

## 2Corinthians – Week 6

### I. Quiz & Review – 2Cor. 2:12ff

#### A. Paul describes his alternate travels...

- i. Instead of going back to Corinth, he headed to Troas...
- ii. Paul readily observed that God had opened a door there for the gospel:
- iii. Even though Paul was having success in this city, his concerns for the Corinthians were weighing heavily on him!
  1. Since Titus did not show up at the appointed time, Paul left to Macedonia.
    - a. This action showed how much he cared for the Corinthians!
  2. Paul shows his two major ministries as an apostle of Christ:
    - a. The preaching of the gospel (cf. 1Cor. 1:17).
    - b. The caring for the local churches (cf. 2Cor. 11:28).
  3. To which should he give first priority? The Corinthians or the lost?
    - a. Apparently, his first responsibility was to the church at Corinth!
  4. But despite the concerns and what seems to be glum at times, Paul thanks God for always leading him and his co-workers in the faith into victory!
    - a. Paul viewed himself and his co-workers as being the aroma of Christ to God, spreading the fragrance of the gospel to all men!
      - i. To the saved, it was a smell of life!
      - ii. To the perishing, it was a smell of death!
- iv. Paul asks another rhetorical question: Who is sufficient for these things?
  1. In other words, who is adequate or worthy to be the aroma of Christ to the world?
    - a. He answers that question in 2Cor. 3:5, when he says, none of us are sufficient in ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God!
    - b. God make us sufficient or worthy to be such an aroma!
- v. Paul takes a subtle jab at the false teachers who were bending the ears of his gospel children...
  1. Yet, these false teachers were peddling (KJV, corrupting) the word of God!
  2. Paul and his companions spoke the pure word of God!

### II. Continuation

#### A. 2Cor. 3:1a (ESV), “*Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?...*”

- i. Paul just identified himself (and his co-workers, Timothy and Silvanus) as being the aroma of Christ to God, sent by God.
- ii. Now, is Paul patting himself on the back here? No!
  1. 2Cor. 10:17-18 (ESV), “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. <sup>18</sup> For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*”
    - a. Paul does not boast in himself.
    - b. Those whom the Lord commends are approved.
    - c. And Paul certainly was commissioned by the Lord to be a messenger of Christ to the Gentiles and to suffer for Christ’s name (cf. Acts 9:15-16).
  2. Paul immediately knocked down any suggestion that he and his companions were patting themselves on the back!
  3. Paul, however, acknowledged God’s work in him as an apostle and thus, his boasting was in the Lord, and not in himself!

B. 2Cor. 3:1b(ESV), “... *Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?*”

i. Letters of recommendation

1. It was common in those days for travelers to have letters of recommendation.
2. Such letters would prove the travelers’ value and genuineness as representatives.
  - a. Paul asked for letters by the high priests to the synagogues, giving him the authority to arrest Christians (Acts 9:1-2)
  - b. There was a letter written on behalf of Apollos (Acts 18:27)
  - c. The book of Philemon was written on behalf of Onesimus.
3. Letters were needed to prevent charlatans from influencing the naïve.

ii. Paul was in a different category:

1. Did he need a letter of recommendation to or from them? No!
  - a. He didn’t believe that, as a founding apostle of the Corinthian church, he should be expected to show such a letter by those he converted.
  - b. He proved to them that he was an authentic apostle by the signs and wonders he performed among them (cf. 2Cor. 12:12).
2. The phrase “*as some do*” seems to point to the false teachers mentioned in 2:17 who were “peddling” or “corrupting” the word of God.
  - a. It is likely that these false teachers were flaunting their letters of recommendation from other churches by belittling the gospel by their conduct and message, while diminishing Paul’s authority because he came with no letter of recommendation.

C. 2Cor. 3:2 (ESV), “*You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.*”

i. This statement should make the Corinthians kick themselves in the head for allowing outsiders to influence them into thinking badly of Paul!

ii. They themselves are Paul’s recommendation letter!

1. Let’s go back to the start:

- a. Corinth had no church in existence prior to Paul’s visit.
  - b. A large number of them had been converted and a church was planted (cf. Acts 18:8).
  - c. As a result of their conversion, their faith would be known to others, especially by neighboring congregations.
  - d. All this was made possible because of Paul and his companions.
2. The general sense is that they were the letter of recommendation which God had given to Paul!
  3. Their conversion under his ministry was the public testimony of his character and loyalty for all to see!
  4. They are Paul’s letter, written on the tablets of his heart!
    - a. Such “letters” are considered very precious and will never be forgotten!
  5. Basically, Paul was reiterating -- in a different way – what he told them earlier in 1Corinthians...
    - a. 1Cor. 9:1-2 (ESV), “*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*”

**D. 2Cor. 3:3 (ESV), “*And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*”**

- i. If the Corinthians were Paul’s “letter of recommendation,” then who wrote the letter?
  - 1. Christ did!****
- ii. The phrase “*by us*” shows that they became a letter from Christ when they heard, believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ through Paul’s preaching and teaching (cf. Acts 18:8, 11).**
- iii. Letters written with ink fade and become illegible over time! They also can be read by only a few and are subject to destruction.**
- iv. But letters written by the Spirit upon human hearts produce divine changes within one’s life!
  - 1. Ezekiel 36:26 (ESV), “*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*”
    - a. A regular, physical “letter of recommendation” written in ink cannot change the heart from stone to flesh! Only God can do such a surgery!******