

Matter of Trust

2 Cor 1:12 – 2.17

If you had to name five people you could really trust, who would be on your list? Who can you trust? I'm guessing not the checkout operator at the local supermarket. Mostly, it'd be the people closest to you you feel like you can trust the most. Hopefully your dad or your mum's on the list. Or husband or wife. Or your brothers and sisters, or closest friends. The people closest to you ought to be the ones you can trust most.

That means of course the people closest to you are the ones who can hurt you the most. If they prove to be untrustworthy.

Billy Joel's got a song called a matter of trust. He says.

Some love is just a lie of the heart
The cold remains of what began with a passionate start
And they may not want it to end
But it will it's just a question of when
I've lived long enough to have learned
The closer you get to the fire the more you get burned
But that won't happen to us
Because it's always been a matter of trust

Billy Joel knows that relationally if you've got trust then you've got half a chance. Without it he says it'll end, it's just a question of when.

When trust breaks down. The writings on the wall.

It's been a problem since Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve were in the garden and they got some bad advice about who they should trust.

Instead of the God who made them, who breathed life into them and gave them everything they had. They listened to a talking snake. Strange thing to do. First to listen to the snake. But even worse to turn your back on the living God.

In the garden the snake insinuates that God's not to be trusted. So Adam and Eve, they shift their trust... from the words of God....to the words of the snake.

And we've had problems with TRUST every since. We have problems trusting the God who made us. And we've got problems trusting each other as well. And for good reason. Sin not only erodes our trust in God....and it also makes us untrustworthy..in the fullest sense....in relation to each other.

Billy Joel's song's hopeful. For us it's a matter of trust. But there are plenty of others that are HATEFUL. Songs written by people who've been betrayed and lost trust in relationships.

There's the classic Aussie break up song by the angels

Am I ever going to see your face again. No way....

And Ugly Kid Joe's got a break up betrayal of trust song called I hate everything about you

Here's how it goes.

I, dont like a thing about your mother,

And i, hate your daddys guts too,

I, dont like a thing about your sister,

And if you find yourself somewhere where there's a group of people and that song is playing. YOU WATCH THEM.... sing along. Watch the passion as they join the chorus. And you might even have to hold yourself back from singing these words....

IGET SICK WHEN I'M AROUND

Ican't stand to be around

IHATE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU.

We are people with issues of trust. One way or another, in relationships, at home, at the office, in the business world, in the political world.....we're people with ongoing issues of TRUST.

And so are the people in the church at Corinth. It's almost like the picture in the garden again. They're not sure whether PAUL.... is to be trusted. They're getting some advice insinuating that he's not. They're weighing things up for themselves.

And what we're looking at here is Paul's response to those doubts. And in a sense they're particular responses to a particular situation. But more than that for the Corinthian church for us. Paul is answering the bigger question...the deeper question...

Who can you trust? Who is trustworthy? And he points us to Jesus.

And it's interesting – he does it in a two stage process. First he points to himself. As someone in Christ....as one of God's servants. He points to HIMSELF....before he takes us on the journey to the heart of the gospel - to Jesus himself. So we'll follow that through in a minute.

But first lets just get a handle on the issue Paul's responding to. Paul's first visit to Corinth is there in Acts 18... that's when the church starts. And in Paul's first letter to

the Corinthians it seems like early on there was quite a few problems in this church. Division, sexual immorality. So Paul had to go back a second time – Paul himself there in verse 1 of chapter 2 calls the second visit a painful one. And that’s when he made the statements being referred to in verse 15.

See he says I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.

Paul’s PLAN was to come back to see them twice more after the painful visit. That’s what he’d PLANNED TO DO. That’s what he TOLD THEM he’d planned. HE planned to visit twice....but the issue is.... he didn’t. And so Paul’s knockers have gone straight to work. The serpent said about God– so he said you can’t eat from any tree eh? And here’s the voices you can infer from Paul’s response – didn’t come back eh? Like he said. That’s interesting. You trust this guy?

And just like Adam and Eve were separated from God. The voices are trying to separate Paul from the church at Corinth. Through an erosion of trust. And you can assume trying to pose an alternate place to put it. And so Paul’s under fire.

And you pick it up from the tone of verse 17 Paul says When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say Yes, yes and No, no? In other words, Am I just like everybody else in the world Paul says? You can only trust me as far as you can throw me?

He takes it seriously. See whether you like it or not.....you can’t escape the fact that the genuineness or otherwise of the message is carried by the genuineness OR OTHERWISE....of the messenger.

The conduct of the messenger is vital. Business people know the importance of customer trust. Successful businesses tend to have a code of conduct for their employees – not necessarily because they think it's important in itself....but at the very least they know it's important for business.

One of the most serious breaches for footy players. Is a public breach of conduct. You behave badly, you're charged with bringing the game into disrepute.

I've even noticed on some company vehicles and taxis. I think it was Telstra Vans at one point. They have a bumper sticker on the back which says. my conduct as a driver is on display. Please phone 1800 whatever...if you've got any complaints.

Paul's conduct is under scrutiny here. The insinuator is insinuating. You can't trust Paul. You can't trust what he says. The serpent's speaking.

And the surprise is, and I think probably the most challenging thing for christians in this passage. And a powerful part of his response here....Is what Paul DOESN'T SAY – notice he DOESN'T SAY...oh well I'm just a sinner and what can you expect. He doesn't say yeah I'm not perfect, but Jesus is. Now.....Jesus IS PERFECT and that's where he's going. But first he's able to say. As one of Jesus' representatives. My conduct is on display. He doesn't shy away from it. He says ok then....Let's have a look at it.

From verse 12 ..You're suggesting something's amiss. Let's have a look and see.

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

Paul can say my conscience is clear. In fact my conduct towards you is my boast.

The managing director of Black and White cabs says this. He says.

The reputation and high regard which Black & White Cabs enjoys within the community is a source of great pride for everybody within the organisation.

And Paul's able to say the same thing. He's able to point to his behavior, and say I'm proud of it. Especially in relations with you. As God's servants. We've acted with the sincerity. And when you have a look you'll see towards you....we've acted with God's grace. Not worldly wisdom.

I don't know if you've ever got one of those phone calls where they're selling time share. You don't actually know that's what they're doing you don't find that out 'till afterwards. But they ring and they say. How would you like a FREE weekend away? And in retrospect I know now, that against all of my instincts I know I should say no thanks.

But they get you in with this almost irresistible offer \ unrejectable proposition. And all you have to do is attend a 2 hour seminar. You think it's too good to be true. When you attend the seminar, you find out that it is. As they put this huge amount of pressure on you to sign up for thousands of dollars worth of timeshare.

You sit through the seminar and afterwards You have to sit down with a consultant, who's done their research. Who presents you in your own private little session with a beautiful bound and personalized set of brochures. And armed with the fact that you're about to accept a ""FREE WEEKEND AWAY"" they say sign here. And there's other couples all around doing the same thing. And you can see them. And beside each couple is a bottle of champayne. Read to be opened. And if some one signs a deal. In the sight of everyone around...they pop the champayne.... and celebrate. If

you want to get out of there with just the free weekend like they offered...you have to say no at least three or four times. With the pressure covers all around you popping the cork.

That's the worldly way of operating. And we know it we say there's no such thing as a free lunch. Worldly wisdom. And Paul says. That's not how we do business at Jesus incorporated. We didn't act towards you that way. We acted towards you with grace.

Paul isn't on a commission. He doesn't get paid for the number of people he brings into Jesus incorporated. He's not on a quota system. He doesn't GET ANYTHING for doing what he's done. Except maybe a few more stomach ulcers ...as he works for their maturity.

It's a great boast I think....to be able to say there's no kickbacks for me...in telling you about Jesus. I get no material benefit. Except the knowledge of sharing something good for free, in the same free way I received it. That's grace. And grace...is a MIS-TRUST BUSTER.

And verse 13 Paul says that's how we acted toward you, and you know what I'm talking about.

For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand

It's a bit of a valvoline moment Paul says you know what I mean

And I hope he says. That, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In a world where trust is very thin on the ground. Paul stands up and says.... you can trust me. And I don't think he's saying he's perfect. But he can say my conscience is clear. My motives are true and right.

I don't say yes and no in the same breath. My boss frowns on it he says.

Verse 18 as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not Yes and No.

And Paul's not saying he's intrinsically faithful or trustworthy in himself. He points to Jesus and he says. Because he is trustworthy. We are.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in him it has always been Yes.

See, even at the garden. God was blameless. God was faithful, God was trustworthy. We're the ones who proved not to be. Yet God didn't give up on us. He's remains faithful. What he's said he'll do he'll do. And the unfolding story of the bible is God's testament to that.

And when I read the bible – there's two questions that keep coming up for me.

One – how could we be so stupid? How could we not trust God and be so unfaithful. That's the first one. And the other one's this. How is it that God keeps on being so loving ... and so faithful to such unfaithful people?

And you read about God's promises to bless the world through Abraham. And he does. Promises blessing. And it comes. Abraham becomes very rich. Promises numerous descendants. And they're like sand on the seashore as they leave Egypt. He says trust the man I've appointed...and they walk through the sea on dry ground....and

they follow a man named Moses who's holding a stick....while the great army of Pharaoh is drowned. God is trustworthy. Always was. He's the only one who is.

And Jesus is the ultimate proof of God's faithfulness. We broke the relationship. God sends his son to die fixing it. And it was always the plan. Those promises in the old testament Paul says, only really make sense when you understand them in the light of Jesus.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ.

God's not doubleminded. God's not unable to do what he says. God's not untrustworthy. Everything he's said he'll do he's done. And he's done them all in Jesus. In Jesus death is undone. And we have life. In Jesus we have peace with God. And forgiveness. In Jesus we call God Father. And the list goes on. Every promise Paul says...YES in Jesus.

Now for one, that ought to help you to understand the bible. Because as you read the old testament. It's like reading the front half of a novel. It's a story that's going somewhere. And it's not resolved 'till the end. Everything in the OT in some way is pointing to the person of Jesus in the new testament.

But Paul's not giving a lecture in biblical theology. He's pointing to the one person in the world you can trust. He's pointing to the one through whom we can start to be trustworthy people. And to be able to trust each other again.

You got issues of trust? Put your trust in Jesus.

And if that resonates with you....you know what you ought to say? You ought to say Amen. Through him Paul says, the amen is spoken by us to the glory of God.

God's the one who makes you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

He's trustworthy. And if you take a close look he says. You'll see that in Christ, we are too. Verse 23 I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. HE says I didn't want to make another painful visit that just distressed us both, that's why I wrote instead.

And the content of this letter of Paul's? Obviously a rebuke. But that's what real trustworthy friends do don't they. It's sort of cruel to be kind.

If you jump down to verse 4 of chapter 2 he says I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

And Paul follows it up with an example. Someone who's being punished somehow for some wrong doing at Paul's urging. We don't know what it is but they do. And Paul says now it's time to forgive this person. And comfort him. And show your love for him again. Which is the whole purpose of the punishment. It's for the person's good.

That's how it works. You can see it in action. The loving person sometimes has to take the tough action. And it's a sign of trustworthiness. The person who pulls you aside and gently tells you your breath stinks. That's who's trustworthy. The rest are saying it behind your back.

Here's Paul's point. It's hard to know who you can trust. But whatever I do...it's for your good. Because I'm in Christ.

I'm trustworthy towards you, because Jesus is trustworthy to me.

Real trust is to be able to trust someone unconditionally no matter what.

And Paul says I trust Jesus no matter what.

Thanks be to God he says, verse 14. Thanks be to God. Who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

Which sounds a bit strange. Because more often than not Paul's in jail. Or on the end of some nasty accusation about his trustworthiness. And you'd think he'd have good reason to be questioning God's trustworthiness. But in Christ he says. It's a triumphal procession.

As God works out his purposes. To God we're the aroma of Christ Paul says. To some that's a foul stench, the stench of death. To others it's the smell of life.

Some love us, some hate us. We might be uncertain about how we'll be received. But we're certain about this. God is trustworthy, and so whatever happens, it's a triumphal procession.

Who is equal to such a task? Well not people who are in it for the money that's for sure. 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.

