

Study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

The letter begins in Paul's usual style of an introduction that identifies where he is going. Paul had changed his travel plans, but it was out of concern for the Corinthians. In contrast, they had read it as out of a mind and heart that was fickle and uncertain.

Body of the Study

Introduction

Paul's despair in Asia

Defence of his conduct

The second benefit

Change of plans

Our guarantee as christians

Final appeal to his change of plans

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How does the idea of "comfort" that Paul discusses, relate to the things that Paul has to say in chapter 1 about his change of plans?*
- *From the first chapter, what's happened in Corinth between the first and second letters?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 2 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

The letter begins in Paul's usual style of an introduction that identifies where he is going. Paul had changed his travel plans, but it was out of concern for the Corinthians. In contrast, they had read it as out of a mind and heart that was fickle and uncertain.

Paul stresses the idea of comfort. The God of all comfort – comforts us – so that we can comfort others. The cause of our discomfort is our falling from sin. We need to put these things right, and then be a comfort to those who need help.

Body of the Study

Introduction

The introduction (2:1:1-7) and the conclusion (2:13:1-14) provide us with an insight to the key things that Paul wants the Corinthians to learn and apply from the letter.

He writes as *an apostle of Christ Jesus (2:1:1)*, when the Corinthians had been *demanding proof that Christ was speaking through him (2:13:3)*. As an apostle, he *had not failed the test (2:13:6)*, and he could not do anything that was *against the truth, but only (those things that were) for the truth (2:13:8)*. If there was any doubt about who Paul was, they themselves knew full well that *the Lord gave him the authority (of an apostle) (2:13:10)*.

God is a *God of comfort and compassion (2:1:3)*. Despite *all our troubles we ourselves are comforted by God (2:1:4)*. Just remember *the sufferings of Christ (2:1:5) who was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's power (2:13:4)*. Though some people might think *we are weak, we display the same kind of weakness and power as Christ (2:13:3-4)*.

It is time for the Corinthians to *examine and test themselves (2:13:5)* as *this is the third time* that he has had to correct them, and *he previously gave them a second warning (2:13:2)*. Even though *God is a God of compassion and comfort (2:1:3)* Paul will not hesitate to set things in order and *will not spare those who sinned earlier* when he comes (2:13:2). The reason that *he is writing the letter is so that he will not need to be harsh in the use of his authority* when he comes in person (2:13:10).

The first letter opens with a stern reproof, whilst the second letter opens with a strong message of comfort. In the introductory verses, Paul mentions “comfort”, “suffering”, “compassion”, “trouble” or “distress” 17 times.

Paul had written a strong letter of condemnation to the Corinthians who needed to be reproved. He himself knew the feelings of rejection, trouble, and distress. He assures them of the comfort that they have in Christ, and that He has been there before all of us.

Paul's despair in Asia

Paul had been in Ephesus when he wrote the first letter. Although the work was fruitful, yet it had its difficulties, not the least of which was the final uproar that caused him to leave. Later in the second letter (chapter 11) Paul describes some of the difficulties that he had suffered, and then adds “...besides the other things, those that come upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches...” (2:11:28). His deepest concern (certainly at the time he wrote) would have been for the church in Corinth.

The burden that Paul (and Timothy) felt was at the point of even despairing of life (2:1:8). They reached the point of totally relying on God, and recognised that we cannot trust in our selves, but only in Him.

Defence of his conduct

Paul defends his conduct, and his actions in changing his travel plans. He was (apparently) being attacked for his fickleness in not doing what he had said that he was going to do. The Judaisers had arrived on the scene, and proceeded to try to discredit him.

Paul responds with an appeal to his behaviour whilst he was with the Corinthians – he had acted in all good conscience in his work with them, and they were well aware of it “...*the testimony of our conscience...in simplicity and godly sincerity...*” (2:1:12). The Corinthians had full knowledge of the circumstances, and Paul adds, “...*we are not writing anything that you didn't already know...*” (my paraphrase of 2:1:13).

The discussion is in the plural “...*that we...*” which includes Timothy with Paul. Timothy had been in Corinth with Paul and Silas almost from the beginning of the church (Acts 18:5). Not only was Paul defending his own conduct, but he also left no room for any attack against Timothy.

The second benefit

Paul writes concerning a second benefit that the Corinthians might get. Some have suggested that this is a deeper blessing of the Holy Spirit that is available to some Christians. It is in fact, in exactly that context that Paul is writing. However the second benefit would come by Paul as an apostle, laying his hands on some of them so that they might receive a miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit (compare Acts 8:17-18; Romans 1:11). In some cases, this might (perhaps) have given them another spiritual gift to add to the one(s) that they already had. As a *church*, the ability to add to their *partial knowledge* (1 Cor 13:12) would provide a blessing beyond the ones that they already had.

On another level, the church would be blessed simply from the presence of Paul with them. He would be able to teach and instruct them in the things that they needed to know. By passing twice, they would not be blessed once, but twice – *a second benefit*.

Note Paul's expression here – he intended to go through Corinth twice – both coming from and going to Macedonia, *so that* they might receive the blessing. Paul wanted to do it *to help them*. This stands in stark contrast to their apparent criticism of him!

Change of plans

In response to the accusations about his fickleness, Paul responds with some details concerning his plans. They are obviously different to the ones that he outlined in 1:16:3-8. Paul's response is that plans are made, but that does not mean that they must be kept at all costs. Sometimes the circumstances change. Nor does it mean that the planning was done lightly.

In 1Co 16:3-8 and in these three verses are found the outlines of two different itineraries relating to Paul and Corinth. Plan A had been: Ephesus-Macedonia-Corinth-Jerusalem (possibly). But now in 2Co 1 we find Plan B: Ephesus-Corinth-Macedonia-Corinth-Judea (now definitely). If, as is probable, Plan A discloses Paul's original intention, Plan B, made after the writing of 1 Corinthians, introduces two modifications of that previous itinerary: Paul now planned to visit Corinth twice--before and after his activity in Macedonia--and he definitely intended to travel to Judea with the collection.

But not only did Paul have to explain these changes. His actual itinerary seems to have been: Ephesus-Corinth (i.e., the "painful visit")-Ephesus-Troas (2:12-13)-Macedonia (7:5)--the place of writing. In other words, neither Plan A nor Plan B was carried out as intended. It may be said that after the "painful visit" Paul reverted to Plan A (see Ac 20:1-3, 16). In other words, to Plan A Paul seems to have said, "Yes-No-Yes"; to Plan B, "Yes-No." He had apparently provided his opponents with a convenient handle for a charge of fickleness!

His detractors were shrewd enough to convert the charge into one of capricious vacillation. His arbitrary changing of travel plans, they urged, was motivated purely by self-interest, with no concern for broken promises or for needs at Corinth. He made his plans on mere impulse like a worldly man, according to the mood of the moment, so that he could say, "Yes, yes" one day and "No, no" the next day, with the result that he seemed to be saying both "Yes" and "No" in the same breath. (NIVBC)

Paul responds to these claims by pointing out that at the beginning, Paul, Timothy, and Silas all proclaimed Jesus Christ as the one who accomplishes everything. It was not a case of *yes and no*, but yes and yes in Christ. The Corinthians ought to have known Paul's commitment, and that he was not a person who would change his mind willy-nilly.

Our guarantee as christians

God has not left us wondering who we are. he has given us adequate and full assurance of our relationship with Him. He has:

- Established us,
- Anointed us
- Sealed us
- Given us the Spirit.

In fact, the things that God blesses us with and gives us demonstrate His faithfulness. God is a promise-keeper, not a promise-breaker. The relationship between Paul and the Corinthians (and Timothy and Silas) was established only through Christ. Without Christ, there would be no relationship. Christ had anointed (and appointed) Paul as an apostle. Whilst he had that assurance, the Corinthians also had a similar assurance – one that was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit. The sealing of the Holy Spirit (like a king sealing a letter with his signet ring) provides a guarantee (a deposit or downpayment) against our inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the deposit, and the final payment is our eternal salvation.

The context of the Corinthian letters would demand that the things written about the Holy Spirit mean the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit. Whilst it is true that the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit in the Corinthian christians would be ample proof of their relationship (and assurance) with God, there are other passages in the New Testament (most notably the Roman letter) that demand that it is the indwelling measure of the Holy Spirit that Paul is talking about. For a longer discussion on this, refer to my studies on Romans, study 10.

Final appeal to his change of plans

Paul makes a final – and quite brutal – comment on the reason that he changed his travel plans. It was for their own good, that he did not come to them in a rage (not really a rage of anger, but he was certainly upset about what he had learned about the goings on in Corinth). Had he come at this time, he would have had to have been like the Lord at the cleansings of the Temple, and turned over the moneychangers.

Such a situation would not have been good for the Corinthians. He wanted them to repent. He could not “make them” repent – that had to come from them “...*we do not have control over your faith...*” (2:1:24). Paul “...*determined ...not to come to you in sorrow...*” (2:2:1) for he wanted them to repent, and to hear the good news that they had indeed changed.