

2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1-2:13 — THE APOSTLE'S EXPLANATION

Paul had left Ephesus where his first epistle had been written to this church, had crossed into Macedonia, and was now in Philippi (see ~~<44923>~~ Acts 19:23-20:3 with chapters 8:1-9:2 of this epistle.) The reception given his first letter had been generally favorable, but all had not submitted to his rebuke, and the adversaries who opposed his teachings before were more virulent than ever, now seeking to undermine his authority as an apostle. It was therefore with a two-fold purpose he wrote this second letter, to comfort some whom he had "made sorry," by his previous one, and to defend his character and authority against those who impugned both. For this reason, as Alford says, "we find consolation and rebuke, gentleness and severity, earnestness and irony succeeding one another at short intervals and without notice." To quote the *Scofield Bible*, his spiritual burdens were of two kinds, solicitude for the maintenance of the churches in grace as against the law-teachers, and anguish over the distrust felt towards him by Jews and Jewish Christians. The latter rejected the revelation through Paul of the doctrines of grace, grounding themselves, probably, on the kingdom teachings of our Lord (~~<61518>~~ Romans 15:8), seemingly oblivious that a new dispensation had been introduced by Christ's death. It was this that made necessary a defense of the origin and extent of his apostolic authority.

The first seven chapters are taken up with an account of his principles of action; chapters 8-9 are an appeal for the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem; and the remaining chapters are a straight-out defense of his apostolic authority.

The particular part assigned for this lesson is the writers explanation of his conduct with respect to his promised visit (see the close of the first epistle), and with respect to the case of incest (see chap. 5 of the same).

The customary salutation, or greeting, (1:1-2), is followed by the usual thanksgiving (vv. 3-7), in which the apostle mentions his sufferings for

Christ's sake, and the relation they bear to this church as an example of patient endurance and Divine consolation. He enlarges on his sufferings, going into detail as to one particular, to magnify the power of God in his deliverance as from the dead (vv. 8-10). Tactfully he mentions his confidence in their interest in him (v. 11), arising, as it must, out of his faithful service on their behalf (vv. 12-13), which they for the most part were ready to acknowledge (v. 14). Note the exception in this last verse, and its indirect allusion to his enemies, ("in part").

At this point he begins his explanation of his change of mind about visiting them, of which his enemies had taken advantage. His first thought had been to go to Corinth direct from Ephesus, then north into Macedonia where he now was, and returning to Corinth proceed thence into Judea (v. 16). Passing by Corinth and going into Macedonia instead, was not a mere whim of his carnal nature, not an indication of trifling indecision or fear, but to spare them the further rebuke which must have fallen on them (1:17-2:4).

He next refers to his previous directions about the incestuous person, whom he now recommends to be forgiven and restored (vv. 5-11).

Perhaps the last two verses (vv. 12-13); suggest a further reason for his going into Macedonia before visiting Corinth.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you examined the scripture passages referred to in this lesson?
2. For what two-fold purpose was this epistle written?
3. What is peculiar as to its literary style?
4. What was the nature of Paul's spiritual burden?
5. Give the general outline of the whole epistle?
6. What is the particular theme of this lesson?
7. Analyze the lesson by verses.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-4:7 — TRIUMPHS OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

Pursuing the consideration of his principles of action, Paul now shows his ministry to have been a triumphant one, notwithstanding the opposition of his enemies (vv. 14-17). The triumph however, was of God's power and grace, and not in himself. Note the comparison between himself and the false teachers (v. 17).

It was not only a triumphant ministry but one fully accredited by themselves (3:1-5).

It was a spiritual ministry as distinguished from one of legalism (vv. 6-18). This is the meaning of "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (v. 6), the first referring to Judaism and the latter to the Gospel of grace. Not that Paul would disparage the former which was glorious in its revelation (v. 7), but the latter more so (vv. 8-15). Prof. Robertson in *The Glory of the Ministry* gives a beautiful exposition of the last-named verses. The glory of Moses was:

1. A Real Glory — "the ministration of death written and engraven in stones, was glorious";
2. A Hidden Glory — "Moses put a veil over his face";
3. A Temporary Glory — "Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished";
4. An Overshadowed Glory — "if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory";
5. A Defective Glory — "who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter but of the spirit"
6. An Ineffective Glory — "their minds were blinded."

Verses 13-14 referring to ^{<1343>}Exodus 34:33-35, are rather obscure because of a wrong rendering of the Old Testament passage. The Revised Version indicates that the Israelites saw the glory on Moses' face as he spake; but when he had ceased, the veil was put on that they might not look on the end, i.e., the fading of that transitory glory. They were permitted to see it as long as it was necessary to be seen as a credential of his ministry but then it was withdrawn. Thus the declaration of God's will to them was not

in openness of speech, but interrupted and broken by intervals of concealment. This was not the case in the Christian dispensation of which Paul was a minister.

It was an honest ministry (4:1-7), for the reason that the apostle's life harmonized with the truth he preached (vv. 1-2); because it was Jesus Christ he preached and not himself (vv. 3-6); and because the power in which he preached was of God (v. 7).

QUESTIONS

1. What four points concerning Paul's ministry are here named?
2. How do you understand the distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit"?
3. Give an analysis of 3:8-15.
4. How does the Revised Version throw light on ^{<12345>}Exodus 34:35?
5. On what grounds was Paul's ministry honest?

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-5:21 — TRIAL OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

HIS SUFFERINGS (4:8-15)

"Troubled," "perplexed," "persecuted," "cast down" — what a story! "Pressed on every side, yet not straitened," not so hemmed in but that he could still proceed with his work; "perplexed, yet not in despair," bewildered like a man going in a circle, put to it, yet not utterly put out; "pursued, yet not forsaken," hunted like a wild animal, yet not abandoned to the foe; "smitten down, yet now destroyed," thrown to the ground but able to rise again — "The Glory of the Ministry." But not merely resigned, he has come to rejoice in his sufferings because of his relationship to Jesus Christ (vv. 10-11). For the meaning of these last-named verses, compare ^{<10024>}Colossians 1:24; ^{<41531>}1 Corinthians 15:31; and ^{<41836>}Romans 8:36. Indeed verse 11 is a sufficient comment on verse 10. Death (v. 12) was working in Paul, physical death, but it was "working out for the good of the saints who were benefited by his ministry." He speaks this by the same faith which stirred the psalmist (compare v. 13 with ^{<38500>}Psalms 116:10), and it is this faith that gives him the bright outlook for himself and his faithful

hearers as expressed in verse 14, and which he amplifies in the next division.

HIS COMFORT (4:16-5:8)

- (1)** Inward spiritual renewing day by day (v. 16);
- (2)** the relation between his earthly suffering and heavenly glory (vv. 17-18);
- (3)** which includes the resurrection of his body (5:1-4);
- (4)** his confidence rests on the eternal purpose of God in his redemption, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his soul (v. 5); thus,
- (5)** he is always of good courage whether in his physical body or out of it (vv. 6-8).

His Ambition (5:9-13)

"Wherefore we labor" might be rendered "wherefore we are ambitious." "Present or absent" has reference to the Lord's second coming. Paul might be "present," i.e., in his physical body on the earth when He came, for like all true and intelligent disciples, he was expecting Him in his own generation; and yet he might be "absent," in that he had passed out of the body in death. But either way he must appear before the "judgment seat" when He came (v. 10). This "judgment seat of Christ" is not that in Revelation 20, which is the last judgment and takes place at the end of the world, but it is one before which disciples only shall stand at the Second Coming of Christ. Note that they are to "receive the things done" in the body. It is not for them a judgment unto condemnation because they are already by faith "in Christ Jesus" (~~400~~Romans 8:1). It is not to determine whether they are saved or lost, which was settled the moment of their accepting Christ, but rather that of their reward or loss of reward in the Kingdom of Heaven then to be manifested (~~400~~1 Corinthians 3:11-15). "Terror" (v. 11) should be rendered "fear," and refers to the godly fear Paul had with reference to that judgment, and his reverent desire to enter upon his reward, which explained his earnestness as a soul-winner. God was his witness to this, and he trusted that the church at Corinth also was. If so, they might properly speak of it before his enemies (v. 12) who were reflecting on him as one who was out of his mind (v. 13).

His Motive (5:14-21)

"The love of Christ" here means primarily his love for us as indicated in what follows. "Then were all dead," should be, "Then all died," i.e., all true believers had died to the guilt and penalty of sin because they are members of Christ (Romans 6). But they are now alive in Him in a new sense (v. 15), and being thus alive they are not to live for "themselves," their own satisfaction and glory, but for him. As a matter of fact this was Paul's governing principle, he says (v. 16). "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh," means that his relationship to his fellow men is no longer that of his former unregenerated state. Indeed this includes that knowledge of Christ he then had concerning Whom he says, "Know we Him so no more." He knows Christ differently now from the way he knew him before his conversion (~~400~~Acts 9). This explains verse 17. Now all these new "things" come from God and are the consequence of our reconciliation to

Him by Jesus Christ (v. 18). This reconciliation is enlarged upon (vv. 19-21). God himself was reconciled, God as manifested in Christ. And His method of reconciling men to Him was not to impute (or charge) their trespasses unto them. This act of grace he was able to express because He had imputed those trespasses unto His Son, mankind's substitute, Who had no sin. The ministry of this reconciliation had been committed unto Paul who, with his fellow-preachers, was an ambassador for Christ, the mouthpiece of God, beseeching men to accept the reconciliation thus wrought out for them, by accepting the Reconciler, Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Name the four principal subdivisions of this lesson.
2. What five considerations ministered to Paul's comfort in the midst of his trials?
3. To what event does "present or absent" have reference?
4. Explain ~~4:15~~ 2 Corinthians 5:10, 16.
5. Analyze verses 19-21.

2 CORINTHIANS 6-7 — HIS APPEAL TO THE CHURCH

NOT TO RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN (6:1-10)

These Corinthians as believers on Jesus Christ, had received the grace of God in their justification and all which it implied; but they would have received it "in vain" did it not bring forth the proper fruit in their lives. That such is the meaning is evident by verse 3: "Giving no occasion of stumbling that our ministration be not blamed," which is the negative side. And by verse 4: "In everything commending ourselves as ministers of God," which is the positive side. Now follows a flight of eloquence in praise of Christian ministration (vv. 4-10). We use "ministration" rather than "ministry" because while Paul has himself in the foreground, he is not limiting what he says to "ordained ministers," but includes all Christians. Notice the rhetorical device in the grouping of the experiences by the use of the words "in," "by," "as" (Greek, *en, dia, hos*). The first touches environment (vv. 4-5). The second, conduct (vv. 6, 8). It was in the midst of such untoward

environment that Paul found the graces of the heart to grow like orchids on the wild rocks. In this second group of experiences there is progress over the first. "By" suggests aggressive conflict in the spiritual sense — the atmosphere of conflict, the swing of victory. The third group is one of paradoxes (vv. 9-10). Light and shadow interplay. One can get a double report on almost any man's life unless he has been a nonentity. This is particularly true of a Christian, and in a good sense, since he must almost of necessity appear as one thing to the world and another to the household of God able to appreciate spiritual things.

NOT TO BE UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER (6:7-7:1)

This division is a continuation of the foregoing about receiving the grace of God in vain, and the great New Testament classic on Christian separation. To quote the *Scofield Bible*: Separation in Scripture is twofold; "from" whatever is contrary to the mind of God; and "unto" God Himself. The unequal yoke is anything which unites a child of God and an unbeliever in a common purpose (^{<4624>}Deuteronomy 22:10). Separation from evil implies

(1) separation in desire, motive, and act, from the world, in the ethically bad sense of this present world-system (see ^{<6138>}Revelation 13:8); and

(2) separation from believers, especially false teachers, who are "vessels unto dishonour" (^{<5121>}2 Timothy 2:20-21; 2 John 9-10). Separation is not from contact with evil in the world or the church, but from complicity with and conformity to it (^{<4375>}John 17:15; ^{<4064>}2 Corinthians 6:14-18; ^{<4061>}Galatians 6:1). The reward of separation is the full manifestation of the divine fatherhood (^{<4067>}2 Corinthians 6:17-18); unhindered communion and worship (see ^{<5133>}Hebrews 13:13-15), and fruitful service (^{<5121>}2 Timothy 2:21), as world-conformity involves the loss of these, though not of salvation.

NOT TO REJECT THE APOSTLE HIMSELF AND HIS TEACHINGS (7:2-16)

Note the seven reasons for this: For the first, see verse 2; for the second, verse 3; for the third, verses 4, 14, 16; for the fourth, verse 5; for the fifth, verses 6-7, 13; for the sixth, verses 8-11; for the seventh, verse 15.

A brief word on verses 8-11: Paul regretted his previous letter because it had made them sorry; but now he did not regret it because it had made them sorry in the right way, "after a godly manner." They had sorrowed with a sorrow never to be regretted. Verse 11 shows in what manner this was true.

QUESTIONS

1. For what three things did Paul appeal?
2. What is meant by receiving "the grace of God in vain"?
3. Why do we use the word ministrations?
4. What rhetorical device is here used?
5. What does separation from evil imply?
6. Name the seven reasons for Paul's personal appeal.

2 CORINTHIANS 8-9 — CONTRIBUTION FOR THE SAINTS

The mother church at Jerusalem was passing through stormy days, and its common chest was replenished by all the daughter churches. Macedonia, in poverty, had contributed liberally, but the wealthy, flourishing Corinthians had been backward. Paul uses nearly one-sixth of his present letter to argue and plead for greater generosity on their part. He enjoins the duty of giving:

1. By the example of the churches in Macedonia (8:1-4). They were poor, yet lavish. The effect of divine grace on their hearts.
2. By the sense of congruity in the Christian life (8:7). They already abounded in other gifts such as faith, utterance and knowledge; liberality therefore was expected. Its absence would be a defect in the symmetry of their spiritual experience.
3. As a proof of their love and gratitude to Jesus Christ (8:8-9), who, though rich, yet for their sakes had become poor.
4. In consideration of what they professed to be willing to do. Regard for their promises (8:10-11).
5. The offering would be appreciated not according to its size, but the

spirit in which it was given (8:12).

6. The care of the poor saints should not fall on a few but all should be equally burdened (8:13-15).
7. The apostle's honor was at stake (8:24, also 9:3-4).
8. As they sowed they would reap (9:6).
9. God was able to reward them (9:8-11).
10. They would thus glorify God (9:13).
11. They would thus secure the prayers and love of the saints (9:14).

There is further homiletic value in the following division of the chapters in the *Scofield Bible*: The example of Macedonia (8:1-6); the exhortation, (vv. 7-15); the messengers, (8:9-16:5); the encouragement (vv. 6-15).

From the same source we get a summing up of the Christian doctrine of giving, as follows:

1. It is a "grace," i.e., a disposition created by the Spirit (8:7).
2. In contrast with the law, which imposed giving as a requirement, it is voluntary, a test of sincerity and love (8:8-12; 9:1-2, 5, 7).
3. The privilege is universal, belonging, according to ability, to rich and poor (8:1-3, 12-15. Compare ~~4300~~ 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
4. It is to be proportioned to income (8:12-14; compare with. 1 Cot. 16:2). The Old Testament proportion was the tithe, a proportion which antedates the law (~~0140~~ Genesis 14:20).
5. Its rewards are (a) joy (8:2); (b) increased ability to give in proportion to that which has been already given (9:7-11); (c) increased thankfulness to God (9:12); and (d) God and the gospel glorified (9:13-14).

QUESTIONS

1. Have you carefully examined the eleven arguments for Christian giving?
2. Divide the eleven arguments among the four homiletic divisions of the chapter.
3. Summarize the doctrine of Christian giving.

2 CORINTHIANS 10-13 — DEFENSE OF HIS APOSTLESHIP

At this point Paul begins his personal defense which concludes the epistle. And here we perceive more particularly that interchange of gravity and irony to which reference has been made, and which causes these chapters to be so difficult of explanation.

The apostle's critics had reflected on his personal appearance (10:1, 7, 10); on what they were pleased to consider his carnality (v. 3); his lack of eloquence (11:5) and his lack of dignity (11:7-10). We shall find it inconvenient to deal with these subjects otherwise than as they come before us in the chapters.

CHAPTER 10

They said that in their presence he was "base" or "lowly," but that absent he was bold as indicated in his letters (v. 1). He besought them therefore, to heed his words that he might not have occasion to be "bold" against them when he was present (v. 2). He had particular reference to some who regarded him as walking "according to the flesh." They would see that any spiritual weakness in his conduct did not show itself in the weapons or results of his spiritual conflicts with the enemies of the truth (vv. 3-6).

They were looking on the outward appearance, despising him and conceitedly claiming some special relationship to Christ for themselves. He meets this by a presentation of his true claims, as to which he might go further without idle boasting and justify any expressions of apostolic power in his letters (vv. 7-11). In proof of this he appeals to facts including his work among them in Corinth (vv. 12-14); and delicately intimates that when the present trouble was at an end, they would assist him to extend his ministry further (vv. 15-18). (See ~~8110~~ Romans 1:10; 15:28).

CHAPTER 11

His pleadings continue because of his love for them and his fear of their beguilement. They were tolerating those who were preaching another gospel to them, and surely they might bear with him, since he was in no respect inferior to those "over much" apostles (vv. 1-6). Verse 2 is very interesting. For an explanation of "a godly jealousy," see ~~02115~~ Exodus 20:5,

and ^{<G249>}Joshua 24:19. For "one husband" and "chaste virgin," see ^{<4012>}1 Corinthians 1:12. The espousal in this case took place when they were converted to Christ, the presentation will take place when He comes again. Verse 3 is interesting from another point of view, since it shows that Paul regards the fall (Genesis 3) as historical. Note also that the tempter did not propose to take Eve's allegiance away from God entirely, but only to corrupt her faith, which was enough. At this point he refers to their assumed contempt because he had not demanded pay from them, explaining the reasons for his conduct (vv. 7-12), plainly characterizing the "false apostles" (vv. 13-15). They had compelled him to boast (vv. 16-33) for which he apologizes. Verses 23-27 reveal a life of hardship far beyond anything told of Paul in the Acts. Verse 19 is ironic.

CHAPTER 12

Here we come to "visions and revelations" vouchsafed to him. In these there could be no self-commendation, but only that of a man in Christ lifted out of his own individuality, and thought worthy of such grace on account of being in Christ. His only object in boasting of such an one was to bear witness to the supernatural life he was living and that such glorious things had been granted him. In behalf of himself he would boast only in his infirmities (vv. 1-6). Verses 7-10 are self-explanatory except as to the nature of the "thorn in the flesh." It has been spoken of as chronic ophthalmia, inducing bodily weakness and a repulsive appearance (^{<4045>}Galatians 4:15), but no one knows what it was. The Corinthians should not have made it necessary for him thus to speak of himself; they should have spoken on his behalf (v. 11), for the signs of an apostle were wrought by him among them (vv. 12-13). The insinuation about his having ministered to them without monetary gain is once more referred to, in order to say that he will continue to do so. He is their parent, and parents lay up for the children (vv. 14-15). Those he had sent to them had followed his example in this respect (vv. 16-18).

The church, however, must not suppose that in what he was saying he was excusing himself to them. On the contrary he was doing all things for their edifying (v. 19), and in the hope that when he visited them the third time, it might not be with a rebuke and with sorrow because of their sin (vv. 20-21).

CHAPTER 13

He emphasizes the rebuke and chastening that await some on his third coming if they do not repent (vv. 1-10), closing with an exhortation (v. 11), salutation (vv. 12-13) and benediction (v. 14).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the general theme of this lesson?
2. In what four ways had Paul's critics reflected on him?
3. Why had Paul declined material support from the church at Corinth?
4. What kind of apostles were these who were comparing themselves with Paul?
5. What kind of life was Paul really living?
6. Why should the Corinthians have commended Paul?
7. With what does he threaten the church on his next visit?