

SMALL GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 9/27/09 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-24

In the previous passage (2 Cor. 1:1-11), Paul reminds the Corinthians of their mutual relationship of love, comfort, and encouragement. He reiterates that he has suffered on their behalf and that his suffering is a way for the believer to identify with Christ in His life and ministry and for Paul to identify with the Corinthians in their own struggles. Paul makes it clear that he is intimately interwoven in the lives of this congregation, and because of relationship has its origin in the plan of God, Paul seeks to reestablish his calling and his standing in light of the concerns that have been expressed.

When Paul writes 2 Corinthians, he has visited Corinth once on his second missionary journey. He has written 1 Corinthians. He has sent Timothy to visit Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17). Upon hearing a negative report from Timothy, Paul made a very difficult visit to Corinth, which ended poorly (2 Cor. 2:1). He wrote a very harsh letter to the Corinthians and after hearing their response to the harsh letter via Titus (2 Cor. 2:4), he now writes 2 Corinthians. In the time between 1 and 2 Corinthians several problems have developed in the Corinthian church. Paul writes to address issues that are both lingering and newly developed.

Problems in Corinth

A group of people calling themselves apostles, have crept into the Corinthian church. These false apostles and servants of Satan (as Paul calls them, 2 Cor. 11:13-15) oppose Paul. Greater attention will be paid to them in chapter 11, but their accusations are peppered throughout the book. These opponents are Jewish and they actively stir up doubts that the Corinthians already have regarding Paul. Some of the accusations are: Paul is unskilled in speech (2 Cor. 11:6), Paul does not accept the financial patronage of the Corinthians but instead he humbles himself and works at a trade in order to preach the gospel without charge (2 Cor. 11:7), and Paul failed to keep his word when he promised to visit them (2 Cor. 1:12-24).

The first two charges against Paul are bound together. When Paul first meets the Corinthians, he comes as a tentmaker. Paul spends time with Priscilla and Aquilla both preaching the gospel and working at his trade (Acts 18:1-5). Later in his 18 month visit, Paul devotes himself solely to preaching, but the Corinthians are bothered that instead of accepting their financial support Paul supports himself by his trade (2 Cor. 11:7-11). Not only would it be undignified for the founder of the congregation to work at a common trade, but it was the custom in Corinth for speakers to be supported by their followers. The Corinthians had a high regard for public speaking. It was a common pastime to listen to orators waxing eloquent on just about any subject. The orators adhered to a specific form of speech that was embellished with emotive, flowery language. Speakers were judged on their oratory skill. The content of the speech was irrelevant. This form of public speaking was highly valued in Corinth and the orators made their living through the financial support of their admirers. Paul refused to yield to

expectations of how he should present his message. This led to the charge of being unskilled in speech. Paul also refused to accept their financial support, even though he did accept support from other churches. All of these actions were an affront to the Corinthian church.

In addition to these problems, Paul has changed his travel itinerary so as not to visit the Corinthians as he had planned to do. Although a change in travel plans might seem rather insignificant, this is an extremely important issue to this church. The church is struggling with divisions, with false teachers, and with a tumultuous relationship with Paul. They need his leadership and his support. When he fails to come to them, they view his decision as one that undermines his very authority as an apostle. If they cannot believe Paul regarding a simple itinerary, how can they believe him when it comes to the Gospel? As we enter into chapters 1 and 2, Paul addresses this concern in great detail, asserting that he loves them deeply, that his word to them is as faithful as the character of God and that any changes in his plans have come from a desire to see the Spirit of God at work in reconciling Paul to the Corinthian believers.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14

As Paul transitions into this next section of the letter, he makes an introductory statement that affirms the sincerity of his character and his devotion to the Corinthians. In 2 Cor. 11:19-21, Paul charges the false apostles of acting deceitfully and mistreating this congregation. Paul on the other hand, has the utmost love and respect for this church. Paul begins on a note of confidence/boasting, a subject that runs throughout 2 Corinthians. Paul uses the terms confidence and boasting interchangeably to challenge the Corinthian culture. In a society where boasting in oneself was an art form, Paul turns the concept around and speaks of the church as his cause to boast and of his ministry as their cause to boast. Anything that is worthy of our confidence, worthy of our boasting has its ultimate root in Christ, which is where Paul intends to point his readers. Paul and his fellow workers are not self-serving in their relationship with the Corinthians. They do not act according to fleshly wisdom. Paul has addressed the difference between Godly wisdom and fleshly wisdom in great detail in 1 Corinthians 1-3, proclaiming, "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," (1 Cor. 2:4). Paul frames his discussion by declaring that the wisdom he seeks is empowered by the Spirit. This will undergird his discussion of the changed itinerary as he explains that his decision not to visit was guided by the Spirit and not intended to harm or punish the Corinthians. It was instead for their benefit.

In v. 13, Paul refers back to his previous writings asserting that he wrote plainly. All of his intentions and desires are laid bare in his letters. Paul longs for this church to develop in maturity. A constant theme in his writings to the Corinthians is the "day of our Lord Jesus." Paul needs to continually draw them out of their present focused thinking toward their future inheritance with Christ. A problem Paul has dealt with in this congregation is an inability to connect their present actions with future consequences. The Corinthians had to learn that what is committed in the body, has eternal consequences for the believer. It is the future hope of a resurrected life with Christ that

should motivate believers to want to imitate Christ in the present. So Paul directs his readers to an eternal perspective that both encourages them to press on in their faith, but also hints of the final day in which every man and woman's motives will be revealed in Christ. Paul's confidence is derived from knowing that there will be a future judgment of believers and his firm belief that he has acted toward the Corinthians with a sincere heart (this will be discussed later in Ch. 5).

2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-17

Following his introduction (2 Cor. 1:12-14), Paul now launches into a discussion of the major issue at hand which is his decision not to make a second visit to the Corinthians as he intended to do. In 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, Paul writes from Ephesus of his intention to visit the Corinthian believers after going to Macedonia. In 2 Cor. 1:15, Paul writes that his intention was to visit them twice. On his first visit he would go from Ephesus to Corinth and then to Macedonia. Following his stay in Macedonia, he intended to go back to Jerusalem via Corinth, bringing them the collection that he had gathered. Paul was resolute in his intention to do so, yet circumstances arose in Corinth that made Paul delay the second visit. Paul was true to his word when he made the first visit. Paul describes this visit however as extremely sorrowful (2 Cor. 2:1). In response to this, he writes "the severe letter," a letter written with many tears (2 Cor. 2:4). Paul writes in 2 Cor. 2:1, that he delayed the second visit because he did not want to come again in sorrow, but he wanted to allow the words of his letter, Titus' ministry, and particularly the work of the Spirit to affect change in the hearts of this congregation. One of the major problems Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians is the hurt feelings that were festering in Corinth because he did not come to them when he said he would. It is patently clear throughout the book of Acts that Paul's travel itinerary is ordained by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit directs Paul through visions, through direct encounters with God, and even through opposition. Every step that Paul takes on his three missionary journeys (his journey to Rome is often counted as a fourth missionary journey) is made in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Paul's ability to heed the direction of the Holy Spirit is one of the reasons he has authority as an apostle, yet the Corinthians accuse him of acting in the flesh and going back on his word. Paul did intend to follow through with a second visit, but he wanted to make sure it would be joyful. By the writing of 2 Corinthians, "the severe letter" had accomplished its intended effect, and Paul is eager to put the past behind them so that they can continue to mutually encourage one another. Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions (with "no" as the intended answer) to bring the accusations to the forefront.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-24

In this section of Paul's argument, he firmly roots his intentions toward the Corinthians in God's faithfulness. It may seem arrogant for Paul to equate his faithfulness toward this church with God's faithfulness, but this is exactly what he does. If his word is suspect in any way, then his entire message is compromised. If Paul can say yes and no at the same time, how can the Corinthians trust in what he is teaching regarding God's great love for them, Jesus' great sacrifice on their behalf, and the

Spirit's transforming work in their lives? Paul spent 18 months in Corinth devoted to teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:11). Silvanus and Timothy were also active in this ministry, confirming the message that Paul brought. If the Corinthians cannot trust Paul to be faithful in little things like travel plans, how can they trust him to be faithful in issues of salvation? Paul assures his readers that they have already experienced the fruit of his salvation message in their lives. They have received the Holy Spirit and this is evidence that what he speaks is unwavering truth. If they know by experience that Paul's word has been faithful, they should trust that his decision to delay his second visit was not arbitrary, but borne out of deep concern that when Paul does visit, it will be done in an atmosphere of joy and reconciliation.

God's faithfulness is the heart of the gospel message. All of Paul's teaching begins with God's faithfulness to Abraham. In the Abrahamic covenant God promised to make Abraham a great nation and that this nation would be a light to the Gentiles. Jesus is the culmination of those promises and Paul is one of God's primary vehicles to convey that a door of faith has been opened to the Gentiles. The core of Paul's teaching is rooted in God's immutable character. Paul makes the correlation between the certainty of the message preached and the certainty of the messenger. On the matter of his relationship with the Corinthians Paul is adamant that he is acting out of God's leading and nothing else.

In verse 20, Paul transitions from the message preached to the message received. The glory of God through us is the evidence that what Paul has spoken in Corinth is truth. Paul points to their mutual experience of God's work in their lives. Paul describes this experience through the threefold activity of the Trinity. God the Father establishes (which means to secure or confirm) and anoints us in Christ. Usually Paul describes Jesus as being anointed by God, but in this passage he writes that we are anointed by God. When someone is anointed in the Old Testament is a sign that God has chosen them for a particular purpose. In this case, God has chosen both Paul and the Corinthians to be participants of His saving Grace. All of this happens in God the Son. It is only by the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection that any of us are invited into this unique relationship. Finally, it is God the Holy Spirit who acts as a seal and a pledge for what is to come. Paul uses business terms to describe the Holy Spirit's relationship with us. In the Roman Empire, a seal meant that the object was the sole possession of the owner. A down payment was not taken lightly, rather it was a certain, secure promise that the rest of the payment would come. What we have in part in this life, we will have in full in eternity. Our lives will not longer be marred by the troublesome imperfections of sin.

In these two short verses, Paul describes the ultimate secure, fixed, certain, unchanging reality that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have effected in their lives (and ours as well).

In reminding the Corinthians of their mutual experience and their unity in faith, they are part of a family. They share the same history and the same future. It is because of the security of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians that he now broaches the reason for not making a return visit: to spare them. From what would Paul need to

spare these struggling believers? We do not know exactly, but it is likely that if a painful visit and a tearful letter of anguish had not yet produced an effect on these believers that a return visit would only be more severe and possibly breach the relationship. Paul's desire for this congregation is to reconcile with them, to come to them in joy, and to share with them in their growth, faith and witness. Paul shows a deep affectionate concern for them and in his love he redirects them to what they have in common in Christ.

SMALL GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

A. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14.

2 Corinthians 1:12-14 (NAS)

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

1. How does Paul characterize his behavior toward the Corinthians?

2. Describe Paul's relationship with the Corinthians.

B. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-17.

2 Corinthians 1:15-17 (NAS)

¹⁵ And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you, that you might twice receive a blessing; 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. ¹⁷ Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or that which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?

3. What was Paul's original travel plan?

4. What is the accusation made against Paul?

C. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-24.

2 Corinthians 1:18-24 (NAS)

¹⁸ But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. ¹⁹ For 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. ²⁰ For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. ²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²² who also

sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. ²³ But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. 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.

Read Genesis 22:15-18

Genesis 22:15-18 (NAS)

¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

5. What does God promise through Abraham?

Read Acts 13:44-49

Acts 13:44-49 (NAS)

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. ⁴⁶ Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

6. What does Paul claim in this verse? Has God fulfilled His promises?

7. According to 2 Corinthians 1:18-24, what proof does Paul offer as evidence of his faithfulness toward the Corinthians?

8. How does Paul describe what God has done for us?

Read Ephesians 1:23-14.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NAS)

¹³ *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

9. How certain is God's promise of salvation to us?

10. Why does Paul turn to this mutual truth in his letter to the Corinthians?