

Study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

Paul addresses some further explanation as to his change of plans. He was accused of not being sincere in his motives. However, on the contrary, Paul was not wanting to rush into a situation that would require him to sort out something that the church at Corinth needed to sort out for themselves.

Body of the Study

Explanation on the change of plans and the first letter

Forgiveness of the offender

Uncertainty at Troas

Apostolic Ministry

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are some examples from the New Testament of sorrow and joy being intertwined together? What are some examples from your own life?*
- *What choices did the Corinthians have to make in relation to the things that Paul was saying to them? Similarly, what choices do we have to make in our lives to respond to the call of God?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Explanation on the change of plans and the first letter

Paul continues the theme that he began in chapter 1, with the explanation of his change of plans. The reason was that he wanted to “...*spare them...*” (2:1:23). If the Corinthians had not put things right before Paul came, then he would have no option but to come in *heavy-handed* and sort things out himself. This would not be a pleasant experience, either for them or for him “...*for I determined that I would not come to you in sorrow...*” (2:2:1).

The reason for the first letter was so that things could be put right before he came “...*I wrote this very thing to you, lest when I came...*” (2:2:3).

The first letter was not written out of spite, but out of love. It would be easy for the Corinthians to react to what Paul said to them, and conclude that he was writing out of spite. In fact, some of them did react this way. But Paul assures them that his letter was written “...*with many tears...*” and his motives were “...*the love which I have so abundantly for you...*” (2:2:4).

Forgiveness of the offender

In the first letter chapter 5, Paul gave instruction to disciplining the man who was openly involved in an inappropriate sexual relationship. Immoral relationships might be common practice in the world (although this one was extreme, and would not be regarded as ‘normal’ by society). But such relationships were not to be tolerated in the church. The man was to be disfellowshipped, so that he would be forced to make a choice whether he continued in his relationship with the woman, or with his relationship with the brethren (and God).

The brethren had in fact implemented the discipline, and it had had the desired effect of causing him to repent “...*the punishment inflicted by the many is sufficient...*” (2:2:6). The problem was, what to do now? They had (apparently) turned a hardened heart towards the man, and were not willing to forgive him. So, Paul instructs them “...*you ought rather to forgive and comfort him...*” (2:2:7). There was a danger that if they didn’t take him back, that he would turn back into sin. He was given a choice: The relationship with the woman, or the relationship with God’s people. He had made the right choice, but if the brethren were closing off the relationship with God’s people, then what choice would he have? It’s obvious that he would (most likely) ventured back to where he had been.

Paul makes the point that it wasn’t him who was grieved by this matter – but rather it was the Corinthians themselves who should have been grieved by allowing such a thing to happen and continue in the church in the first place (2:2:5). In writing about the matter, and instructing them to sort it out, Paul says that he was putting them to the test. He was testing their faithfulness (2:2:9). On the matter of forgiveness, it was not a question of whether Paul should forgive the man or not. Whatever the church in Corinth decided to do, that was enough for Paul (2:2:11).

This illustrates an interesting principle of congregational independence. As an apostle, the things Paul wrote, and the things that he taught were authoritative – it was just as if God had said them. In fact, God did say them – He said it through the apostles. Whilst the apostles had given

instructions on how things within a local congregation were to be administered, it was not their place to act as “policeman” ensuring that each local congregation had acted appropriately in each and every instance. Such would be a physical impossibility, nor was it warranted. The *responsibility* for implementing the instructions – for acting within the framework that the apostles set – rests with those in the local congregation. So, Paul says “...if you have forgiven him, then I too have forgiven him...” (2:2:10). Whatever collective action the church had implemented, then Paul would accept that action. Paul here sets a quite specific example as to how we should act in relation to brethren who have been disciplined by a church where we are not a member (as Paul was in this case). However, we also need to note that Paul says that he had already forgiven the man “...I have forgiven him for your sakes in the presence of Christ...” (2:2:10).

Finally, Paul adds that we need to be mindful of how Satan works. If we do not help and support one another as brethren, then we feed the opportunities for him to act and “...take advantage of us...” (2:2:11).

Uncertainty at Troas

After leaving Ephesus, Paul came to Troas expecting to find Titus. Titus had been to Corinth, and was instructed to come back to Paul with news about how things were going in light of the first letter. Paul (apparently) had arranged to meet him in Troas, but when Paul arrived there, Titus was not there, and Paul therefore “...had no rest in his spirit...” (2:2:13). He was obviously concerned to know of news from Corinth.

In Troas, Paul was very well received, and says that “...there was a great opportunity...” (2:2:12) however despite this opportunity, Paul (almost uncharacteristically) moved on. This shows how great a love and concern Paul had for the Corinthians. He wanted to so much to know what was going on in Corinth, and to make sure that things in the congregation were *put right* that he would forsake the great opportunity that he had in Troas to preach the gospel.

Paul departed for Macedonia, most likely Philippi, but perhaps Thessalonica or Berea. There he found Titus, and received the long awaited news from Corinth, and then wrote the second letter.

But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. (2:7:6-7 NIV)

Apostolic Ministry

Paul now begins what is to be a lengthy discussion on apostolic ministry that will continue through chapter 7. In his usual style, he intertwines the thoughts with those under the present discussion. He was obviously elated at the news from Titus when he finally received it in Macedonia. It was as if it was a victory that he had achieved. In fact it was a victory of triumph through Christ.

Dickey¹ writes: “...Judging by Paul’s defense of himself throughout this letter we must infer that the charges against him were serious. Some were evidently accusing Paul of vacillating in his decisions (1:15-17), causing the Corinthians sorrow (2:2), not having appropriate credentials (3:1), being boastful (3:1-3; 10:15), restricting the Corinthians (6:12), being a coward (10:1, 10), being fleshly (10:2), not being an original apostle (11:5; 12:11, 12), demeaning himself and the Corinthians by working with his hands while amongst them (11:7-11; 12:13), being deceitful (12:16), and, perhaps, even intending to embezzle the funds being collected for Judea (8:20-23).”

¹ Dickey, M. Thaxter “Triumph in Christ” Florida College Lectures 1984 “Ministering Obedience to Christ – Studies in Second Corinthians” p.39
Study of Corinthians by Graeme Offer

In this context, rather than a straight defence of the accusations, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the victory that we all have as Christians.

The idea of joy and sorrow are interweaved throughout scripture. We cannot think of the cross without thinking of the sorrow that Christ took there, and at the same time, through it He brought joy in taking us out of sin and back to God. The sacrifice of Jesus might seem like a story of weakness in a man who could not stop his enemies from putting him to death. But on the contrary, when we know the whole story, it is a story of joy and triumph of a God who was so strong that He allowed them to do it for the joy that was on the other side. “...*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God...*” (Heb 12:2 NIV)

Paul might have been held with some degree of scorn by some (but certainly not all) of the Corinthians. But as an apostle – and as with all of the apostles – his ministry was special, and totally focussed on Christ. Some might have regarded him (Paul) as an imposter “...to some we are the aroma of death unto death...” (2:2:16). But those who really knew Paul knew things differently “...to the other the aroma of life unto life...” (2:2:16).

The definitive answer to these things is to look at what was being taught, and credentials of what they were teaching. Some had come around “...peddling the word of God...” In contrast, the sincerity of Paul and the rest of the apostles could not be faulted. Paul says “...*(we speak) as from God...in the sight of God in Christ...*” (2:2:17)

Anyone who knew Paul – and many (probably most) of the Corinthians did – ought to have no question as to his motives or credentials! By way of reminder, they had the miraculous gifts and they were mostly given through the laying on of Paul’s hands. They ought then to listen to what he had to say.