

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS FOR 2/21/10
2 CORINTHIANS 12:14-13:4
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2 Corinthians 12:14-18

In 2 Cor. 12:13 Paul returns to the subject of his financial relationship with the Corinthians. He asserts that he deliberately chose not to be a burden to them by depending upon their financial contributions and this has been a particular source of scorn among the Corinthians. While closing his thoughts on this subject, Paul now uses the subject of finances to introduce a new topic which is his impending visit to Corinth. Having been accused of not keeping his promise to visit them previously, Paul boldly states, "now for the third time I am ready to come to you," (12:14). Paul visited Corinth once when he originally founded the church, once when he confronted one who had offended him, and now he assures them that despite their claims that he has been less than forthright in his travel plans, he will return a third time. Much has elapsed outside of Paul's two visits. There have been at least four letters written that we know of, the ministry of Titus and others have accompanied those letters, false teachers have exerted their influence, and problems of morality have continued to plague certain groups among the church. So now, with a final note of irony, Paul becomes parental and confronts the Corinthians' complaint that he will not accept their money with his desire to spend himself in order that the Corinthians might know Christ and live their lives to the fullest in Him.

In 2 Cor. 12:14 Paul shifts from rhetorical sarcasm to an honest declaration of his love for this group of believers. Paul tells them that he is ready to come visit them, and that the purpose of his visit is not to be rewarded financially, but to be in relationship with them. Paul writes that it is not their resources he seeks. Instead he desires to encounter hearts that have been reconciled first and foremost to Christ, and then to him. Although an amazing teacher, Paul is at heart a pastor who tenderly cares for the hearts of those who are in his churches. Paul again stands over and above the false apostles in this respect. He will not come to abuse them, to confuse them, or to bleed them dry. He will come to restore them and build them up. If necessary he will administer discipline, but Paul's overarching goal, which is motivated by the love of Christ, is reconciliation. Paul writes, "I do not seek what is yours, but you," (12:14). Paul has previously referred to the Corinthians as his "children" in 2 Cor. 6:13 he encourages them to open their hearts wide to them and here again he takes on the role of father citing the principle that "children are not responsible to save up for parents, but parents for children," (12:14). Although there is a money issue at hand, Paul is speaking metaphorically that it is his job to care for the Corinthians as a father cares for a child. He is the one to make the investment and he is the one to guide them into the truth. His fatherly desire is only to see them respond in love to the truth that he has set before them. Paul has written extensively of the emotional, mental, and spiritual pain that he has willingly endured on behalf of the Corinthians (and the other churches). He has gladly "spent" himself to the point of exhaustion in order that they would know the depth of the love of Christ and His transforming power. Paul then asks a series of rhetorical

questions. Paul writes, “If I love you more, am I to be loved less,” a question which slyly sums up the theme of the previous “Fool’s Speech.” Is Paul to be loved less because he willingly chose a path of weakness in order to show his love for the Corinthians? Paul has been quite frank in sharing the sufferings he endured for the purpose of bringing the gospel to the Corinthians. Paul was willing to do this because of the great love he has for them. Are they to respond in turn with less love for him, thus invalidating his ministry (and in effect invalidating the ministry of Christ)?

In 2 Cor. 12:16, Paul answers to yet another charge that is related to his decision to work as a tentmaker and refuse the patronage of the Corinthians. The charge is that although Paul worked at a trade for a living, he was siphoning off funds that Titus and others collected. More specifically, Paul is accused of being crafty and deceiving the Corinthians. Rather than defending himself, Paul poses the following questions: “have I taken advantage of you through those whom I sent” and “did Titus take advantage of you.” The implied answer to both questions is, “no.” Paul calls upon his own character and the character of Titus and others who worked among the Corinthians in order to answer the accusation. Paul asks two more questions, “did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit” and “did we not walk in the same steps.” The implied answer is “yes.” Paul need only call to mind his and Titus’ character as they walked among the Corinthians as refutation to the charges against them. Paul is certain that he and Titus have conducted themselves (“walked in the same steps”) in such a manner that they are blameless. He is also certain that when this argument is put before the Corinthians that they will have little to say in response.

2 Corinthians 12:19-13:4

In this next section, Paul will again remind his readers of his impending visit. Although he has previously rejoiced in the repentant response the Corinthians have made in regard to the severe letter that was sent (2 Cor. 7:6-13), Paul acknowledges that there are issues that still need to be dealt with and he no doubt uses a harsher tone in order to move the Corinthians to action so that his visit will be one of joy and not discipline. Paul begins this section by writing that contrary to what the Corinthians might think and expect his letter is not meant to provide a defense of his ministry. Although 2 Corinthians certainly does defend Paul and his motives, this is not the primary purpose of the letter. The primary purpose is to upbuild (strengthen or encourage) this beloved community. In Ephesians, Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the church. Christ is the cornerstone, the apostles and the prophets are the foundation, and the church is the building that is growing into a dwelling place for God. This is what Paul wants for the Corinthians. He is not trying to prove himself for the sake of being right, but for the sake of encouraging the Corinthians in the right direction. Paul is hyper-aware that all of his life takes place in light of the judgment seat of Christ. He is accountable to Christ, he has submitted his life to Christ, and he will answer to Christ for all that he does and says in his life. Because of this awareness, Paul does not take offense that the Corinthians have allowed their opinion of him to be swayed by the false apostles. Instead he reiterates that they need to take responsibility and participate in the building process. In 2 Cor. 12:19 Paul uses the term “beloved” for

the second time in this letter. This note of fatherly love needs to be kept in mind when reading what will follow.

As Paul continues, he again reminds the Corinthians that he is coming to visit them. His fear is that although the Corinthians had a positive response to his severe letter, that their response might not penetrate deeply enough to spark behavioral changes. Paul's fear is also that the Corinthians might reject his leadership, not being the type of apostle that they want. Paul now issues forth two lists of behavioral misconduct that he hopes not to encounter. The first list in 2 Cor. 12:20 reflects ongoing circumstances in Corinth. Paul cites jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. He has addressed similar issues in 1 Corinthians suggesting that although some positive changes had occurred, the problems were deep-rooted and still impacting relationships among the Corinthian community. In 1 Cor. 3:3, Paul accuses the Corinthians of jealousy and strife. In effect, the Corinthians have progressed little since his first visit, but still Paul prefaces his fear with the word "perhaps" suggesting that he holds out hope that the Corinthians will allow the Spirit of God to transform them and bring them to a place of maturity so that he will not have to prove to them that he can be as strong in person as he is in his letters.

In 2 Cor. 12:21, Paul confesses a second fear which is that God might humiliate (or humble) him before the Corinthians. This verse is not easy to understand, but most commentators agree that Paul is referring to a possible situation where he will have to 1) address unrepentant behavior among the Corinthians and 2) suffer an apparent "failed ministry." Paul has dealt extensively with sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians, but he is concerned that despite his stern warnings and his physical presence, that there may be some who continue in their sexual sin (his second list of sins). Paul is disturbed by, and in fact mourns the possibility that some of the Corinthians have persisted in sexual immorality. Paul is grieved because at the heart of the issue is a misunderstanding of the believer's identity in Christ. Paul has taught in 1 Corinthians that the body and spirit are one unified being. What a person does in the body, impacts the spirit. For the Corinthians to persist in sexual sin following such in depth teaching to the contrary, means that they have failed to understand the importance of deeds done in the body. Again, Paul offers a word of hope that this situation *may* not occur and to insure that it does not, he writes a third time of his impending visit.

In 2 Cor. 13:1 Paul makes it clear that although it is not his desire to do so, if he has to come and execute discipline among this church he is prepared to do so. Paul cites a principle of Deuteronomy 19:15 that in disciplinary situations it is necessary to have two or three witnesses to corroborate the accusations. Paul quotes this law in order to drive the point home that when he does come to Corinth, if it is necessary, he will begin disciplinary procedures. In doing so, he will stand in the biblical tradition of the Old Testament Law, which is carried forward in Matthew 18 as the standard of church discipline. In 13:2, Paul reminds the Corinthians of his second painful visit which ended with sorrow and pain. Paul was challenged during this visit and after leaving, he followed up with a severe letter in response to the Corinthians' behavior toward him. This led to the accusation that Paul was weak when present but powerful when absent,

in essence that in reality he was not who he claimed to be. Paul speaks with authority in this passage, claiming that not only does he have the power granted him by God to correct and discipline the church members if necessary, but that he also has the fortitude to follow through on his intentions. Paul addresses this section to both those who have sinned and to all the rest, stating that he will spare no one if he finds that the gospel is being compromised. It may appear that Paul is threatening the Corinthians but it is important to keep in mind here that he is speaking to his beloved, as a father, not as one who delights in abusing his congregation. Paul writes that they are seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in him and he offers his words as proof. The Corinthians were looking for outward demonstrable signs of Christ's power in Paul. Although the Spirit worked many miracles through Paul, because of the insistence upon outward displays of godliness, Paul maintains that his teaching and his life be the proof of his apostolic authority. Paul describes Christ as not being weak toward the Corinthians, but mighty in them, yet their ideas of weakness and power have led them to an overly triumphant view of Christian living. Because of their cultural definitions of power and success, the Corinthians have great difficulty integrating the weakness and humility of Paul and of Christ into the Christian life. Paul attacks this point once again as he points to the necessary servanthood of Christ who willingly chose the weakness and humility of death on a cross in order to provide the way of salvation to humanity and for the power of God to be dramatically displayed in the resurrection. In contrast to their cultural beliefs, it is by climbing down the ladder of success, that true success is attained. The weakness of the cross and the power of the resurrection are both necessary parts of the equation. They are also both necessary parts of the Christian life. Paul concludes his thoughts by making the statement that the power of God is truly displayed, when we realize our weakness and dependency upon Him.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:4

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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. 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*, 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.

5. What is Paul afraid that he might find in Corinth when makes his third visit?

6. Have you ever had to confront someone regarding misunderstanding of who God is or because of a sinful behavior? If yes, what was the outcome?

7. Do you think you relate to a particular aspect of Christ's ministry more than the others? Why do you think it might be dangerous to focus on one element of Christ's ministry to the exclusion of others?