

Lesson Two

(1:23 — 2:17)

SECTION IV 1:23 — 2:4

23 But I call God to witness against me — it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy; for you stand firm in your faith. 1 For I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. 2 For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? 3 And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not be pained by those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. 4 For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

V. 23 — **God to witness** — Many times a similar expression occurs in Paul's epistles, as Romans 1:9, 9:1; II Corinthians 11:31; 12:19; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; I Thessalonians 2:5, 10. This should

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cause us to think that God does know the heart of man, that our lives should be so lived that we would not be adverse to having God testify about our actions, and that it is right and proper to "swear" that what we have done/said was as it has been presented.

We should remember that this is still Paul's defense concerning his change of plans, for which cause some had accused him of being fickle. The section runs through 2:11 in particular.

V. 24 — Some consider this verse parenthetical.

lord it over — The Greek term is, in its noun form, translated as "lord." No one, not even the apostle, should "rule" another's faith, since by such action faith ceases to be faith as God desires it. Even God does not force anyone to do/be other than said person wills. Of course, "will" is the point: if one does not, of free will, have faith, then said person has no salvation.

you stand firm — The point is, by virtue of their faith they now stand, and not by means of anything else. Hence, though some might blame Paul or others for lapses in faith, in reality, "every tub must stand on its own bottom."

Chapter 2:1 — This verse presents a problem, not significant in some ways, about how many times Paul visited Corinth other than what is recorded in Acts. Two options are present: 1) that Paul had gone to Corinth with grief because of a problem there, or had gone because of a problem and the visit was upsetting, 2) that because of circumstances, Paul had decided not to go, since the visit would have been with sorrow. Neither position has much bearing on our understanding of the epistle in general. It seems from chapter 13 that Paul had visited twice, even if the Acts history doesn't show it.

I made up my mind — As a point of interest, the Greek term is commonly translated "judge." Many times in the N.T. the idea will be found that judging is common to everybody, and quite necessary to life. The only reason for these remarks is that some people are always quoting Matthew 7:1, and taking the sentiment expressed there and applying it to life in general, rather than in the specific situation involved in Matthew 7. It is only those who have not examined themselves or the New Testament who say people are not to judge. We do judge, and that constantly, since any determination we make about anything is a judgment. The concepts of people judging others are seen in the Old Testament, as in Genesis 9. God instituted judges to help Moses in Numbers 11. Throughout the book of Judges he set up both men and women to judge. So it is in the New Testament, since Jesus enjoined judging, John 7:17, 24. The idea of the Greek term itself is basically that of discernment, and then choosing on the basis of discernment. It is pertinent to remark that this

argument is not intended to insist we take God's place. It is intended to say that we should get involved in life rather than excusing ourselves from situations by hiding behind a misapplied Matthew 7:1.

Vs. 2-4 — These three verses are further explanation of Paul's change of plans: he had the "good health" of the whole church in mind, as well as his own personal feelings. So, as it has been pointed out, they are really independent of anyone as far as their individual faith is concerned, and yet quite interwoven with each other as members.

V. 4 — The problem in this verse (though, again, it is not crucial to interpretation) is about which letter Paul is speaking: First Corinthians or some other letter which we do not possess. Some argue for the one, some for the other. It is impossible to settle the matter.

QUESTIONS:

16. Is it all right to appeal to God to be a verification for our word?
17. Does anyone have the right to "lord over" some other person's faith?
18. With what emotions did Paul write to Corinth?

SECTION V 2:5-11

5 But if any one has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure — not to put it too severely — to you all. 6 For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough; 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. 10 Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

V. 5 — Some argue that the person in mind is the man of I Corinthians 5, while others argue for someone else. In either case, the congregation had evidently taken some action in the matter, with Paul's blessing (and perhaps because the apostle was in some way involved personally). Now, they need to follow up the matter by renewing the ties that had been severed, perhaps by excommunication,

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or some other way. The reason for the needed action to take place is that the person has profited from the discipline, whatever its nature, and was again fit for fellowship. Moreover, Satan would gain the advantage (vs. 6, 11) if they did not complete their obedience (v. 9) which was a by-product of the whole matter.

Obviously, this is a good example for any congregation, not only to test obedience, but to practice Christianity on the local level. Note especially verse 7, where the congregation is, upon the person's repentance, to extend grace and exhortation (as in Heb. 10:24-25).

Discipline as a concept in the New Testament is much broader than the term is commonly used, since it really involves the whole teaching/learning process of the Christian life. Its intended end is to bring the "new creation" (5:17) unto the likeness of Christ, Ephesians 4:13. A part of discipline is seen in Hebrews 12:3-17. Another part in the purpose of the law (i.e., to train us to come to Christ) or the purpose of instruction, Hebrews 5:11-14. The term itself can be seen in such passages as Luke 23:16, 22; Acts 7:22; 22:3; Romans 2:20; I Corinthians 4:15; 11:32; II Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 3:24ff; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 1:20; II Timothy 2:25; 3:16; Titus 2:12; Hebrews 12:5ff; Revelation 3:19.

Forgiveness is as much a necessity for the "one offended" as the "offender." If the "one offended" can not forgive, an essential facet of being like God is not in his/her life. Moreover, said person acts as if the sin committed is more unforgiveable than sin against God (and that is hardly possible!). Such a mind attitude makes reconciliation impossible (have you noticed that it is the person "offended" who is to be the reconciler? See Matt. 5:21-26). This creates an undue state of mind in the "offender" who can not find forgiveness, a most essential part of life. A person needs to feel forgiveness as a reality, both from God and his/her peers. So we are put on the spot to forgive others lest we find no forgiveness ourselves, Matthew 6:14-15; 18:15-35. See, of many texts, Luke 17:1-10; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13. Now read v. 10 and Paul's own example.

V. 9 — Obedience here was as much involved with their subsequent action as their past performance. The end of any discipline, as written above, was to bring a person to the change of mind necessary so that subsequently God's will is done. The Corinthians themselves accepted the discipline from Paul through Titus, and changed their minds/lives, ch. 7:ff.

test — A common Greek term (*δοκιμάζω*) with the basic idea of "checking out" or "proving" something, as the quality of a metal, or the character of a person. In this epistle, 8:2, 8, 22; 9:13; 10:18; 13:3, 5, 6, 7; elsewhere such texts as Luke 12:56; Romans 1:28; 12:2;

14:22; I Corinthians 3:13; 9:27; Titus 1:16; Hebrews 6:8; James 1:3; I Peter 1:7; I John 4:1.

V. 11 — **advantage** — Doubtless much of Satan's success in our lives is because we are ignorant of him and his ultimate goals for us, and so he has the advantage. We ought to read carefully such texts as Ephesians 6:10-17. In the case at Corinth, whatever punishment that was given was not to be for the ultimate destruction of the person. Evil was not to be overlooked, but rather "treated" and the cure effective.

QUESTIONS:

19. The person in this text was not named — wonder why?
20. Does the local congregation have an obligation to itself and the community to oversee its members?
21. Did their obligation stop after said action upon the person?
22. Why should every congregation "guard" its members?

SECTION VI 2:12-17

12 When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; 13 but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

◁ V. 12 — This verse resumed the thread of thought from v. 4, where Paul was discussing the thought of his great concern for the Corinthians, and presented the idea that he was so concerned for them even "open doors" could not deter him from finding out about them. Recall to mind that he had affirmed that his love for them had caused him to not come, rather than being simply fickle, as some had accused him of being.

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a door — Here is an interesting example of an opportunity to serve Christ that was, in effect, ignored because of other considerations that were deemed (by Paul) to be more important. All of us have had, and will continue to have, similar experiences in life. Many and varied are the opportunities that come to all Christians, and our priorities will determine which one(s) we choose. Hence, our concern for one thing may well cause us to pass up another thing (an open door). We must, then, strive to have the right priorities at all times, and be aware that many more demands (= doors) will be upon us than we can possibly fulfill. Now read Philipians 3:1-14 in this light.

V. 13 — Titus had been sent to Corinth with a letter from Paul. The letter (whether our I Corinthians or some other letter) was of such nature that Paul feared lest the Corinthians react negatively. Evidently a rendezvous at Troas had been agreed upon, which is where Paul went, expecting Titus with news of Corinth, as well as to preach, v. 12. However, Paul had to go on to Macedonia before finding Titus.

my mind — The Greek term is commonly translated as "spirit" in the New Testament. Comparison with 7:5 will show that the Greek terms for spirit and flesh overlap in some ways. The apostle could not find any rest, even though the opportunities to serve Christ were his, because of his concern for the Corinthians. (This is the point they were to get, that even preaching took second place in his love for them, which was another argument against those who were opposing him.)

V. 14 — **Thanks be to God** — As we can see, Titus brought good news (note 7:5ff) to Paul, which lead him into this short doxology, and also into an extended (through 6:10) presentation of the preaching ministry, as exemplified by himself, the apostles and others. The meeting with Titus is picked up in 7:5.

The word "thanks" is elsewhere translated "grace" as in 1:2; or "forgive" in 2:7, 10. Note 9:8 ("blessing"), 11, 13, 15.

who . . . always leads us in triumph — God always brings good gifts to those in his service, always can be depended upon to bring victory even out of the greatest tragedy. So it was here: Paul had had many moments of despair in connection to the Corinthians, but God had turned it into something good, and this caused Paul to break into this moment of praise.

The figure of speech is this: God in Christ always is triumphant, and those who go with God are in the triumphal procession with God — rather than being the defeated, Christians are among the victors — what more could one ask?

fragrance — As the victory procession went by, incense was burnt,

giving off a sweet fragrance to those standing by. So Paul likened those in the victory procession of God: they were even as incense, an odor reminding people of God and God's ways. Check Ephesians 5:2 and Philippians 4:18.

V. 15 — This verse further developed the idea in v. 14, presenting the point that Christians generally, and preachers in particular, are representatives of something to everyone and either a reminder/portent of life or of death (even if some/most/all did not realize it).

being saved . . . perishing — This is the correct translation of the Greek text (the identical idea is in I Cor. 1:18). People are either saved/lost at any given moment, should they die; yet it is also correct to describe people as in the process of being saved/being lost, since physical death has not yet occurred and sealed their destinies. Hence, the text also instructs us that people can change their minds, thus changing their lives, even in the matters of salvation. Of course, this is the reason preaching is done, as well as all phases of "church work" in general: we believe that repentance can take place, people's lives reclaimed from the devil and returned to God, etc.

V. 16 — **death . . . life** — As these eternal consequences of preaching and the eternal destinies of people came to mind, hinging upon their relationship to the message preached by such as Paul; and then as he reflected upon the great responsibility of those who bore that message, he thought of who was sufficient for such an awesome task. The (implied) lack of sufficiency or worthiness on the part of any or all was directly related to the greatness of the message and the task. Of course, the God who sent the message was also able to make the ones sent sufficient for their task.

V. 17 — Continuing the thought of v. 16, the apostle seemed to have some in mind (perhaps those who opposed him, or others) who either openly or covertly presented themselves as sufficient for such tasks, but who were in actuality "watering down" the message and the task in such a way that they were totally unworthy/insufficient. Paul will argue in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 that God can make anyone a worthy messenger of the gospel, but only God can do so. Nothing else of man would suffice to accomplish it — only God.

men of sincerity — Contrasted to men who were, of themselves, acclaiming their own worthiness. The Greek term for sincerity was used in 1:12 in connection with Paul's conscience. Some then, as now, were in the preaching ministry for less than the right motives, not knowing that to God they were seen for what they actually were. Paul asserted throughout this whole epistle that his ministry was transparently clear and pure, that he was quite willing "to spend and be spent" in behalf of the church, because he loved them as a father.

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QUESTIONS:

23. Where was Paul when Titus went to Corinth? Where had he (evidently) planned to meet Titus?
24. Does life sometimes present us with more opportunities than we can use?
25. What determines which of several opportunities we will choose?
26. What sort of procession is the Christian in?
27. How did Paul indirectly describe the relationship of Christian to non-Christian? (The apostles may be the "we" in our text.)
28. Were some "peddlers" of God's Word then? Are some now?