

Thursday Bible Class

22nd Oct. 2015

2 Corinthians

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Lord Jesus.

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the lord Jesus Christ. This was how the Apostle consistently addressed his readers, and it reveals his humility, and also his desire for the spiritual good health of all the saints, and that God;' mercy and grace is always upon them. His sentiments are to be an example to us. That the second letter of Paul was written by Paul to the Corinthians and has been accepted as part of the Holy Canon of Scripture there is of course no doubt. As far as external evidence is concerned, Polycarp confirms that the author was Paul, as indeed does the Letter to Diognetus, Theophilus of Antioch, Tertullian, Irenaus, Athnagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Marcio's Apostolocon and the Muratorian Canon. We are informed also that the epistles is also found in the old Syriac and old Latin versions, so that by the end of the second century it was fully accepted without question. Of course the internal evidence and its total harmony with other scripture, would have left believers in no doubt at all, and references to external evidence were hardly necessary. It appears from the letter, that it was while Paul was in Macedonia, where he tarried at Philippi, that he was joined by Titus, who had just come from Corinth, and gave him a favourable report, and also other feedback it appears.

The Apostle was moved by the Spirit, inspired to write this second letter to the Corinthians as a follow up to his first epistle, because he evidently had learnt that there were still serious problems fermenting in the ecclesia. Incidentally this was not really the second epistle, it could be called the third or even the fourth, as there I clear evidence in the letter we call the first epistle, that he had already

written to them at least once. But that's by the bye. Despite the lengths and detail Paul goes to in the first epistle it seems there are some outstanding issues that need to be dealt with, such as internal wranglings, evidence of worldliness, and false doctrine. Additionally Paul is required to respond to opposition to his ministry, and attempts to undermine his foundation and that of other Apostles. It seemed that the Corinthians ecclesias was providing a culture for dissent, and it was this lack of spiritual wellbeing that Paul seeks to address, as well as defending the Gospel and his own position. So in light of all this, Paul in this letter took the opportunity to explain his sufferings in Asia, to justify himself in his change of plans about returning to Corinth, to instruct them in the treatment of the offender, to express his joy at the good news of their progress, to bring about their full reconciliation with himself, and to urge the Corinthians to participate in the collection for the ecclesia at Jerusalem, and finally he seeks to establish his authority as an apostle.

Chapter 1

Paul wrote this as an open letter, and addressed it not only to Corinth, but also to all the saints which be in all Achaea. His opening passages reveal a very kindly man, and though he explains the difficult time he has been having, aspects of which we are shown in the record of the Acts of the Apostles, notwithstanding this, his reservoir of love and care toward s others is so evident, as he writes in a generous spirit of togetherness, with a warmth which can be felt. He begins by praising God, who he confirms has given him the strength to continue in adversity, so grateful is he and assured by this strength that he avows to share it with his readers, the sufferings of Christ he declares gives us the comfort of Christ also. He reveals how he and comrades felt at one point resigned to death, 1:8, but he

shares his great experiences of rescue from these life and death situations for the sake of the Gospel, and he again revealing his generosity, declares that he attributes such salvation partly to their thoughtful prayers.(v11) This spirit of fellowship, is the same spirit with which he writes to them, with integrity openness and transparency that should be the communication of all saints. V 12-13 allowing no reading in between the lines, or hidden meanings, and Paul emphasises that the message he has delivered to them has been based on the spirit from above and not fleshly wisdom, and there has been no vacillation but consistency throughout, delivered by the Holy Spirit which has been their Divine commission. Paul points out in verse 23 his return to Corinth was delayed because he didn't want to overly influence their growing faith, but instead to compliment. A valid point for our own exhortation.

Chapter 2

In ch 12:14,21 and ch 13, of this letter Paul actually reveals he has already visited them after he wrote them the first epistle. He describes as coming to them again, and that it would be the third visit. That earlier visit was evidently to reinforce the message of the letter, which was to restore ecclesial discipline, and directly address those stirring up trouble. In this second chapter we see Paul taking a step back, he would not visit with that purpose in mind again. The time now was primarily to build up, to encourage, and not to focus on chastening. The right balance has to be struck in these things. So verse 3 he declares the purpose of this letter is not to give a heavy heart but to cheer up. Nevertheless he points out in verse 5 that there are others who have caused offence, but corrected, and chastened, now is the time for forgiveness, to prevent depression and a falling away, and the underlying motive of correction should

come to the surface, that of love, v 8. So again he confirms why he is writing, to examine their spirit of forgiveness.

Chapter 3

As we begin ch3, we can see aspects which Paul begins to address, which were troubling him somewhat, as some had been working hard to undermine him, and the Gospel. Paul develops this carefully and slowly. First he speaks of letters of recommendation. As we can learn from the Acts, Paul did carry letters of commendation to begin with in the early days, because of his past history, we also read in Acts 18 that Apollos also was given letter commending him, so it seems the apostles did this to support one another as they began their ministries, it perhaps was regarded as a general thing to do, but Paul expresses frustration, that really with the Corinthians was it necessary, they themselves were the evidence. They knew him personally, why was he being called into question? They were the result of his work. All other ecclesias, and any who would know the gospel would see this clearly, the outworking of the ministry of Christ is not verified by letters, or thesis, or statements of faith, but by practice. Thus they were now the very epistle witnessing to the world, having been written by Christ on the tables of their hearts, and not tablets of stone. The works of the law of Moises had been written on tablets of stone, and as a law, it had been the letter of verification, or commendation as it were, so that the letter of the law had been observed, but their minds had been closed to the teaching behind the law, that of Christ, they could not see the glory because of unbelief. But Paul writes to them that v18, he, his fellow apostles, and all the saints to whom he wrote were able with an open face to see the glory of the Lord, the veil of unbelief being taken away, no need to be hung up then on letters of commendation, the proof is in the doing of it.

Chapter 4

The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. It was a gentle reminder to the Jewish members of the Ecclesia. The openness and transparency of the gospel of Christ is something which the Apostle emphasises. The veil, the darkness of ignorance of what lay behind the law, was still so prevalent in the synagogues in every city, that influence was everywhere, the teaching of salvation by works and piety of an individual, by contrast the light of the gospel shining in a person, reveals character of God, the life of Jesus Christ that saves, the glory is not that of man, but of God. Paul uses the term earthen vessels, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Man is perishing as are his works, and letters, and every part of him, but the it is the letter written on the heart by the finger of God which sustains, troubled on every side, but not distressed, perplexed but not in despair. Little phrases, just one verse, written by Paul conveys so much, such as v10 of this chapter *bearing about in the body the dying of the lord Jesus*. A whole class could be given on this, showing the mortifying of our members, the carrying the cross daily, enduring the cross, despising the shame as Christ did, and in so doing sharing the eternal life that was given to Christ, for as he lives now, so he lives in us now, through faith, and he which raised up Jesus, likewise will raise us up. All things are for your sakes he says. Again so much said in such few words. The Gospel being God's breathed out word, is the spirit which saves, that Spirit working in a man, no longer just an earthen vessel but a receptacle of God's Spirit, intrinsically part of God's purpose, thus all things for your sakes, thus though the outward earthen vessel perish, the inward man of the spirit is daily

renewed. This correct perspective makes it all worthwhile, all these troubles just light affliction in comparison.

Chapter 5

The comparison continues, now comparing the human body not as an earthen vessel, but an earthly tent, something which is temporal and transient, which wears out and is destroyed. It is corruptible, burdensome, which causes us to groan, especially when aware of the new life promised, an eternal house, a permanent structure. Knowing this, Paul teaches the believers to be patient and cheerful, for the Spirit of Christ residing in us is an earnest he says of the permanent structure to come. An earnest. This word was used in chapter 1, and F.F. Bruce shows this Greek word is specifically used, as it gives the idea of an engagement ring, or betrothal, it is a sign or a pledge of guarantee. Thus Paul adds we walk by faith, not by sight, based on this guarantee. This cheerfulness continues when we experience the power of Christ within, knowing the love of Christ constraineth us, or controls us, and being in Christ we are a new creature, a permanent building in the making. The beginnings can be seen. Paul reminds of the coming bema, the judgement seat, where the works of this mortality are judged, and knowing the terror of the Lord he says, he persuades men. Yes indeed God is a consuming fire to those who though recipients of the Gospel of Christ, and receive the token of guarantee of a life in Christ, and yet despise it. For it is no less than the work of God himself, it is he who is working through Christ to reconcile not just individuals but the world to himself, as part of his grand design, to bring all men back to him again, not counting their sins against them. As representatives, or ambassadors, Paul appeals the same end, Be ye reconciled to God! For Christ's sake, for it was Jesus who was made sin for us, so that we can be at one with God, how can this be ignored?

Chapter 6

Now Paul draws his readers in, involving them in the same work and purpose. We as workers together, chapter 6., all to be ambassadors, all have the responsibility, as all having received the grace of God, let it not be wasted. The seriousness, the holiness and gravity of the ministry must not be lost. Paul as workers together, includes the Corinthians, and all believers, as suffering for Christ, that in all contrary circumstances in all adversity, to always conduct ourselves as God's ministers, His workers, look at our example, he says, and Paul shows the sacrifice he and his fellow apostles have endured for their sakes, look what we have done for the ministry,, all for you, look at what Christ has done for you, even more! Now it was their turn! O ye Corinthians! Indeed as it is ours turn also. He declares how he has not held back his love, his tender feelings for them, but v12, they are holding back "straitened in your own bowels". They are not being completely self-less, but need to be spoken to as children, be ye enlarged, or increase your understanding, be sympathetic, love more! He identifies the power holding them back. It is their only partial separation from the ways of the world. He speaks of the need to be unyoked, to keep ties with the world to a minimum, to disentangle themselves from its influences, how can they believe one thing, but walk in tandem with people who believe the opposite. This is the distraction that was evident in the Ecclesia. Maintaining holiness from the corruption and vice of the world not just physically but mentally, spiritually as well, God promises I will receive you, and be a Father, having then these promises,

Chapter 7

Paul urges believers to be clean from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. Still the general tenor of this letter continues in a different vein to the first letter, Paul continuing to adopt an encouraging tone, he seeks their reciprocation of true friendship, and mutual trust. He really does praise them, not just to balance the letter as it were but wants them to see how their obedience to the faith has been a witness and is noticed by so many. He wants them to know that they too have been instrumental in building him up. He explains the difficulties he encountered in Macedonia, troubled on every side, without were fighting's within were fears, but after finally managing to meet up with Titus, he delivered to Paul the great news of their sterling work, and spiritual growth, since his last letter which chastened them. He explains how pleased he was and uplifted by their positive reaction, and how they acknowledged their faults and took steps to correct them, and repented in the right spirit. To Paul, their reaction revealed their hearts, and stirred up emotions and actions which he wasn't sure were there at first. V11 of 7, This is why he says v13 why we were so happy and encouraged he says, and that Titus too was really appreciative of your support. This is a wonderful chapter of praise and reveals Pauls advanced shepherding skills of care and love to be emulated by us all. Now Paul, in

Chapter 8

after noticing and commending their spiritual growth and generosity, draws upon them to perhaps demonstrate it in a rather more tangible way. On March 23rd AD37, in the reign of Caligula there occurred a great earthquake, it was followed by another in the reign of Claudius, followed by widespread crop failures. We recall how Agabus in Acts 11 prophesied of a great famine. Saul and Barnabus were selected to send relief to the ecclesia at Jerusalem. This work developed continually, so that it became a part of the duty of every

ecclesia to give even as they had received, the first day of the week, as we recall from Paul's first letter, chapter 16, and as Paul writes to the Romans and Galatians also. So very diplomatically and carefully Paul reminds them that they were quite forward in this work, but now perhaps not so generous. This chapter is a master class in making a point powerfully but without causing offence, driving home the message persuasively but still leaving it open to their conscience, that when they did give it wouldn't be because they were told to, but that it would be from their hearts. Paul shows that as they give, so it will be given to them, if they sow sparingly, whether in preaching the gospel or helping or giving, so they would reap sparingly, sow bountifully they would reap bountifully, for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver. And Paul makes the point in

Chapter 9

that being so aware of the community of believers, and the wider fellowship, being sensitive giving in love, giving in time and material benefits actually demonstrates and shows the proof that we are in submission to under Christ's authority and that you agree with his gospel. What can we give that compares to what has been given for us! He concludes his point by exclaiming Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Words cannot express the gift given for us to obtain salvation. The gift of His only Son who was made sin for us, that we might have life eternal. It is always cause for wonder and gratitude. What can we give that matches this generosity, so why should we withhold what is not ours anyway? Paul in

chapter 10

turns to the last subject he wants to address. His authority, and that of other Apostles has obviously come under severe attack, and thus by extension the authority of the Holy Spirit, and that of Christ

Himself. In the rest of the letter he vindicates his position and that of his fellow apostles by an open attack on the adversaries. By challenging the ecclesia to demonstrate his lack of integrity, By becoming a "fool" in boasting of his accomplishments as a disciple, by citing personal acts of divine favour, and lastly by recounting his personal privilege and glory in receiving visions and revelations. He apologises in advance excusing himself for not retaliating against the gainsayers in a worldly way, responding like for like, but *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*, no instead the knowledge of God is mighty to break down false logic, and is able to bring into captivity every thought. He then accuses in a gentle way again of some of their members looking on the outward appearance making judgements using worldly wisdom, for example comparing his letters with his bodily physical presence. Oh his letters are weighty and powerful, but he is not a good speaker, Paul in trying to be humble, and not lording it over people, and not walking with a swagger as it were, as the worldly rulers do, cultivating an over bearing presence, is clearly not what the Corinthians were used to, and this was seized upon as evidence that Paul was deficient in authority. Paul puts the matter straight; he does not want to be compared to such v12 of 10. We dare not to take ourselves too seriously or compare ourselves with those people who pat themselves on the back. When they use themselves to measure by, and compare themselves with themselves, they are foolish. Instead verse 18 Who is approved? It is not the one who congratulates himself. It's the one whom the Lord approves. That's what's counts. Empty boasting might give a form of authority, but it is exposed, and does not last, and denotes a false leader.

Chapter 11

Paul asks his readers to bear with him, as he explains his passionate response. It is their complete spiritual well-being only which motivates him, he seeks no promotion or recognition from men, and cares little for it. His driver is that of the ecclesia am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, so naturally when false teachers arise, who like the serpent deceive, so he is anxious that they are not corrupted, but he seeks to present them as a chaste virgin to Christ. He sees that as his duty. He chides them for bearing well with another gospel v4 being preached in their midst. As far as these so called “super Apostles” as the words “very chiefest apostles” should be better translated, he describes them with heavy irony, they are but false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves, v13, not allowing the Gospel to transform them we note. He acknowledges that Satan himself, human nature can distort itself, twisting sin, into being a very message from God, lies spun into truth, the bigger the lie, the easier to believe, is the observable truth! He briefly defends his own record, that unlike others, he never allowed himself to be a burden to them, and how could any in Corinth accuse him otherwise when it was known that the generous Macedonian ecclesia had helped him. He admits to indulging in self-defence, as he points out many are glorying in the flesh v18, so let’s settle that issue as well, if my credentials are not sufficient, and he runs through all the perceived qualifications the super Apostle s seemed to boast of, showing how in all he exceeded them all, as he had been deliberately chosen by God a chosen vessel for this very purpose. Preserved by God, and indeed preserved by the very efforts of fellow disciples, who helped him to escape Damascus in a basket, what a letter of commendation that was if any was required

chapter 12

Paul refers to one more aspect. The so called super Apostles were making the boasting of the flesh as their credentials, but Paul's boasting is of another sort. He comes to visions and revelations of the Lord. He describes how he knew a man some 14 years ago whether in the body or out of the body he couldn't tell, thus despite being inspired he was not revealed everything, and freely admitted it, and he describes as being caught up to the third heaven where he received these visions and revelations, he describes being in paradise, and hearing words that it is not lawful to utter. He was in fact speaking of himself as can be seen in verse 7 that he was given a medical impediment of some kind to keep him grounded and level headed, lest the knowledge of what he had heard and seen allowed him to become too pompous and exalted like these so called super Apostles and false apostles had. The third heavens Paul refers to are the spiritual heavens, the future vision of glory of the Kingdom of heaven upon earth located in Zion. That was the paradise he had witnessed. Included in these visions and revelations were a meeting with Christ, as he describes in his previous letter as he was the last apostle to witness Christ as one born out of time, (1 Cor 15) Paul speaks in the third person, and rather indirectly for the very reason such boasting or self-defence comes uneasily to him, and he immediately is willing to put himself down willing to show his weakness in that the Lord saw fit to give him this thorn in the flesh. His style and honest yet self-effacing delivery, speaks of genuineness and sincerity which the Corinthians would have gladly seized upon, and indeed first and second century disciples as we described at the commencement of this overview. Finally he admits he has had to descend to the foolishness of self-defence, but rests his credentials on the very proof of his ministry, 12:12 truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in patience, in signs in wonders and mighty deeds. So he reveals his plans to come again the third time, and

again explains that he does not expect to be financially supported, nor did Titus, he sadly confesses, that when he comes he is not sure that he will find them in spiritual health as he would expect, and hopes that this letter has an effect.

Chapter 13

He warns them that if he does find back biters, whisperers and debates he v2 of 13, he will not spare, but counter such sins. He notes then in verse 3 that they are seeking proof of Christ speaking in him. Pauls weighty and powerful letter now delivers upon its build up, what of you. I have attempted to explain myself, what of you. What is your defence? You are concerned about proof of Christ speaking in me? When there is ample proof of the power of Christ when we are living in him. But what of you? Verse 5 Examine yourselves? Whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves, just as you have been vigilant in testing me, and others, now it is time to test yourselves. Again one of those verses which say so much in a few words, v8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth, it stands by itself with or without us. It is absolute. We cannot gain say it. Paul indicates that he hopes his letter may have achieved its desired goal, to spare him having to be bold and sharp and cross with them, so he leaves them with the exhortation be perfect, be whole, complete. Be at harmony with one another, be of one mind, complete as individuals but in fellowship even more. He concludes *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen*