

**2 CORINTHIANS 1-2 FALSE TEACHERS ARRIVE; DEFENDING HIS MINISTRY**



We begin with Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. They were truly privileged to have received these two special epistles that God chose to especially inspire so they would be part of the books of the Bible. Paul also mentioned he was in Macedonia when this second epistle was written around the year A.D. 55 (see 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5; 8:1).

In this second epistle, Paul, as the Church's regional pastor, faces a multitude of problems to resolve. He addresses them with great patience and tenderness, assuring them that, despite his firm correction, he truly loved them. Alarming, during the interval between his first and second epistle to them, false teachers had infiltrated the Church, showing supposedly impressive credentials, and started teaching false doctrines, sought to seize control of the region and wanted to discredit Paul.

As *Preacher's Commentary* brings out, "The difference in the tone of *this letter* is to be found in the occasion that precipitated it. There seems to have been a *resurgence of antagonism toward Paul's leadership*. Second Corinthians was written primarily to deal with that problem."

So, Paul was compelled to write this second epistle largely to defend himself against the slander of these false teachers and expose the falsehood of their heresies. These false ministers, along with the backing of some deceived brethren, leveled the following **ten accusations against Paul**:

1. He hid his true intentions when writing (1:13).
2. He didn't keep his promises (1:17).
3. He was seeking to lord it over them (1:24).
4. He didn't have letters of recommendation from Jerusalem like these false teachers (3:1).
5. His teachings regarding the Gospel were not clearly understood (4:3).
6. He had not personally known Christ, as some of these false teachers claimed (5:16).
7. He was financially exploiting the brethren for personal gain (7:2; 11:9; 12:14-16).
8. His letters were strong but not his physical presence (10:10-11; 11:6).
9. He was operating in an area where he had not received authority to evangelize (10:14-16).
10. He sent assistants who were harsh (12:16-19).

Paul begins the epistle by addressing them, as usual, with the Church's true name: "the Church of

God in Corinth" (2 Cor. 1:1). Then, despite all these accusations, he doesn't get down nor get angry and begins on a positive note, praising God for rescuing his ministerial team from a mortal danger.

He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

Here he reveals a very important principle for us--the trials we undergo can help us understand the suffering Christ went through for us and also, that we can become more compassionate and consoling of others who are suffering similar trials. It's easier to identify with someone who is suffering if we have gone through a similar experience. That is one reason Christ came to earth—to undergo the trials and temptations common to us and be able to identify with us. As Heb. 2:17-18 says about Jesus, "This is why He had to be a Man *and take hold of our humanity in every way*. He made us *His brothers and sisters* and became our merciful and faithful King-Priest before God; as the One who removed our sins to make us one with Him. *He suffered and endured every test and temptation, so that He can help us every time we pass through the ordeals of life*" (TPT).

Paul then relates the great trial he overcame, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many" (1:8-11).

What was the terrible trial Paul endured? Although not explicitly stated, in his previous epistle in 1 Cor. 15:32 he had said: "I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus." Ephesus was the capital of Asia (modern Turkey) and somehow Paul had to contend with wild beasts there. It was because he had been delivered from such a trial that he was so grateful to God—an experience serving to help him comfort others who were being persecuted.

After recounting his trial, Paul defends himself against the false accusation of boasting. He says: "For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you" (2 Cor. 1:12).

Paul was also accused by false teachers of being unreliable. He denies this accusation, explaining the situation, "And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?" (2 Cor. 1:15-17).

He then reveals why he had postponed his trip to Corinth, "Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, *that to spare you I came no more to Corinth*. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but *are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand*" (2 Cor. 1:23-24).

Thus, instead of going immediately to Corinth, he waited hoping tempers would cool and attitudes improve so he wouldn't have to apply a severe correction. He explains ministers shouldn't be lords or masters of a person's faith, nor should they try live people's lives for them, or be constantly correcting them, but instead helping them according to their faith and applying correction, with love, only when absolutely necessary.

Now, in the first epistle Paul wrote to them, he had instructed them to suspend a member who was engaging in sexual immorality with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1-4). This member eventually repented but now some were shunning him at Church and Paul must correct this unforgiving attitude.

He thus says, "But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—

not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore, I urge you to *reaffirm your love to him*. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, *whether you are obedient in all things*. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, *I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ*, lest Satan should take advantage of us; *for we are not ignorant of his devices*" (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

Here we have a model of how to reintegrate a member who has seriously sinned publicly. The person must first repent wholeheartedly and stop sinning in this way. Then, once the pastor (sometimes in consultation with other ministers), grants the authorization for the person to be reintegrated, having confirmed the fruits of repentance are genuine. Thereafter, the congregation should receive the person with patience, acceptance and love. For, as Paul says, if opposition persists, Satan can take advantage of the situation and lay snares to cause some to fall into negative attitudes, thereby dividing the Church.

"The reason *why Paul wrote*," says *The New Bible Commentary*, "was to see if the Corinthians would acknowledge his authority, first by disciplining the man and then by restoring him when he repented" (p. 1077). Instead of going to address the matter personally, Paul had sent Titus with a "severe letter," probably 1 Corinthians, and asked him to report back about the reaction. When he arrived in Troas, he expected to meet Titus, but it didn't happen. Anxious, he departed for Macedonia, where they finally met and his joy was immense on learning of the positive reaction to his letter.

Paul praises God saying, "Now thanks be to God *who always leads us in triumph* in Christ, and through us *diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge* in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

Here, Paul uses an analogy drawn from Roman "triumph" procession—a technical term used for a victorious general parading with prisoners and the spoils through the streets of Rome. He feels himself to be part of Christ's procession with every triumph

achieved for God's Work. His message of God's truth is like the aromatic incense heralds scattered before the victorious general. But for those who rejected that message, it's the smell of death – they are still in their sins and condemned.

Another triumph Paul is confident will be attained is *the defeat of the heretical teachers who have infiltrated the Corinthian congregation*. He accuses them of falsifying God's Word and says: "For we are not, as so many, *peddling the word of God*; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17).

What did these false teachers teach? The very same heresies seen in the other apostolic epistles. It was a group who had infiltrated the Church and claimed to come from "James" and had perverted the true gospel by teaching a blend of Christianity, Judaism and what became known as Gnosticism.

The imprint of the Samaritan, Simon Magus, is evident throughout these teachings. Once rejected by the apostles as a false teacher, he had boasted he would go to Rome and establish a hybrid of Christianity, Judaism, and Samaritanism—a system referred to in Revelation 17:5 as "Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots." As Church historian Adolf Harnack notes, "We know that in *the Apostolic age* there were attempts in *Samaria* to found *new religions*, which were in all probability influenced by *the tradition and preaching concerning Jesus*. Dositheus, **Simon Magus**, Cleobius, and Menander appeared as *Messiahs or bearers of the Godhead*, and proclaimed a doctrine in which ***the Jewish faith was strangely and grotesquely mixed with Babylonian myths, together with some Greek additions***. The *mysterious worship*...and the wild syncretism, whose aim, however, was a **universal religion**, all contributed to gain adherents **for Simon**" (*History of Dogma*, Vol. 1, p. 245).

Notably, in Acts 15:24, the apostle James denies that these false teachers had acted with the apostles' endorsement, saying: "Since we have heard that some who went out from us, *to whom we gave no instructions*, have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, by commanding you to be circumcised and to keep the law [the context shows it's the part about rituals]."

Paul is among the first to recognize that these Jewish-Christian heretical brethren were, in reality, false teachers masquerading as leaders authorized

by the leadership in Jerusalem. He identified this Gnostic movement as "the mystery of lawlessness [or lawbreaking] (2 Thes. 2:7). He also refers to them as such in Gal. 2:4, "And this occurred because of *false brethren* secretly brought in (*who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage* [under the ritual law]." Jude warns that some "crept in unnoticed...*ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness*" (Jude 4). Satan's aim was to use his law vs. grace "Trojan horse" especially against the Fourth Commandment, to eventually substitute Sunday for the Sabbath and his quasi-pagan feasts for God's Feasts. That is what precisely happened!

So, Paul must vigorously attack these pernicious teachings--and this goes far beyond placing Moses above Christ and the Old Covenant above the New. In reality, they were teaching a satanic mixture of Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism.

Therefore, Paul must show the Old Covenant and the Ten Commandments have a rightful place within Christianity—indeed, they form its very foundation. Yet now it is complemented with a new type of administration since believers now possess God's Holy Spirit. No longer does the letter of the law stand alone, but it is now accompanied by its spiritual dimension--just as Christ taught in Matthew 5–7. This constitutes a new application of God's law—one that, in reality, demands more, not less, than the previous Sinaitic covenant. For instance, one is forbidden now not merely from killing, but even from having hatred toward others.

In the next Bible Study, Paul will explain this new administration of God's law, showing it represents the new era God had promised to Israel. It is the initial stage in which, through the Holy Spirit, He would *begin* to inscribe His Law upon their hearts, rather than having it consist of words etched externally on stone tablets which, in reality, they did not have the heart to obey (Deut. 5:29).

Paul himself had been a Pharisee and scrupulously adhered to every ritual and tradition prescribed by the Law. Yet, it had failed to bring about an inner conversion and was still carnal. This is why he is so adamant in his condemnation of the distorted manner in which God's law was being administered under the prevailing Judaism of the time and by the Gnostic Christians now appearing. We have a very interesting Bible Study coming up!