

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Introduction

Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was a treasured special relationship. Relationships with our fellow believers bring unique joy; but if spoiled, they may also bring great sorrow. That was Paul's sad experience with the Corinthians.

Summary

In 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4, Paul defends his integrity with regard to his travel plans, when accused of duplicity by the Corinthians.

1. Under Attack vv. 12-14

There was something wrong in the church at Corinth. Paul's motives and conduct had become a bone of contention. Paul protests that he could look back over his time in Corinth with a clear 'conscience' (2 Cor 1:12).

As Christians, we should be constantly living so that when we can look back over our lives without regret over our motives and actions in the Christian life.

The believers in Corinth could take Paul's words at face value (2 Cor 1:12-13).

Nevertheless, an accusation appeared to be gaining ground that whenever Paul wrote to them, he did not mean what he said.

The word 'boast' (2 Cor 1:14) tells us that Paul believed that the church at Corinth had good reason to be proud of him. There is a searching challenge here for those who are already called or who might desire to serve the church. Are our congregations appropriately proud of us? It is also sad to note that the Corinthian tragedy is often repeated as conscientious spiritual leaders are undermined by disloyalty.

As well as declaring that 'you will boast of us', Paul also noted 'we will boast of you'. This confirms the genuineness of his affection for these Christians in Corinth.

2. Alleged Duplicity vv. 15-17

The attack on Paul's reputation focused on his travel plans. From Ephesus, Paul had hoped to head for Macedonia, passing through Corinth first on the way there and then again on the way back, before heading eventually for Judaea in Palestine. He had to change his travel plans, however. Certain elements within the church at Corinth seized on this and were ready to condemn him no matter what he might do or say.

3. Vigorous Defense vv. 1:18-2:4

Paul flatly denies the charge that he gave out contradictory messages.

'God is faithful', and those who speak in his name must do so in a reliable and trustworthy manner. Those who trust in God can do so with complete confidence.

He is the last word in dependability. Jesus is a wonderful expression of the truthfulness and reliability of God (**2 Cor 1:20**). Throughout the Old Testament, God made a succession of mighty promises. Now, in Jesus, all of those commitments have been met in full. How would Paul fulfill his commission as the messenger of the dependable God if he was not himself reliable?

The apostle goes on to argue that his own experience of God had made a new man of him. By the power of grace, he was a far cry from the dubious creature his detractors had made him out to be (**2 Cor 1:21-22**).

Paul's concern here was to emphasize what he and the believers in Corinth had in common. As they shared the same blessings, it followed that an attack on his sincerity and trustworthiness also reflected on them. **Firstly**, it is God who 'establishes' Paul, together with the Corinthian believers. **Secondly**, Paul and his friends in Corinth had been "anointed" by God. **Thirdly**, God has 'sealed' Paul, together with the believers in Corinth. **Fourthly**, God had also given Paul and the Corinthian believers the Spirit in their hearts 'as a guarantee'.

Paul goes on to explain the actual reason for cancelling his proposed visit (**1:23-2:4**). This was not fickleness, as his opponents alleged. He wanted to 'spare' them (**1:23**). Paul did not come before the believers in Corinth as though he belonged to a superior class of Christian. He says rather 'we work with you for your joy' (**1:24**).

Paul concludes his explanation for his failure to arrive at Corinth in 2 Cor 2:1-4. It seems that he had decided that, having done so once before, he would not visit his friends in Corinth again 'in sorrow' (**2 Cor 2:1**). His last visit to Corinth had been difficult and trying. He now hoped that he might have joy as a result of their repentance. He explains in verse 3 that his purpose in writing was to have this very effect, that if he should visit them at some time in the future, the situation would have improved in the meantime and, just as their disobedience had grieved him, he might be able to take heart that things were improving.

Paul set great store by honest communication (**2 Cor 1:18**). He was not a man who would say one thing to one person and the opposite to someone else. There is no doubt that the world at large is crying out for Christians in all walks of life who are known for their integrity and consistency. Part of the explanation for the apostle's impressive soundness of character may lie in the fact that he had so very high view of what it means to be a Christian. A person who really grasps what it means to have been established in Christ anointed by God and sealed by the Holy Spirit, so that his very possession of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee from the Almighty that his future is secure, has no excuse for spiritual mediocrity.