

No.14, Second Corinthians

Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church received a mixed reaction. It would seem that most received it well, submitting to and acting on the Apostle's exposure of their sin and correction of their faults & discrepancies. See 2 Cor 7: 9 in which the Apostle refers to genuine repentance being displayed by them – he responds to them in a spirit of praise & commendation. But there were others in Corinth who did not receive well the first letter, reacting against it in rebellion, with the result that they began to attack God's servant very viciously.

One of the ways in which they did so was by attacking his character and accusing him of making empty promises which he then failed to keep, which is the meaning of ch 1: 18. It had been alleged that his word had been "yea and nay" which means that he said one thing but then did another. Moreover, they based this allegation on the fact that Paul, for very good reasons, changed his plans regarding certain proposed visits to Corinth. However, seizing their opportunity, his enemies went a step farther: having alleged that the *man* was not trustworthy, they then alleged that his *message* could not be trusted either. In other words, their single goal in attacking Paul was that of seeking to discredit the Gospel that he proclaimed. To them Paul responds strenuously, denouncing them for their rebellion toward God's truth.

Thus, in this epistle there are two different responses incorporated into what he wrote – a response to those who welcomed his 1st epistle; and a response to those who did not. This twofold response explains why in this epistle there is such a sudden change in tone the whole way through. As noted, at one point the Apostle writes tenderly and with praise for the Corinthians; but then the next he suddenly adopts a denunciatory approach. Thus, unless we understand that in this letter Paul is dealing with one group and then another, its content will be confusing. However, at the same time Paul's method of writing gives us special or unique insights that we would not otherwise have.

(1) A unique view of Paul the man. 2 Corinthians is the most autobiographical of Paul's letters; in it there is more of Paul himself than in any other epistle or in the record of him contained in the book of Acts. Moreover, while in 2 Corinthians there is focus on Paul as a worker & labourer in Christ's kingdom as there is in other Scriptures, yet in this epistle there is a view of Paul's heart & mind; there is an insight into what moved him & made him what he was in the work of God. Here we see him as a man with a heart on fire with love and passion for Christ.

(2) A unique view of Paul the minister. In this epistle Paul unveils much about his labour & service for Christ as a Gospel minister. He refers to various aspects of ministry, details not found in any of his other writings.

(a) The scope of his ministry – see ch. 10: 16; his intention was to preach the Gospel in the unevangelised places of that time. In this there is proof of that great love for Christ & for souls that burned in his heart.

(b) There is the subject of his ministry. First & foremost his subject was the person & work of Christ, ch.8: 9 – this in a nutshell presents the subject of Paul's ministry. But throughout the epistle he expands on that foundational theme in various ways.

Regeneration – ch.4: 6; comparing what God did at Creation with what He does in the new creation, Paul shows that regeneration is a miracle of grace whereby an entirely new principle of life is infused into the soul. See also ch.5: 17 which defines the great change that results from regeneration; and ch.1: 22 where Paul speaks of the indwelling of the Spirit that also results from our regeneration.

Justification – ch.5: 18-21; his subject is reconciliation with God through Christ. v.18 – as one personally reconciled to God through Christ, he had been given the ministry of reconciliation. Note this well – in his ministry Paul preached the Gospel from his own experience of the Gospel. Note v.21 – this is one of the greatest statements of the Gospel in the entire NT. It shows the very basis of reconciliation, of why the Gospel minister may cry "*be ye reconciled to God.*" The verse describes the purely legal transaction of men's sins to Christ so that His righteousness may be imputed to them & they become reconciled to God.

Consolation – ch.1: 3 & 4; the point is that for God's people, for those saved by grace there is the comfort that the Gospel affords in even the time of greatest trial & tribulation.

Glorification – ch. 4: 17 & then ch.5: 1-8 Note how Paul longed to be with Christ. v.6 – the word "absent" means *away from home*. While Paul had an earthly home, his dwelling in the earthly body, yet he knew it was not his true home: it was with the Lord.

(c) Then there is the steadfastness of his ministry; a steadfastness that was born out of the realisation that he had been entrusted with his ministry & message by the Lord Himself, ch.4: 1-7. Note especially v.7 where he sees himself merely as an earthen vessel set aside to be an instrument for the channelling of the Gospel so that the Lord would have all the glory. But the steadfastness of his ministry as depicted in this epistle is most clearly in seen as he speaks of his battle with false apostles and bitter opponents of his ministry. For example, see ch.10: 2-6 in which he speaks very plainly of his warfare, weapons, foes etc. The point is clear – he was not going to be moved from standing for Christ against such men & their wicked & slanderous opposition to him. He was steadfast because the danger in which the Lord's people were placed by these wicked men, ch.11: 1-15.

(d) The suffering of his ministry – it is in this epistle that Paul really sets forth a very full revelation of his sufferings for the sake of Christ. Details of this aspect of his ministry are found all the way through the epistle. See 1: 8-11 – the reference is to his labour in Ephesus in Asia Minor when his life was in great danger. See also ch.4: 8-10 & 11: 23-28 – an amazing description of personal suffering of various kinds for the sake of Christ; but note how Paul actually viewed it all & why. See ch.4: 17a – he saw his affliction as being *light* and but for a *moment*. Why? Because he was constantly living in personal renewal & revival, v.16; he viewed all in the light of eternity, v.18; and he saw that the reward awaiting him would infinitely outweigh the suffering, v.17b.

(e) The success of his ministry – see ch.3: 1-6a. In these verses Paul refers to the false apostles who could only gain access by use of certain letters of commendation, probably forgeries & fabrications. But Paul needed no such letters – his letter of commendation was comprised of the converts that the Lord had given him. Such were "the epistle of Christ" v.3 – people gloriously changed by the power of the Gospel, proving that Paul was an "*able minister of the new testament.*"