

## Sermon Notes

### *Corinthian Navigation: To Praise & Not to Praise*

1 Corinthians 11:2, 17

January 17, 2016

#### **Introduction: Navigation**

It's time to get our bearings through some reminders of what has been covered already and by pointing to some of what's still to come in First Corinthians. This is part of our "navigation" of this Epistle. As we do this we will see that Paul had many things to say to them by way of commendation and encouragement. But that's not all. He *also* had quite a bit to say about some matters that needed attention and correction. They were doing well in some areas; not so well in others.

This will be seen in the two verses before us today (2, 17).

#### *Both Verses...*

*Both* verses include the same word: "praise" or "commend"

In *both* verses, this word "praise" comes before Paul's instruction

In verse 2, Paul commends them, "I praise you..." and in verse 17, Paul does not commend them, "I do not praise you."

#### **Reflecting Corinth**

This "you are doing well" and the "you still need work in this other area" found in chapter 11, can serve as something of a summary of 1 Corinthians. This reflects the reality of that congregation...and all other congregations as well.

Paul begins with praise. He congratulates them on their reception of the delivered traditions (παρέδωκα...παραδόσεις). Traditions are not all (or always) bad or evil. They are not a problem here [see also 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6]. For this "praise", Paul will speak of their order in the gathered church, and how that order had to do with the roles of men and women, and their God-given distinctiveness as men and as women (thus the mention of hair). Paul opens this first part of chapter 11 with the words, "Now I praise you..."

Paul will also point out some areas where they are falling short, where they are not reflecting the life of the received Gospel, and particularly with regard to their behavior at the Lord's Table. This has everything to do with their communion with one another. He begins that section with the weighty words, "Now in giving you these instructions, I *do not* praise you..." (11:17).

#### *Paul started this Epistle with praise*

This has been seen elsewhere in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. We all know that there were many problems ("issues") going on in and around the church there. Some would say that they were a mess. However, Paul does not open the letter with some kind of tear-down. He starts with acknowledging the obvious work of the Lord among them, and His great provision for them [see 1:4-9]. This may be a surprise to many, but Paul has much praise to offer about what's going on in Corinth.

Great difficulties often provide precision and sharpening.

#### *Still, there were serious problems...*

Amidst that which is praiseworthy, there is also that which is not praiseworthy. There many things which still deserve attention and correction. The Corinthian Church, like all churches, had this as well. Walking through this Epistle, we have become aware of a number of the problems...

#### **Reflecting Paul's Pastoral Task**

Paul's "praise and not to praise" occurs in this passage and in the entire Epistle, and this is part of his pastoral task. His example is not only instructive, it ought to give us cause for pause. Do we listen and not hear? Are the words read and not received? Throughout this letter Paul is pointing out the wondrous *provision* in the Gospel, as well as the ongoing *pursuit* for those of the Gospel. Provision & pursuit. Both must be present. There are some areas where we are doing well, and there are other areas where we are weak and need to grow. Paul boldly offers both confirmation and correction, and Paul is not alone in this. John did this as well (Rev. 2:2-4; 13-14; 19-20).

Most all will admit that this is needed. Most will say that this is "good." However, it's often not easy to receive.

Rooted in each of the problems is an additional problem; the problem of blame-shifting. This is an issue as old as the Garden. It is serpentine.

Pastorally, Paul also knows of the tendencies of those with tender consciences, and the tendencies of those with consciences which are not-so-tender.

What about them? What would 50 or so years do for the church in Corinth? [Clement of Rome]

What about us?