: "...you have restricted your affections." That word "affections?" In Greek, it is *splagsnois*. Do you know what *splagsnois* means, literally? "Guts! Bowels. Innards." It's kind of a gross word. *Splagsnois* even SOUNDS yucky. But it was a popular expression at the time. You loved someone "with all your guts; with all your bowels." You loved someone with all your *splagsnois*.

But, Paul says, "You have restricted your *splagsnois*." Anyone here ever had a restricted *splagsnois*. It is not pleasant! Certainly not something you choose for yourself! And it's something you take care of as quickly as possible, right? Paul says, "You have CHOSEN to be relationally constipated! You have chosen to restrict your affections. You have decided that you are going to reject me...in spite of all I've done to prove my affection for you."

Then he illustrates with ANOTHER body part. The heart. This isn't the first time, is it? Remember a few weeks back when Paul, rallied the Corinthians with these brave words: "WE...DO...NOT...LOSE...HEART! (2 Corinthians 4:16) I heard from a member of the Peninsula School Board that she passed that sermon on to her fellow board members because she felt they all needed renewed courage in this difficult time.

This was Paul's clarion cry to courage, to endurance; hang in there and trust God even in the face of hard times. We all needed to be reminded of that, didn't we? Well, Paul takes that metaphor one step further. It isn't enough to not LOSE heart. Now, he says we must "widen our hearts." "Our hearts are wide open to you. In return...widen YOUR hearts also." Reminds me of the Grinch...his heart was three sizes too small. "Widen your hearts!" Paul says. To the Corinthians. And to the Gig Harborites.

Hear this, Chapel Hill: we must widen our hearts toward each other. We must make room in our hearts for each other. In a time of division, could there be a more important message for us to heed? That all of us believers, whichever side of the aisle we might be seated on...must CHOOSE to...DECIDE to...WORK to...widen our hearts towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those with whom we might disagree on earthly, temporal matters...but with whom we have the most important thing in all



eternity in common: we are the adopted children of Almighty God! We must widen our hearts toward each other.

BUT, what does it look like to widen our hearts? Well...God taught me a heart-widening lesson just this last week. When I was doing youth ministry in Bakersfield, there was a young man who showed particular promise. He gave his life to Christ, was devout, passionate, dedicated...I KNEW he would become a pastor. And he did.

But in seminary he turned sharply to the left. Over the years, he became one of the most ardent voices in our former denomination advocating for the ordination of lesbian and gay persons and for same-sex marriage. This put us at odds since I was an ardent voice for maintaining biblical standards of ordination and marriage. And so, what once had been a close relationship, was torn apart. In fact, at one point, he told me that my comments were "embarrassing." That hurt; to be called an embarrassment by my young protégé? It was the last time we talked. I came to view him as the enemy; as the proponent of dangerous trends which ultimately caused us to leave our denomination.

For years, we had no contact. I didn't want any contact with him. And then...THIS last week of all weeks...I received word that his mom had died. So...I thought, "What the heck." I tracked him down and sent a note of condolence. Immediately he responded back with gratitude, telling me how much my ministry had meant to him. Several emails followed. At one point, I spoke with regret of the division between us. He replied, "Oh, I'm sure we're still divided – politically, philosophically, theologically. But I'm happy to have reconnected with you personally, Mark."

Here's what I wrote back: "Yes...you are obviously right. We are STILL divided in so many ways. But finding a way to have relationship in spite of huge differences...that is the work of older men, I think. And if we, as Christ-followers, can't figure out how to do it...what hope does this toxically divided country of ours have?"

My friend and I will NEVER agree on many of our political and theological differences. We will never exchange pulpits. Our votes will always cancel one another out. But this week, God has taught me what it means to widen my heart toward a brother in Christ...who is DEFINITELY on the other side of the aisle. We all need to do this.



When I held Cecilia for the first time, I experienced an almost “painful joy.” A widening of my heart; a deep love that is indescribable...until you experience it. And I remember thinking two things: “When my son holds his daughter, it will be the first time he has a clue of just how much I love him. And this is just a taste of how much my heavenly father loves me!” It is THROUGH this heart-widening love of Jesus for us...that we receive the capacity to love others in that same way. Even difficult others.

Wednesday morning...you can choose. Angry, constipated relationships...or wide hearts. Whether you “win” or “lose” Tuesday...Wednesday you can CHOOSE the nature of your affection toward your siblings in Christ. Not in your own strength...but because the Holy Spirit lives in you. The one who reconciled you to God...and can reconcile you to the rest of your church family...even if they are completely wrong in how they voted! 😊

Wednesday morning...let us begin to show the world what it means to live with wide hearts. If we Jesus-followers can't do it...who in the world can?