

II CORINTHIANS

FOR BEGINNERS

MIKE MAZZALONGO

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1.

Review of I Corinthians

To understand II Corinthians, it is assumed that you have studied I Corinthians, and since there is no guarantee that this is so, I'd like to begin with a brief review of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

The City

In 146 BC, the Roman general Lucius Mummius crushed a Greek bid for independence from Roman domination by destroying the city of Corinth. A hundred years later, Julius Caesar sent a colony of veterans and descendants of freed men to rebuild the city that in time would grow to great importance. Corinth became the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It had a population of about 600,000 people, and was well suited for trade and commerce because of its three seaports and its location on the isthmus between northern and southern Greece. It became the Roman capital of the Greek district of Achaia. Because of its location, it drew a mixed population of Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Jews who had come to trade.

Corinth was a wealthy city given to commerce, art and entertainment. The Isthmus Games (second only to the Olympics) were held there. The outdoor theatre located in the city seated 20,000 people, and the covered theatre could accommodate a crowd of 3000.

The population worshiped a variety of pagan deities and many temples were located throughout the city. The two most popular gods among the people were Poseidon, god of the sea, and Venus, the goddess of love. Corinth was the central location for the worship of Venus, and the temple dedicated to her had 1000 temple prostitutes freely available to pilgrims who travelled to worship at her shrine. The Corinthian people were not given to the practice of chastity or sexual purity, and their immoral habits were a great challenge to those who were converted to Christianity. The city was well known for its immorality, to the point that during that era the term "to Corinthianize" something meant to prostitute or desecrate that person or object. Aelian, a Greek writer of that period, said that when a Corinthian was portrayed in a play, he was always shown as being drunk.

The Church

The church was established in Corinth in about 50-51 AD by Paul when he was on his second missionary journey. He was assisted by Priscilla and Aquila, a Christian couple who had fled Rome because of the persecution of Jewish people there (Acts 18:3) and settled in Corinth. Paul also travelled with Timothy and Silas. Another worker who helped build the early church there was Apollos, who was taught by Aquila and Priscilla. The story of the establishment of the church in Corinth is found in Acts 18:1-19:1.

¹ After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of

Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.⁴ And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.⁶ But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."⁷ Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.⁸ Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.⁹ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;¹⁰ for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."¹¹ And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,¹³ saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;¹⁵ but if there are questions about

words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.”¹⁶ And he drove them away from the judgment seat.¹⁷ And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

¹⁸ Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.¹⁹ They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent,²¹ but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

²³ And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;²⁶ and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way

of God more accurately.²⁷ And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

¹ It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.

The Members of the Church

Here we see Paul establishing a church made up of Jews who have left the synagogue but who face animosity from their Jewish countrymen for leaving, and Greeks who have a background in sexual immorality and paganism. Most of the people in these two groups were poor and from the lower ranks of society (I Corinthians 1:26). In addition to this, there were great social, cultural and religious differences between these new Christians.

Paul supported himself in his ministry by working with Aquila and Priscilla in their tent-making business. This is an important point to remember and it will become more relevant further on in our study of this book.

The Greeks had great pride in their intellectualism and oratory skills (I Corinthians 1:17; 2:1-5). They also were argumentative and clannish (I Corinthians 1:11-13). I Corinthians does not describe the Jewish Christians very much, but we already know how self-righteous, legalistic and bigoted they could be, so this congregation faced a serious challenge in trying to create unity between these two very different and difficult groups. We also know that Christians at that time and place usually met in homes,

public halls or schools whenever it was safe to do so, and usually in secret (privately owned church buildings became more common by about 250 AD). We do not know how large in number this congregation was, but we do know from Paul's letters that it had people with varied backgrounds.

Background of I Corinthians Letter

The letter of I Corinthians was probably written in the winter of 54-57 AD, roughly three to five years after the church was established. Initially, Paul had been with them for about 18 months (Acts 18:11). This means that by the writing of II Corinthians he had been away from them for a few years.

At the time of writing, Paul was in Ephesus (Ephesians 16:18), but several events took place that moved him to write and send this letter to them:

- He had received a report about the affairs of the church from Chloe's family, who were members of the church in Corinth (1:11).
- He had also received a letter from the church asking him questions on several topics (7:1).
- He had urged Apollos to go and help them resolve their problems but Apollos had declined (16:12).
- He had received news from several brethren from Corinth who had brought him a gift from the church (16:17).

Some interesting facts about I Corinthians:

- Next to Romans, it is Paul's longest letter.

- Compared to his other letters, it is the most varied in content.
- Corinthians contains the strongest rebukes of any found in other letters written by him.
- This was the second letter he had written (5:9), the first was lost and we have no record of it.
- I Corinthians gives us the clearest picture of the life and problems of a local church in the Gentile world during the first century.

OUTLINE OF I CORINTHIANS

The concern of I Corinthians was not doctrinal (who is God, the nature of salvation, when the end will come, etc.) it was pastoral in nature. These weak, immature, divisive Christians needed a mature leader to show them why and how they should lead the Christian life. I Corinthians contains an introduction followed by the discussion of nine vital concerns this church had to deal with:

1. Introduction – 1:1-9
2. Concerns regarding division – 1:10-3:4
3. Concerns regarding leadership – 3:5-4:21
4. Concerns regarding immorality – 5:1-6:20
5. Concerns regarding marriage – 7:1-40
6. Concerns regarding freedom – 8:1-11:1
7. Concerns regarding worship – 11:2-34

8. Concerns regarding spiritual gifts – 12:1-14:40
9. Concerns regarding resurrection – 15:1-58
10. Concerns regarding the collection/Close – 16:1-24

Like a good elder, Paul shepherds this confused, disobedient church by teaching them what the Lord requires from them in different areas of Christian living.

Events Between I and II Corinthians

There is no absolute agreement about the order of these events, but something resembling this occurred between the writing of the first letter and the second one Paul writes to these brethren.

It seems that the Corinthians resolved most of the problems that Paul mentioned in his first letter to them. After a time, certain Jews came into the church and began to stir up trouble which in turn required a visit from the Apostle Paul (2:1). This would now be his third visit to these people (12:14). These Jews were creating problems in various ways:

- They were presenting themselves as legitimate Apostles (11:13).
- They stirred up strife and division.
- They criticized Paul and challenged his authority (11:19-20).
- They tried to build up a following for themselves among established churches but did not evangelize.
- They taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation along with the keeping of Jewish ceremonial laws.

- They criticized Paul for receiving money for his work in an effort to undermine him before the Corinthian church. This is important to note because Paul refers to these accusations in his second letter.

Paul had written I Corinthians from Ephesus and then left for Macedonia to collect money for the churches there (2:13; 8:1-4). At this point he fell ill (1:8-11). While Paul was recovering, Titus arrived in Macedonia and gave Paul a report describing the effect of his letter to the Corinthians (7:5-16). In this report Paul is made aware of new problems (personal attacks, etc.) taking place and he writes II Corinthians to deal with these new issues. He gives this letter to Titus for delivery (8:16-24). Later, Paul will visit Corinth again for a few months and during this time will write a letter to the Romans and, perhaps, one to the Galatians as well (Acts 20:2-3). His stay at Corinth will be short lived, however, as a plot will be formed to harm him and he must escape by changing these travel plans (Acts 20:2-3).

During this time, we see Paul's work as an Apostle include the very real tasks of caring for the needy (organizing a special collection for the poor), teaching (through the writing of epistles), mentoring (training and directing Titus), resolving disputes and divisions (the specific counsel he gives in II Corinthians) and preaching along with church planting (establishing and nurturing the churches in that region).

OUTLINE OF II CORINTHIANS

Unlike I Corinthians, II Corinthians is a subjective book. I Corinthians teaches the church how to do things and how Christians conduct themselves in various situations. II Corinthians reveals what it is like to be an Apostle. The book can be outlined in the following way:

1. Introduction – 1:1-2
2. Apostolic Experience – 1:3-11
3. Apostolic Explanation – 1:12-2:11
4. Apostolic Ministry – 2:12-7:16
5. Apostolic Fellowship – 8:1-9:15
6. Apostleship Defended – 10:1-13:14

In the next chapter, we will begin our study of II Corinthians by following the outline above.

2.

The Experience of Apostleship

II CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

In the introductory chapter, I provided some basic information about Corinth and its people as well as the church and the background of these letters. Some key points to remember were:

- Corinth was a cosmopolitan city filled with sexual immorality and grand temples dedicated to the worship of pagan deities.
- Paul established the church there and it comprised of both Jews (with their ancient religious background) and Greeks (who had been influenced by pagan religious practices and Greek philosophy).
- Paul's first letter was sent as a response to the problems that this church was having several years after its formation, problems of conduct, attitude and personal conflict which seemed to have been settled by the Apostle's instructions.

- At some point after the first letter from Paul was received, Jewish Christians from Corinth began to attack Paul's motives, question his credentials and criticize his work among these brethren in a bid to establish themselves as the new leaders. They promoted the idea that believers had to be circumcised in order to become true Christians, and this teaching threatened to divide the church.
- The next letter Paul sends to the Corinthians deals with these troublemakers and the charges that they were bringing against him. It is personal and subjective in nature, and deals with the proper conduct of an Apostle rather than the conduct of the church which he addressed in his first letter to them.

Introduction

Paul's opening statement gives insight into the problems that he was facing, namely the personal attack made and division caused by the challenge concerning his authority as a genuine Apostle.

^{1a} Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

Letters at that time were structured differently than letters today. The signature (yours truly) was usually at the beginning and the salutation (Dear Joe) was at the end. Paul uses the signature to establish his credentials. He introduces himself as, "...an Apostle of Christ." The term apostle in its generic form referred to one who was a "messenger," but it was used here in the more formal way referring to an ambassador or official messenger. Paul's introduction states that he is not just any messenger, he is an ambassador of Jesus. This was significant because in the years following Jesus' resurrection and ascension

a person did not refer to himself as an "Apostle" unless he was one of the men specifically chosen by Christ to fulfill this role.

Although he does not say it, Paul establishes the critical difference between himself and the so-called "Apostles" that were causing trouble there: he was appointed by Christ and they were self-appointed. This underscores several important principles concerning legitimate leadership in the church which can be summarized in the following brief manner: no commission without commendation, no position without permission, no office without ordination. For example, in the Old Testament every Jewish person was required to worship, serve and obey God. However, those who did specific tasks (priests, Levites, etc.) were appointed to these positions in the beginning by God, and then continued in these roles through genealogical succession (Aaron was first appointed as high priest by God and then his sons served in this role after him, Exodus 28:1-ff).

Similarly, in the New Testament, we learn that Jesus selected the Apostles as His special messengers. Later, we see them appointing deacons and elders for positions of service and leadership in the local church (Acts 6:1-7; 15:1-2). As the church grew and spread throughout the Roman Empire we read that elders in various congregations appointed evangelists (I Timothy 4:14) whose work was to proclaim the gospel and establish new congregations. Part of the evangelist's ministry in organizing new churches was to train and appoint leaders (elders) who would serve in these churches and, as part of their ministry, would themselves appoint new evangelists and deacons thus repeating the cycle of reproducing the church and its leadership from generation to generation.

It is this pattern of church authority and appointed roles that I am referring to when I say that there are no self-appointed preachers, teachers, deacons, elders or missionaries in the

church (no commission as evangelist without the commendation of the elders, no position as deacons without the permission of the church, no office of eldership without ordination by other elders or an evangelist). When examining this issue in the Bible we discover that in every case, these men were chosen and trained in some way, and only then appointed / commended / ordained to their work by the leaders in the local congregation.

I've explained all of this to underscore the point that in the first verse of II Corinthians Paul states that it was Christ Himself who had appointed him to his position as an Apostle, but no one had appointed these other leaders to this role. They had simply appointed themselves and, consequently, had no real authority.

1^b and Timothy our brother,

In his signature Paul includes Timothy, who was originally sent ahead of the first letter to prepare the Corinthians for the arrival of his teaching (I Corinthians 4:17).

1^c To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

It is amazing that with all the problems this church had and continued to have, Paul still referred to them as God's church. They were weak, sinful, immature and ungrateful, but still God's people (this should be a reminder to us when we are ready to quit the church because there are one or two people who do not measure up to our standard of holiness).

Paul also includes others (Achaia) in the greeting since he presumes this letter will ultimately have a wider circulation than the church at Corinth.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He offers a blessing upon them. This was not only a sign of his kindness but also a reminder of his position, since the one in the higher position always blessed the one in the lower position.

The Experience of Apostleship: Suffering - II Corinthians 1:3-11

If you were asked to summarize the experience of being a parent or an engineer or teacher in a single word, what would that word be? For example, if a police officer were answering this question perhaps he would say, "service"; for teachers: dedication; for sales people: perseverance.

Paul is saying in this passage that, in a word, the ministry of Apostleship is suffering.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Note that Paul does not complain about the suffering that he must endure. We know from other passages that he has been whipped, stoned, imprisoned, mobbed and survived several plots to kill him. As a matter of fact, this very letter is written to people who are criticizing him and trying to destroy his work.

He tells his readers that he concentrates on the comfort that God supplies for him throughout these sufferings and not the

discomfort itself. The suffering is there as a mainstay of his Apostolic ministry, but it is the comfort of God that Paul focuses upon. He explains that the comfort he receives from God enables him to do two things:

1. He can praise and honor God for the comfort that He supplies when suffering is at hand.
2. He can empathize. Paul says that he passes on to others, who are suffering, the comfort that God gives to him for his own difficulties.

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

He comments on the fact that his trials never outweigh his comfort in Christ. The trials are always there, but so is the comfort of God, and in greater abundance than the suffering.

⁶ But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; ⁷ and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

In these verses, he explains how his experience as an Apostle is related to the Corinthians. The purpose of Apostleship was to bring people to Christ, and everything the Apostles experienced was somehow related to his charge. In these verses Paul says that everything in his life serves his ministry, the suffering as well as the comforting. If he suffers, he does so to defend or proclaim the faith so people like the Corinthians could receive

Christ and His salvation. If he is comforted, then he has something to offer them when they are suffering. His hope is that they remain faithful to Christ despite the trials they experience, and in so doing, share both the sufferings and comforts of Christ like he (Paul) and other Christians do.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; ⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, ¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

In this section Paul provides his readers with a concrete example of his suffering and comfort that they can relate to. He describes a time, while far from home, when he was threatened with death (from disease or persecution, we do not know). He sincerely believed that he was close to dying and was losing all hope of recovery. He goes on to say that God saved him, even though he had given up hope. Paul describes the comfort he felt not only for his healing but also for the encouragement he experienced in the knowledge that the brethren were earnestly praying for him. He adds that he was also greatly comforted by the fact that God was honored by the prayers of thanksgiving offered up by those who were grateful that he was saved.

After the description of his experience as an Apostle, Paul will go on to explain why he has written this second letter to them.

LESSONS

The first passage in this letter gives us insight into Paul as an Apostle, and from this we gain a greater understanding of spiritual leadership. Apostles are our pattern for Christian leadership.

This brief passage contains two important lessons for church leaders:

1. Leadership in the church involves suffering.

Whoever is responsible is visible, and whoever is visible is vulnerable. Those who lead in the church (or anywhere for that matter) will often be attacked, under-appreciated and disappointed. Whoever takes on leadership must be prepared to experience suffering because it is part of the job. It seems that for church leaders there is a pool of suffering associated with Christ, and when a man begins to lead in it, he needs to be prepared to share in that suffering.

2. Leadership in the church draws the leader closer to the Lord.

The beneficial effect of suffering, for a church leader, is that it draws him closer to God or it breaks him, one or the other. Paul rejoiced, not in his suffering (he was no masochist), he rejoiced in the comfort he experienced as he drew closer to God because of his suffering. The "comfort" is simply a greater assurance of the Lord's presence. A leader will sense it in his prayer life, study life, ministry life and in his emotional life.

The reward of leadership in the church is not the same as the reward of leadership in the world (privilege, money, power, etc.).

The reward of leadership in the church is God Himself, as David, a great leader of God's people wrote, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup..." (Psalm 16:5). We are all going to heaven, but like Moses or David, the leader gets a glimpse of it first and that glimpse is both his comfort for the trials that come from being at the head of the people and out in front of the curve. It is the motivation to keep leading. You see, leaders have seen the Promised Land and are both rewarded and challenged in suffering because of it.

SUMMARY

If this be so, let us always remember to pray for our leaders, both secular and church, for they bear a greater burden than the rest. And let us encourage and cooperate with their efforts, especially in the church, because their work is done out of a love for God and the love of souls, not the love of power or money.

On the other hand, let leaders be aware of their responsibilities and lead with diligence, knowing that along with a great reward, a stricter judgment also awaits.

Finally, let us all submit to our Lord and leader, Jesus Christ, in all that He requires of us, for His yoke easy and His burden light.

3.

Apostolic Explanation

II CORINTHIANS 1:12-2:11

In previous chapters, we examined the general background of the city of Corinth (promiscuous, prosperous, pagan) and its people, as well as the church that Paul established there made up of both Jews and Gentiles. We also reviewed the way Paul's first letter was laid out as it provided instruction about Christian conduct in both life and worship. Next, we talked about the events that took place between the writing of the first and second letters (some Jewish Christians tried to discredit Paul and introduce new teachings to draw people after them).

I then mentioned that the second letter was personal and subjective in nature, dealing with what it was like being an Apostle. Since legitimate leadership was the issue, Paul talks about Apostleship (they are attacking his credibility as an Apostle). His letter, therefore, has six parts, five of which deal with Apostleship:

1. Introduction - 1:1-2
2. Apostolic Experience - 1:3-11
3. Apostolic Explanation - 1:12-2:11
4. Apostolic Ministry - 2:12-7:16
5. Apostolic Fellowship - 8:1-9:15
6. Apostleship Defended - 10:1-13:14

In the previous chapter of this book I dealt with Paul's introduction and the Apostolic experience that he described as one of suffering. He explained that Apostles suffered greatly, but their suffering brought them closer to God which, in turn, rendered the suffering bearable and enabled them to encourage others who were suffering as well.

In the next section, Paul will offer his readers an explanation concerning his conduct which had been questioned by some at Corinth. This passage provides an interesting insight into the very personal relationship that Paul had with this particular group of people.

In chapter 1:12-23 Paul responds to those who were accusing him of being insincere, of even lying to them, because he had made a change in his travel plans without notifying them. These people were using this seeming inconsistency to accuse him of being dishonest.

BACKGROUND ON TRAVEL PLANS

Original Plan

Once the church was well established in Corinth, Paul moved on to continue his mission work in other places. While he was in the city of Ephesus he decided to travel into Macedonia and stop briefly in Corinth on his way north. He then planned to visit Corinth again on his way back with the hope of receiving assistance from these brethren for the final leg of his journey home to Judea.

This original plan changed when he heard about the trouble in the Corinthian church. The news concerning the problems they

were having moved him to write the first of two letters in which he describes a change in his travel plans, without any mention of his original itinerary. In I Corinthians 16:5-9, therefore, Paul describes only this new plan, not the original one he had intended before he received news of their various difficulties.

Revised Plan

Paul sends the letter to Corinth and continues to work in Ephesus. He eventually leaves Ephesus and travels north through Macedonia (as originally planned but without a stop at Corinth) and, while he is traveling, falls ill. It is during this period that he writes another letter to the Corinthians. During the interval between the reception of Paul's first and second letter, the Corinthians find out about his original travel plans and accuse him of duplicity because he changed his plans without telling them (according to the original plan he was supposed to visit them but changed his mind because he did not want to distress them as a result of the admonitions contained in his letter, and perhaps because he may have wanted to see how they reacted to his teaching, he chose not to visit them at that time). This is why, in the second letter, he explains the reasons for his change of plans (II Corinthians 1:15-16). In this passage, he also defends himself against the attack on his honesty.

Let us keep these details in mind as we look at this passage more closely.

¹² For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

First, he states that his conscience is clear. He is not a hypocrite (fleshly wisdom). His conduct (where and when he travels, and what he does) is guided by God and is proper in the world and in the church.

¹³ For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; ¹⁴ just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

The information about his travel plans in this letter was what they used to charge him with fickleness and insincerity. In response, he asks them to accept his letter in total, not simply the parts that they think are good. His argument is that the entire content of his letter is true, not just the parts containing doctrine (teaching). He states that what he writes is true and they have good reason to be proud of him, as he is proud of them (even though some have wavered in this matter).

¹⁵ In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing;

He uses the word "confidence" as a word-bridge linking up to his next idea (i.e. have confidence in me as I had confidence in you when I originally came to you). The "first" blessing was his initial visit during which he preached the gospel to them. He had intended to come a second time.

¹⁶ that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.

Here is where he explains his original travel plan which was not mentioned in the first letter.

¹⁷Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? ¹⁸But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.

Paul claims that this original plan was made in good conscience and that, as an Apostle of Christ, he is not a vacillator, hypocrite or insincere. His yes is yes, and no is no, nothing has changed.

¹⁹For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.

Now he refers to his work among them. The preaching and teaching, the miracles and giving of gifts, there was no vacillation here, no duplicity. It was always yes to and for Christ.

²⁰For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. ²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²²who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Paul argues that God never wavers in His promises. When He says yes, it is yes. Paul continues by pointing out that this same God sent him and his co-workers to proclaim (to amen) these promises and, through them, reveal the glory of these promises (explain the content of the gospel message and demonstrate God's power through miracles). He tells the Corinthians that

they, along with himself, have been united in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit (they have received a guarantee of their salvation by the Holy Spirit who is given to indwell every believer at baptism - Acts 2:38). The point here being (but not expressed), that God's messengers (Apostles) who bring the gospel with the power of God do not lie or act in an insincere way in large or small matters (e.g. travel plans).

In verse 23 Paul will explain why he changed his plans. It is true that he did make changes, this he does not deny, but there was a good reason for doing so.

23 But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.

He did not come immediately but changed his plans in order to spare them (save them pain). His first letter was harsh and demanding. Because of this, he wanted to give them a chance to respond before coming in person and using his Apostolic authority to discipline them.

24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

He is not trying to be authoritative or bossy, his purpose is to work with them so that they will obtain the joy that the Christian life offers. He does not doubt their faith and commitment (they believe but they are immature).

1 But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again. 2 For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? 3 This is the very thing I wrote you, so

that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

Paul acknowledges that his letter caused pain, both to the Corinthians and himself. He did not like rebuking them. His only joy would come if they repented and received his correction properly. For this reason, he did not want to be there before this had taken place and so, changed his travel plans to give them a chance to sort things out. He also tells them how difficult it was for him to write that first letter.

⁵ But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. ⁶ Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, ⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Again, Paul uses a word-bridge to include another idea. He speaks of his own sorrow at writing the first letter to them,

especially in reference to a man involved in an improper relationship with his step-mother. In I Corinthians 5:1 he refers to a man having sex with his step-mother (his father's wife but not his biological mother). He was appalled, not only at the sin, but at the indifference towards this sin by the church. He demanded that they discipline this person and, if he refused to repent, they should disfellowship him (separate themselves from this person and have nothing to do with him). In II Corinthians Paul refers back to this situation as it seems that the church followed his instructions. Concerning this he says several things:

1. The offense was against the church, not Paul the Apostle. It threatened them, not him. (There was "sin in the camp" and the sin of one threatened the entire group - Deuteronomy 23:14).
2. A majority (not unanimous) of the members was willing to disfellowship this man and this number was sufficient to be effective.
3. Once this person repented, however, the brethren had to change their behavior and renew their fellowship with him again so he would not become discouraged.
4. This command (to discipline a sinful member) was a test to see if they would obey Paul's instructions.
5. If the church forgave this brother, Paul would also forgive him so that Satan would not have an opportunity to cause division in the church.

SUMMARY

Paul responds to those who accuse him of being insincere concerning a planned visit that he had canceled without advising them. His answer or explanation is twofold:

1. He states quite emphatically that he is not a liar, he is a chosen Apostle. Apostles are sincere and their work, power and authority speak for themselves.
2. He did change his plans, but it was done to spare them a painful visit. This explanation demonstrates that Paul's decision to change his travel plans was based on Christian love, not deceit.

The fact that the church handled a delicate matter (sexual sin of a member) properly and responded to his letter without his presence was proof that his decision to delay his visit in order to measure their maturity and spare them pain was the correct one.

4.

Apostolic Ministry

II CORINTHIANS 2:12-7:16

In the previous chapter, we examined Paul's explanation regarding the accusation by some brethren at Corinth that he was being fickle and insincere because he had changed his travel plans without telling them.

Background

Paul had intended to visit the Corinthian brethren while traveling through their region. When he heard of the trouble they were having, he sent them a letter which contained strong teaching concerning their conduct, and a revised travel plan which would delay his coming. They changed their behavior as a result of this letter but found out about his original travel plan and accused him of insincerity. The Apostle then wrote a second letter and in it described his original plan, but explained that a change was made in order to give them time to respond to his first letter. He also reminded these people of his work among them which was above reproach and the fact that as a chosen Apostle of Jesus he was not insincere, his words and work confirming this.

After dealing with this accusation Paul moves on to a description of his ministry and a comparison of his work to that of the false teachers who were the ones promoting these allegations in the first place.

More Travel Explanations

¹² Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,
¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.

In addition to not wanting to hurt them with an early arrival, Paul was also looking for his young assistant, Titus, and travelled through Macedonia searching for him. This was another example of the suffering he experienced as an Apostle: anxiety over the welfare of fellow workers.

Paul Compares Ministries

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. ¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶ to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

Paul changes the subject here by providing a beautiful image using Greek ideas and culture to describe his ministry among them. The Greek games would see the winner wear a laurel scented wreath on his head while running through the crowds in a victory parade. Paul uses this familiar imagery to describe the ministry of Apostles. He explains that God leads them everywhere to parade the victory of Christ and the gospel. Their lives are the aroma that people are aware of when they come in contact with them. For those who accept the gospel, the aroma is sweet because it smells of forgiveness, joy, fellowship and love. For those who reject the gospel, however, the aroma is of disobedience, condemnation, suffering and death.

Paul can accomplish several things with this one passage:

- Describe in Greek terms the effect of the gospel on believers and nonbelievers.
- Describe the kind of life and influence the Apostles have wherever they go.
- Encourage the brethren to a lifestyle that imitates Jesus' life and thus produces the "aroma" of Christ's love, purity and godliness.
- Set the stage for a comparison of Paul's ministry and teaching against that of the teachers in Corinth who were causing trouble in the church (verse 17).

COMPARISON OF MINISTRIES

Ministry of Law vs. Ministry of Spirit

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? ² You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ⁶ who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?
- II Corinthians 3:1-8

The first comparison Paul makes is between the Holy Spirit and the Law of Moses. He says that his ministry is powered by the Holy Spirit and theirs by the Law of Moses. The example he cites to demonstrate this difference is that they were preaching that a believer needed to be circumcised, among other things, in order to become a Christian. These teachers were returning to ceremonies and duties that belonged to Moses and the Law (their

thinking was that since Judaism came before Christianity, one should adhere to Jewish law and custom before becoming a Christian).

Paul, on the other hand, was preaching the gospel of Jesus which offered not only forgiveness through His cross, but also spiritual power, renewal and life through the agency of the Holy Spirit that indwelled every believer at baptism (Acts 2:38). Through his Apostolic ministry Paul was administering the substance (power) of God. The false teachers were trying to enforce the shadow and preview of things that were promised (things given to the Jews to prepare them for the eventual coming of the Messiah) contained in ceremonies and traditions which never had the ability to save or empower in the first place.

Their ministry of the Law and Moses was incomplete without Christ. Paul's Apostolic ministry was the final work of God that began with Moses and the Law (this was true), but finished by Christ and the giving of the Spirit. This Apostolic ministry did not result in more law-keeping (circumcision, etc.) but in freedom. The ministry of these teachers did nothing to improve the lives of the Corinthians, on the contrary, they unnecessarily added the burden of the Law. Paul's ministry, on the other hand, brought freedom from sin and death, and power to be transformed into the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, a work that Moses and the Law could not and were not given to accomplish.

His ministry is out in the open

¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, ² but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the

manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- II Corinthians 4:1-6

The teachers at Corinth are crafty and speak behind his back trying to destroy Paul, however, he carries on with his ministry in good conscience before God and all men (verses 1-2). Whenever the gospel is hidden it is so because sinful men refuse to see it, not because he hides it (verses 3-4). Paul concludes by affirming the fact that as ministers of the gospel they are preaching what God has revealed to them through the Spirit, a message that always leads the hearer to Christ.

His ministry causes persecution

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus'

sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death works in us, but life in you.

¹³ But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- II Corinthians 4:7-18

Paul does not say it here, but the implication is that these false teachers have never really suffered any persecution on account of their message. They cause persecution, but do not receive any.

He describes at length his own unworthiness to preach the message (verse 7) and the suffering he has endured to carry out this ministry (verses 8-11) which these others have not experienced. Paul always has this comparison of the quality of his ministry with the false teachers in view, but makes other points along the way as well (e.g. the suffering caused by his ministry is destroying his body, but making his spirit stronger - verse 16).

All ministries will be judged

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

² For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. ⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight— ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- II Corinthians 5:1-10

Paul declares that his body is decaying, but he is nevertheless anxious for death to materialize because it will be at this point that his eternal life with God will be fully realized (verse 2). He also uses this idea to remind his readers that along with death comes judgment, and everyone will be judged according to what they have done.

Again, the implicit suggestion is that he himself looks forward to this time because his ministry is from God and has been fruitful, but his detractors may not be able to say the same thing about their ministry.

His ministry is one of reconciliation with God

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. ¹² We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

¹⁶ Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on

behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- II Corinthians 5:11-21

Paul is proud of his ministry because it serves God's purpose in bringing people to Christ, and they should be proud of him as well (verses 11-12).

He reviews God's ultimate purpose and reminds them that his ministry is in line with the purpose of God (verses 18-20). Again, the implication is that Paul's ministry is in perfect accord with God's ministry, and that is to reconcile people to God through Christ. He is happy and proud to do this, and they should feel that way too. Again, the implied comparison is that his ministry brings God and man together, and their ministry divides the brethren and separates them from God.

His ministry is sincere

¹ And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— ² for He says,

“At the acceptable time I listened to you,
And on the day of salvation I helped you.”

Behold, now is “the acceptable time,” behold, now is “the day of salvation”— ³ giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, ⁴ but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the

Holy Spirit, in genuine love, ⁷ in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸ by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; ⁹ as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.
- II Corinthians 6:1-10

Not only did Paul preach, but he acted in such a way that his conduct supported and confirmed his message (verse 3). Even though they (Paul and his co-workers) suffered all forms of hardships and humiliations, they never did anything that would cause the brethren to doubt their sincerity, and there was no reason to begin now. This may have been a way for Paul to encourage his readers to compare his conduct to that of the false teachers in order to determine who, by their conduct, proved to be sincere.

After having reviewed these six areas of ministry, Paul finishes with exhortations.

EXHORTATION — II CORINTHIANS 6:11-7:16

He offers three exhortations. He begins one, then stops in order to give a second one, and finally combines the two into a single word of encouragement to finish the chapter.

Exhortation #1

¹¹ Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. ¹² You are not restrained by

us, but you are restrained in your own affections.

¹³ Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.

He begins by pleading with them to open their hearts to him as an Apostle. This is an emotional appeal that they be reconciled together with him in fellowship and love once again. Paul says that his love is not restrained but they are the ones holding (being held) back from love and fellowship with him.

Exhortation #2

¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

¹⁷ “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you.

¹⁸ “And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty.

He changes course here from a personal appeal based on their relationship with him, to a broader issue of relationships in general. He cautions that they not be bound / united to unbelievers. Paul was an ambassador for Christ trying to bind these brethren to himself, and through this to Christ according to

God's plan. Therefore, he encourages them not to unite or yoke themselves with unbelievers who would take them away from Christ. In context, he is referring to the false teachers as well as nonbelievers and pagans. Stay with the believers, he says, stay with him.

The wider application of this verse can include business associates, friends, even marriage partners, for the principle remains true in each situation (verse 15b). They were uniting themselves to the false teachers and he tells them that this was similar to the temple in Jerusalem being united to a pagan temple of idols, or righteousness occupying the same position as lawlessness. Certain things did not go together!

As a general principle this can be applied to mixed marriages, but this is not the point being made here. Paul is not talking about marriage, he is talking about ministries. I Corinthians 7:12-13 tells us that if unbelieving partners consent to live in peace, believing partners should remain married. It is not the ideal, but God blesses the children of these marriages and reminds the believers that they have opportunity to reach their partners so long as they are willing to remain.

Exhortation #3

¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

² Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.

³ I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. ⁴ Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am

overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. ⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while— ⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹ For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. ¹³ For this reason we have been comforted.

And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ¹⁴ For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we

spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth. ¹⁵ His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.

- II Corinthians 7:1-16

Paul now combines both previous exhortations into a final thought that encourages all of them to be united and holy. This last exhortation urges them to receive his sincere love and affection, and continue in holy and pure living which are major objectives of his ministry to them. He wants the Corinthians to be united in love, and holy in their conduct (verses 1-4).

In the rest of the chapter Paul finishes the story about Titus that he began in chapter 2. In this manner, he closes this section of his letter in a natural and personal way. About Titus he says:

- He himself was ill and depressed but finally met up with Titus who brought news of the Corinthians' reaction to his first letter.
- He reviews how he felt about writing the letter in the first place, and the joy he experienced when Titus reported their repentant attitude.
- He even recounts how Titus was excited about their positive attitude and effort to change (verse 13).

This leads to a final word about how he now rejoices and has confidence in them because of their change and attitude (verse 16). Paul ends the passage by including the comparison of his ministry to that of the teachers at Corinth who were causing the problems. He ends on a positive note, assuming his readers' good

intentions, and this sets the tone for the next subject which will be fellowship.

SUMMARY

Paul reviews his own ministry and sets it alongside the one being conducted by those who oppose him. His defense is to say to them, "Judge me by my works, not just by my words."

I believe that this is a valid way to judge all individuals to determine their sincerity, not only ministers but the sincerity of any brother or sister in the Lord. We, as Christians, are saved by faith, but we demonstrate the sincerity of our faith by our works because a sincere faith wants to rejoice in the Lord, serve the Lord and obey His Word.

5.

Meaning of Fellowship

II CORINTHIANS 8:1-9:15

In our last section, we saw Paul reviewing different facets of his ministry in order to compare his work with the work of those teachers who were challenging his legitimacy as an Apostle and creating dissension among the Corinthians. His purpose was to convince the Corinthians to judge him, not on what the false teachers were saying about him, but to judge him based on the work he did among them.

Paul also wants to retain the fellowship that they used to share, and it is this that he appeals to in the final verses of the passage. This will also serve as a bridge for the discussion about fellowship that he will begin in the next section.

This passage deals with fellowship, but not with the kind of fellowship that we are normally accustomed to. Our general idea of fellowship is usually the socializing we participate in while at church, or getting together to share a meal with our Christian friends. These are common types of fellowship but not the only kinds described in the Bible.

The word fellowship comes from a Greek word which means to share, to participate or to associate with. Under these various meanings the word fellowship could refer to:

- Social interaction: Associating with others (Acts 2:42).
- Ministry: Participating in a service activity (Philippians 1:5).
- Giving: To share what you have with others in need (II Corinthians 8:4).

In II Corinthians, Paul discusses the kind of fellowship that involves sharing in order to help others. In this particular chapter, he will review some of the events connected to a special collection he is organizing, and teach them about the Christian attitude regarding this type of fellowship (or sharing).

Background

In the middle of all this letter writing, in order to deal with the ones causing trouble at Corinth, there was also the matter of a special collection for the poor that Paul was pursuing (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:26; I Corinthians 16:1-3). Part of Paul's overall mission work was to collect money for the poor brethren in Judea, and we see him mentioning this benevolent effort in several of his letters. This was an ongoing ministry that he was directing in all of the churches. The collection of funds had been started at Corinth some time before the writing of Paul's first letter to them.

When the first letter was written, Paul included instructions as to the manner the money was to be collected and the spirit with which the people should give. The Corinthians had corrected

many things based on that letter but it seemed that Paul's rebuke had slowed down the preparations for that collection (harsh preaching is often met with resistance in the pocketbook).

In the second letter Paul talks about the opportunity to reawaken their "fellowship" or participation in this special project. He will do this by comparing their giving with the giving of other churches, and then compare both of these with what he will describe as the ideal in Christian giving.

Macedonian Fellowship

– II Corinthians 8:1-6

In I Corinthians 16:5 Paul mentions that he would be going through Macedonia on his way to Corinth. In Romans 15:26 he writes that these churches shared with him, and he boasts of their generosity in his letter to the Philippian church (Philippians 4:15). In II Corinthians, he mentions the generosity of these churches as an example to the Corinthians, who have had a false start in their "fellowship" or sharing regarding the special collection.

¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

He introduces the idea.

² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of

participation in the support of the saints,⁵ and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

He describes their situation and attitude in this matter of giving. Their generosity was amazing in light of their suffering. Usually, when people are suffering, it is not a good time to remind them or ask them to help others, but these brethren, even though they were suffering various trials:

- Gave generously (more than expected).
- Gave more than they could afford (gave sacrificially).
- Gave enthusiastically (asked to participate).
- Gave sincerely, first in obedience and holiness to the Lord, then gave their means to the brethren (their giving was the outgrowth of a holy life).

These Macedonians had mastered the virtue of Christian giving (fellowship/sharing) so well that Paul held them up as an example of what giving should be like.

Corinthian Fellowship

— II Corinthians 8:7-9:5

Paul reminds the Corinthians of their own original commitment and possibly the reasoning that motivated them to begin with.

⁷ But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

He acknowledges the gifts and talents they already possess and encourages them to raise their giving to the standards they already have in other areas.

⁸ I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

Paul says that he does not command that this collection be made, he does not want their giving to be out of compliance but rather as a proof of their love, like it was for the Macedonians (talk is cheap, money talks loudest; and when it comes to proving love and sincerity, the area of giving is an unmistakable indication of one's love and genuineness). The Apostle is giving the Corinthians a chance to demonstrate, in a concrete way, what they have claimed verbally.

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

The prime example, of course, is Jesus who endured the humiliation of the cross in order to save us. His wealth was His divine position; His poverty was His suffering and death as a human. Our wealth is that, because of Him, we will enjoy eternal life with God in heaven.

¹⁰ I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

Paul makes a direct reference to the fact that they were the ones who originally offered to help. It was a good thing that they desired to do (this is a key ingredient in Christian fellowship/sharing) however, it will not advantage them if they do not complete what they started.

¹²For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

He explains an important principle in Christian giving. If a person wants to give, God accepts his gift in relationship to what he has, not to how poor he is. Not having a lot to give is balanced and made acceptable by a willing heart. This is what makes a poor man's gift equal to a rich man's gift, his willingness.

¹³ For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality— ¹⁴ at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; ¹⁵ as it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack."

Paul does not want to make the Jerusalem brethren rich at their expense. He wants them to share what they have so all can have a portion. He also suggests that the tables may be turned one day (this can also refer to the fact that they needed the gospel that once came from Jerusalem, and now Jerusalem needs food that comes from them). In any case, the idea is that sharing from a willing heart is a sign of sincere love, and will produce balance and equality among the brethren.

He quotes Exodus 16:18 to demonstrate this equality in action. When God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, He arranged it so that no matter how much was gathered, no one had more than a day's supply. The rich and poor, large families and small, the young and strong along with the elderly and sick had enough to eat each day, for only that day. All were equally provided for.

Details About the Collection

– II Corinthians 8:16-9:5

Now that he has encouraged them regarding their original commitment, Paul will explain the procedure being used to collect the money and who had been given charge over it.

¹⁶ But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.

Titus, one of Paul's helpers in ministry, has recently come from Corinth and Paul is sending him back there to organize the collecting of this money. He is going of his own accord, anxious to carry out this new assignment.

¹⁸ We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; ¹⁹ and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, ²⁰ taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous

gift; ²¹ for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

In addition to Titus, Paul is sending another brother of good reputation selected by other churches (known to them but not us), who will vouch for the work and serve as one who guarantees that all will be done in an honorable way. Paul is careful not to give his accusers any reason to cause any more trouble.

²² We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you.

He mentions yet another brother who will be traveling with them as well.

²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

He encourages the Corinthians to receive and work with these men, reminding them that the other churches (who appointed the brethren) will be observing the events taking place in Corinth.

¹ For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your

zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

Paul now explains why he is making these arrangements for the collection. He has motivated the other churches in this matter by boasting of the Corinthians' willingness to give. The other churches have given. He is now sending this delegation ahead of time to prepare the offering so that when he comes, there will be no embarrassments (especially if he brings with him some Macedonian brothers who have themselves given based on Corinth's enthusiasm). He also wants their attitude to be right, that no one think that he is forcing them (out of greed) for money, but that it be a free will and generous offering.

Christian Fellowship

— II Corinthians 9:6-15

Paul now summarizes the essence of Christian fellowship or giving, as it is done to please God.

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Some media "evangelists," eager to get rich, have interpreted this section to mean that, "The more money you give to me, the more God will bless you with health and business success, etc."

⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Here, Paul explains the actual way that God blesses the abundant giver. First, he repeats the idea that attitude is so important. Being a willing and a cheerful giver is the first priority. The giving must not be motivated by guilt, compulsion, fear, doubt or manipulation. The acceptable way to give is to first consider carefully what to give, then decide freely to give it and finally, offer it as a "gift" because we are usually happy when offering a gift.

The more a Christian gives in this manner, the more God will provide in order to give again. God has many good works reserved for us to do and He will honor those people who understand that their blessings are not for hoarding or wasting, but for investing in the kingdom. God will provide everything a Christian needs in order to live, and even supply extra to do good works.

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

¹³ Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴ while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

The bonus was that the doing of good through giving by these Christians was not only providing for the poor in Jerusalem, this giving also provoked an outpouring of thanksgiving to God because of the generosity of these brethren. A win-win-win-win situation:

1. The poor were fed.
2. The contributors were blessing the poor and storing up blessings for themselves.
3. The church was being built up by the witness of the Corinthians who were proving that their faith was sincere.
4. God was being thanked and praised by all.

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Paul sees this entire situation as an opportunity to rejoice and does so in the final verse.

6.

Paul Defends His Apostleship

II CORINTHIANS 10:1-13:14

In this final section of II Corinthians, Paul will drive home his point on two issues:

1. The validity of his own Apostleship.
2. The danger presented by the false teachers.

He will do this by explaining why he is a true Apostle in comparison to the false teachers causing trouble in Corinth, after which we will see him actually exercising his Apostolic authority over this church.

Until now, Paul has been dealing with the problems and questions that the Corinthians had concerning his visits with them. At this point, however, he will go to the heart of the matter which is the challenge being made to the legitimacy of his Apostleship by those who were claiming a superior position to his in the church.

How to Measure an Apostle

— II Corinthians 10:1-18

Paul describes the four criteria that determine genuine Apostleship:

1. Spiritual power

¹ Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! ² I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

They confused his gentle attitude with weakness, but did not realize the power he exercised as an Apostle in the spiritual realm. To destroy the work of Satan required true spiritual power, which he possessed. He warns them that he will exercise this power for those who continue in disobedience when he arrives. An example of this power was demonstrated when he struck blind the false prophet, Bar-Jesus, who tried to undermine his work while he was preaching on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:11).

2. Position in relationship to Christ

⁷You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, ⁹for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters.

Paul says that as a Christian and an Apostle he is also "in Christ" or united to Christ as they were. In addition to being related to Christ as they are, he has also received authority for building up the church. The point here is that this "authority" is directly from Christ. He also uses the idea of authority to string together the next idea.

3. Deeds through Christ

¹⁰For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." ¹¹Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.

An Apostle is measured by what he does. His authority gives him the right and power to do what he has done (or threatening to do) among them. He is not using this to frighten them but rather to remind them that he can "do" what he writes about in his letters and was not, as the troublemakers were saying of him, "all talk."

4. Ministry for Christ

¹² For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. ¹³ But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.

Paul speaks for all Apostles when he argues: we do not just talk about ourselves and measure ourselves by our own words. We measure ourselves by what we have done in the service of Christ. You, the Corinthian church, are an example of our ministry. We measure our work by you and what we have accomplished in you.

¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵ not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, ¹⁶ so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.

He continues by saying: unlike the false teachers who are taking credit for you (who are really the result of our work), we hope that one day you will grow to the point where you will support us to go plant another church in an area where the gospel has not been preached before. This was something that these false teachers did not do in Corinth and had no plans of doing in the

future. True Apostles are instructed to go out and preach the gospel, not steal other men's work (Matthew 28:18-20).

SUMMARY

¹⁷ But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. ¹⁸ For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

Paul uses a quote from Jeremiah to summarize his feelings about his own role as an Apostle. This role, he says, has been received from the Lord, authorized by the Lord, empowered by the Lord and done for the Lord. If there is any praise, therefore, it should go to the Lord. If anyone is praising himself, it is a sign that he is a false Apostle.

Condemnation of False Apostles — II Corinthians 11:1-15

Here Paul speaks plainly of the character and motives of those who claimed to be "superior" Apostles in the Corinthian church.

They are being seduced by false teachers

¹ I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.

² For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. ³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if one comes and preaches

another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

He uses the imagery of marriage to tell them that they are being seduced into unfaithfulness to their original husband, Jesus, in order to follow another. He wonders at how easily they are being led astray by a different lord, different spirit and different gospel. He is jealous that they are leaving the true faith given to them by a true Apostle, and so easily following others to a false end.

The accusations against Paul were false

⁵ For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. ⁶ But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

They were charging that Paul was inferior. In this passage the word "eminent" did not refer to Peter and the other legitimate Apostles, but to those who were describing themselves as eminent or superior to Paul at Corinth. Paul responds to their charge by saying that he may have been soft spoken and not trained in the tactics of oral debate, but his knowledge (concerning the things of God) spoke for itself since they had been the main benefactors of his teaching.

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; ⁹ and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden

to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹² But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.

His accusers also base their charges against him on the fact that he did not take any money for his teaching. Paul acknowledges that he indeed preached to them for free, and would continue to do so in order to prove his sincerity and to give no one the chance to accuse him of preaching for profit.

SUMMARY

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

He calls the teachers what they are: false messengers, deceitful workers (hypocrites), actors pretending to be Apostles. He compares their strategy and eventual judgment to that of Satan.

The Mark of a True Apostle

— II Corinthians 11:16-12:13

Suffering

¹⁶ Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. ¹⁹ For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. ²⁰ For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. ²¹ To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶ I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷ I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and

exposure. ²⁸ Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

³⁰ If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³ and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

He has done this before in chapter 4, but this time he goes into detail about the things he has suffered because he is an Apostle. The false teachers boast in their intelligence and their position, but Paul boasts in the things he has suffered on account of the gospel. The implication is, of course, that he has paid the price for serving as an Apostle and they have not.

Communion

¹ Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. ⁵ On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I do wish to boast I

will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

⁷ Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

What they cannot claim is to have spoken with Christ and to have been in His presence. As a true Apostle, Paul has spoken with the Lord and here talks about a heavenly experience reminiscent of the visions described by the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, and the Apostle John in the New Testament (Revelation). Paul is too humble to boast about this and gives a rare glimpse into his personal sufferings and how he coped, but the point is that only an Apostle could truly speak of such things. He shows his genuine Apostolic character in that he does not use these things to boast (as they would), he uses them to give glory to God.

Miraculous power

¹¹ I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in

no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. ¹³ For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

The marks of Apostleship, according to Paul, are suffering, communion with Christ and displayed power. Anybody can say they have seen Christ, but only the ones who can actually perform the signs and wonders can confirm their words with actions. He also reminds and chastises them for not recognizing these signs. Instead of defending himself before them, as he is doing now, he should have been praised and encouraged by them, especially since they received so many blessings from him.

Paul Exercises His Apostleship – II Corinthians 12:14-13:10

In this last section, he brushes aside these false teachers and takes his rightful place as an Apostle, and exercises his authority among them.

¹⁴ Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. ¹⁷ Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you,

have I? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?

He is going to come to them again out of love, and they are not to worry, it will not cost them anything for himself or his fellow ministers who never took advantage of them either.

¹⁹ All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹ I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

He hopes they will be ready for his arrival and have repented of their sins. He is not defending himself here, he is building up their faith before God.

¹ This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ² I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone,

Paul warns them that he will punish the sinners, all of them.

³ since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. ⁴ For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

They confuse his mild appearance with lack of power. He says that Christ also seemed weak because of His crucifixion, but was empowered by God to resurrect from the dead. Paul says that in the same way he will also be empowered by God when he will be among them for the purpose of disciplining in Christ.

⁵ Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

When he examines himself, he sees the power of Christ working in him. He asks if this is what they also see when they examine themselves.

⁷ Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved. ⁸ For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. ¹⁰ For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the

authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.

He wants them to do what is right and obey him, not to prove that he is right, but to demonstrate maturity (completeness), and avoid punishment. It is their choice, his visit can be one of blessing or one of punishment.

Salutations – II Corinthians 13:11-14

¹¹ Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you.

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

The chapter finishes with a series of positive encouragements:

1. Rejoice, be mature, be united, be encouraged, be at peace and enjoy God's love.
2. Offer each other the sign of Christian brotherhood in these times (the holy kiss).
3. He adds a greeting from other churches.
4. He offers a blessing that includes the entire Godhead.

KEY LESSONS AND IDEAS FROM II CORINTHIANS

Here are seven lessons on leadership from II Corinthians:

1. Apostleship was Real Work

Paul's ministry included: care for the poor (special collection), teaching (writing epistles), training workers (Titus), dispute resolution (Corinth), peaching and church planting. Church leadership demands a commitment to work hard in many areas, therefore the role of leader should not be taken lightly. Much will be required of their time and energy.

2. Apostles were Appointed

The false apostles were self-appointed and this alone should have disqualified them from a leadership role. In the church, leaders are appointed to their task by someone in authority in cooperation with the members. Paul goes into detail about the qualifications necessary for the roles of elders and deacons, as well as preachers in his epistles to Timothy and Titus.

3. Apostles Suffered

Paul repeated this often, that his dues for Apostleship were paid through the sufferings he encountered. Church leaders cannot avoid times of suffering on account of their work. It is part of the experience of leadership.

4. Apostles Acted Like Apostles

Apostolic conduct was unmistakable in its sincerity, holiness and humility. Spiritual leaders must be Christlike in character and

conduct since this gives their teaching and leadership moral authority.

5. Apostolic Ministry was Evident

To his accusers Paul simply offered his work as a response and defense. Leaders' actions must speak louder than their words. Good leaders in the church, as in most endeavors, lead by example. A church cannot grow beyond its leadership.

6. Apostles Love the Church

Paul was continually helping the church, not only in spiritual matters, but also in benevolent ones as well (e.g. special collection for the poor in Jerusalem). Leaders lead by supporting and nourishing the weak members. I have noticed that in the modern church we rely too much on the preacher to provide pastoral care of the members when their actual role should be preaching the gospel, teaching the Bible, church planting and church organization. The task of caring for the flock rightly belongs to the shepherds/elders. Unfortunately, many times these leaders are more focused on budget matters than the needs of the saints.

When preachers are preaching and teaching the Word, and deacons are caring for the physical needs of the members and the physical place where the church meets, the leaders can then carry out their rightful task of shepherding the flock and guarding it against false teachers and teachings (Acts 20:17; 25-31).

7. Apostles have Authority

In the end, Paul warns them to obey his words because he had the power to back up his authority in Christ. Leaders in the

church today do not have miraculous powers but they do have the authority to lead, to discipline, to appoint and to encourage. The church will not grow if leaders do not exercise their legitimate authority and the congregation does not submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

In closing this study of II Corinthians, I pray for all those who serve as leaders of congregations everywhere. My prayer for you is that you will take to heart the example and admonitions that Paul, a true and blessed leader of our Lord's church, has left for us in these letters inspired and preserved by the Spirit of God for our edification and instruction.

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