

11.1 The Second Letter to the Corinthians

1A. Continuing trouble at Corinth

After leaving Corinth, Paul spoke of his plans to make a return visit to the Corinthians, but it would be after some delay, because of the opening of a wide and effective door at Ephesus. He writes, I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, ⁶ and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. ¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am (1 Cor. 16.5-10).

Of course, we know that there were many ungodly things going on at Corinth; thus, Paul penned first-first Corinthians and First Corinthians. Note that the difficulties he describes relate to attitudes and actions of people at Corinth toward Paul, and thus he concludes with a warning about coming to them with a rod: ¹⁸ Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. ²¹ What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? (1 Cor. 4.18-21). Arrogant people charged Paul with fickleness regarding his proposed visit. This is just part of the picture and Paul lays it before us in sarcastic sounding language:

⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! ⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. ¹⁴ I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children (1 Cor. 4.8-14).

In not seeking to shame them, Paul is saying that he is not merely seeking to embarrass them; he wants them to have the shame of repentance.

However, in the end, they remained unrepentant, and he did have to come to them with a rod. News of things going on at Corinth caused Paul to make a special visit. Between the first and second canonical letters, Paul made an urgent visit to Corinth that involved distressing confrontation. When he writes the second canonical letter to the Corinthians, he hesitates to make “another painful visit.”

2 Corinthians 2:1-9 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. ⁵ Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure- not to put it too severely- to all of you. ⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.

2A. Outline of events

- 1) Paul founded the church at Corinth, then went on mission
- 2) He wrote first-First Corinthians because of sexual immorality [the letter about sexual immorality, cited in 1 Cor. 5.9-13]
- 3) He wrote First Corinthians to clarify what he wrote earlier, to answer questions sent to him, and to deal with irregularities such as conduct at the Lord's Table
- 4) He made an urgent and painful visit to Corinth [cited in 2 Cor. 2.1]

5) Paul wrote first-Second Corinthians [the painful letter or severe letter, the letter of tears, **For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, 2 Cor. 2.4**]

6) He wrote Second Corinthians

He clarifies things he said in first-second Corinthians (the severe letter).

He explains why he delayed visiting them again (2 Cor. 2.1 in context of 1.15-24). Is it because he is fickle?

Paul reports on his comfort regarding the Corinthians (2 Cor. 7.2-16). Titus brought him news as to how the people at Corinth repented. In this way, God comforted Paul (7.6)

Thus, Paul tells the church of his intent to visit them in the near future, a third visit (2 Cor. 13.1).

The purposes of the letter are manifold including the matter of a collection for the persecuted church of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor. 9 on the principles of giving: as God has prospered; on the Lord's Day; with sowing and reaping 2 Cor. 9.6-15, as Gal. 6.6-10)..

3A. The problem with chapters 10-13

How can Paul exuberantly rejoice over the repentance of the flock at Corinth (2 Cor. 7.2-16) on one hand, while he appears to speak of the church as unrepentant in 10-13?

He uses sarcasm that hints at opposition to his work, 10.1-2

Will his letters (from a distance) cause fear while he is afraid (when present)? 10.9-10

They may stray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ, 11.3

Paul can stand head to head with the super-apostles at Corinth, 11.5

However, there are false apostles, deceived and deceiving, 11.13

Paul performed signs of a true apostle, 12.12, 19 (in self-defense)

He fears the continuance of sexual immorality and sensuality, 12.21

The third visit may involve firm action, not sparing those who sin, 13.1-2

The explanation must be that the church made great progress and Paul rejoices in that progress. Nevertheless, serious problems remain and they include claiming to be apostles while denouncing Paul as apostle. The problems that remain cover a wide range of things from apostolic authority (the authority of the apostle and thus the authority of Christ's word of Scripture through the apostles) to radical sensuality. Throughout the letter, a tone reflecting conflict remains despite the progress of the church in their attitude toward Paul.

Lessons

1) The saving of sinners throughout the world through the apostolic message is messy business and we must do our work with tender hearts, but with tough hides. This is much needed perspective for pastors as well as church members. The mess "we's in" is one in which we are in. We are in it and we are part of it. Part of it comes from those who are not truly of us.

Note to pastors: every prospective pastor should read the Corinthians letters repeatedly until the weight on their shoulders knocks them down at the feet of Christ; every pastor needs to return here often to hear the Lord promise His sufficient grace (12.9a) and to boast in weakness where Christ perfects the preachers strength (12.9b).

2) There is a need for serious self-examination, 13.5

3) Paul warns with strong words to build up and not to tear down, 13.10

4) It is part of genuine family life to rejoice,

So do so, 13.11

In a context in which you aim for restoration, comfort, agreement, peace and love

As a reflection of the grace, love, and communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit