

Clogged Arteries – Part 2

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 6:11-13

“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 unto children) widen your hearts also.” (II Corinthians 6:11-13 – ESV)

In our previous lesson, we noted Paul making an impassioned plea for the Corinthian people to open their hearts to the ministry of the Word that Paul and others had been giving them. Those who had ministered to the church did it with an open heart. But the Corinthians had mixed affections. Like clogged arteries, they were not completely open to the things that were being shared with them.

Our goal is to look at some of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians and determine what things can either clog or open the heart to the ministry of God’s Word, to the ministers of God’s Word, or to the fellowship of the saints. The first consideration is

Christ’s love creates ministry – II Corinthians 5:14-21

II Corinthians 5:14 says, *“... The love of Christ constrains us (i.e., controls / compels us).”* *“We love Him, because He first loved us”* (I John 4:19). We need to be searching for the evidence of Christ’s love / God’s love working in our lives and in the lives of others (Ephesians 3:14-19). Sometimes that is difficult because God works in mysterious ways and uses great difficulties to make us Christlike (II Corinthians 4:6-18; 6:1-10; Romans 8:26-39; Philippians 3:10; 4:6-13; I Peter 1:3-9).

Paul started his second letter to the Corinthians with the concept of God’s grace, mercy, and comfort working in our lives, during adversity, so that we, in turn could minister the same to others when they suffer adversity (II Corinthians 1:2-4). Paul wanted them to see the big picture of all of us united in Christ, suffering for Christ’s sake in this world, and being consoled / comforted by God, as we further His cause (II Corinthians 1:5-12). God has called us out of this world and united us with His loving presence and provision (II Corinthians 1:22-23).

In the second chapter, Paul wanted them to see how love motivated Paul to give the church correction, so that they could keep the testimony of Christ pure before the world. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentioned an erring member, who was involved in an improper relationship. For his own good, he needed to be disciplined. Thankfully, good results came. The erring brother repented. Now, in the second letter, Paul encouraged the church to show love and restore that brother to full fellowship. See I Corinthians 5:1-13; II Corinthians 1:23 – 2:11; 7:2-16.

Whether there be personal adversities or sin going on in the lives of our brethren, the life of a Christian and the corporate life of a church is full of hard things. We can choose to run to God and open our hearts to His grace, mercy, comfort, and instruction or we can harden ourselves to what He is doing in our lives. We can open our arteries with love and faith, or let them be clogged with bitterness, cowardice, laziness, and indifference. See James 1:2-8; I Corinthians 12:25-27; II Timothy 3:16-17; I Peter 4:10-11. Consider the true Christian response that is taught in The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23).

Because of the love of Christ, we have a ministry to one another (fellow believers) and to the world. Let's examine II Corinthians 5:14-21 more closely.

Christ's love brings new life and a new method of operation in our lives.

- **II Corinthians 5:14** – We were dead in sin. Christ's death liberated us.
- **II Corinthians 5:15** – Our new liberated life is not for self-absorption / self-gratification. We belong to Christ and should live to please Him.
- **II Corinthians 5:16** – Our perspective about relationships has changed. We no longer look at people the way we used to look at them. They are souls in need of a Savior. Or, they are fellow-members of God's forever family. We used to look at Christ differently before we were born again. But now He is our living, loving Lord and Savior – our King, our Shepherd.
- **II Corinthians 5:17-19** – A new life means radical change. We are reconciled to God. Now we are His friends. Whatever we are given to do, it is now to serve a greater purpose. We are all ministers, seeking to help others to become reconciled to God.
- **II Corinthians 5:20-21** – We are sent on a mission to be representatives of Christ to a world that is not reconciled to Him. Make sure of your friendship with God. God provided everything by giving His Son for you to be a new creation in Christ.

We must not harden ourselves to this love. God is not imposing on us when He calls us to surrender and serve Him. We were perishing – spiritually dead to God and headed to eternal destruction. He sacrificed His Son and saved our lives. Let us keep our hearts open to the great privileges we have as children of God – as fellow servants of our King. See Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 2:20; Romans 5:1-11.