

***Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:
"Its Major Themes Reviewed, Part 3"***

- ***Review, Part 2: Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today:***
- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Carnality***
- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Compromise***
- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Satanic Influence***

Introduction:

But why the apostle Paul at all? The question is not simply whether Paul is a true and authentic apostle, the 13th, of course, as many believe. There were already Twelve Apostles, weren't there? Few seem to want to comment on this during much of church history. The false teachers had asserted that they were also apostles and that surely has something to do with Paul's seemingly endless focus on his defense against the false teachers (or, as he calls them here, "false apostles") that seemed to follow him everywhere. But there seems to be more to it and perhaps much more. Of course one can just ignore the issue and attribute it to Jews in first Jerusalem and then in Gentile lands (the diaspora) that sought to maintain the purity of the 1st century Rabbinic Judaism.

But Paul in the Galatians letter writes this:

Gal. 2:1-17

1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;

8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

10 Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

15 We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

- *So as he teaches here, he was “apostle of the Gentiles” while Peter and the eleven were “apostles of the circumcision”. Peter and James agreed to this also.*
- *We see here then more reasons why his defense was so essential to him (and to us)? “Some came from James ...” says so much. It was not therefore only legalistic and unbelieving Jews that were the problem Paul faced in the churches. It was believers that had come from Jerusalem, from James, even! And his harsh language regarding them demands an explanation. What might that be?*
- *Because Paul’s ministry and message were unique and very different from what had gone before explains so much. The dispensation itself had changed and the Lord was now working differently. James was complicit initially, it seems, with the leaders who were imposing the requirements of the Law of Moses, but Peter defended Paul and finally James did too, for Gentiles, that is, if not for Jewish believers. This is so very Interesting, as*

Peter made the difference here and as seen in Acts 15. But many did not accept the decision of the elders and apostles in Jerusalem and sought to impose legal restrictions wherever the gospel was being preached.

- ***The Galatians letter is all about the purity of the gospel Paul preached and the uniqueness of it, from the beginning of the first chapter to the end of chapter two. In many places he implies that that gospel was unique and different as in Gal. 2:***

Gal. 2:2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

- ***The issue for Paul was that the false teachers would add legal works to the good news message itself, not that he was preaching the wrong gospel. That was never a possibility, since, as he writes there in Galatians 1 this gospel came directly by revelation to him from the Lord in heaven.***
- ***Therefore his gospel and his apostleship for the same reason MUST be defended against all others. Those that add works in any way stand cursed by Almighty God:***

Gal. 1:6-9

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

- ***And, there is a necessary conclusion that must be drawn as well: We must go to the Pauline letters, to THAT REVELATION, to learn of how God is working today, under grace. For it is the Pauline Epistles that contain that truth. Amen. So be it.***

Our Outline Today: Part 3: The Pauline Apostleship, Under Attack and His Defense:

- ***Paul's Predicament: Even His Apostleship Was Under Attack by Evil Ones***
- ***Paul's Defense: His Words and His Word Made Living Letters in Corinth***
- ***Paul's Person: His Service with His Suffering Marked His Apostleship***

- ***Paul's Promise: The Full Power of His Apostleship Always Stood Ready***

I. Paul's Predicament: Even His Apostleship Was Under attack by Evil Ones:

2 Cor. 11:10-15

10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.

12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

- *These leaders were acting dangerously true to form and just as they were in fact, as false teachers. As the instruments of Satan himself they presented themselves as “ministers of righteousness” just as Satan had with all subtlety offered himself to the other angels as an angel when he was not (for he was a seraph and not an angel) and as a “light-bearer”. See Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 for the details.*
- *The chapter ends with the strongest statement to be found anywhere in Paul's letters concerning his apostleship. But his defense there is all about his infirmities, his weaknesses. Praise God for his unlimited grace that has included even us sinners of the Gentiles:*

2 Cor. 11:30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

- *His overriding theme therefore is weakness made strong as we share in Christ's work of grace in and through us. And verse 30 says that so powerfully and in such an encouraging way that we may very well fall to our knees and weep considering all that the apostle has written here. That is the effect those verses have had on me often. What about you? Have you read verses 16 through 29 recently?*

II. Paul's Defense: His Words and His Word Made Living Letters in Corinth:

- *To write of that in this letter and to remind the Corinthian believers of it was therefore the best defense of his apostleship. For it was to*

Paul that the revelation of the administration or dispensation of the grace of God and it was Paul who was appointed as the administrator of that new dispensation even as Moses was appointed to the Legal Dispensation. That was how God had worked! And that was how God was still working then. And it is how he is working today, praise God. It really does make all the difference to know this precious truth. For grace unlimited as the primary mode of God's working today is very different from mercy and grace under the terms of a legal standard like that of Moses or the coming Kingdom.

- ***In chapter three of our letter the apostle draws the distinction in these words which are so moving to us all:***

2 Cor. 3:1-11

1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?

2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious.

- ***Looking ahead near the end of this letter, we cannot forget his teaching there regarding these same realities of grace working in and through his children under the fullness of grace:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 13:3-4 "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we

also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.”

- ***These two verses summarize the teaching of chapters 2 and 3 so well. Let's look there now for this great theme where we see the spiritual dynamic of life under abounding grace presented as the apostle's testimony of his previous ministry in Corinth where he testified concerning that new life to them.***

No one could have denied that they all had been transformed by the words which he had shared. And, as he has written here and as this major theme in the letter so often declares, this was the only proof he needed against the constant onslaught of the enemy in Corinth.

Those first verses in chapter three powerfully convey of that theme with characteristic Pauline boldness:

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:1-3

1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

- ***So both early and late in the letter we see this fundamental theme well expressed. It is summarized in verse 3: “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”***
- ***But we also know that with this boldness there is the recognition of his own weakness alongside the Lord's strength. And that underscores the entire letter where we see the work of the Lord under grace revealed throughout. “My weakness — his strength” are the words chosen. Apart from that as he wrote in chapters 2, 12, and 13, grace cannot operate. His many trials and sufferings are offered as an example of that and it is a major theme in this letter. It truly MARKS his apostleship:***

III. Paul's Person: His Service with His Suffering Marked His Apostleship:

- ***His many trials of love: His many persecutions and trials are detailed in several places in this letter. That is a major theme and Paul's testimony stands in the middle of it, for it is revealed in this letter and was revealed to all as he ministered and served, with great suffering, everywhere. No one who had seen him in his ministry could reasonably have denied that he was the Lord's apostle, indeed, even **THE** apostle of the Gentiles:***

2 Cor. 4:1-18

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

15 For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

- *He continues in the sixth chapter:*

[READ] 2 Cor. 6:1-10

1 We then, as workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)

3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

4 But in all *things* approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

9 As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

- *And again, in the same way in chapter 11:*

2 Cor. 11:18-30 [See verses 7-11 on the nature of this boasting leading to this section here]

18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise.

20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour *you*, if a man take *of you*, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

22 Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I.

23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

24 Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one.

25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

27 *In* weariness and painfulness, *in* watchings often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness.

28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

- ***Is this pure arrogance and self-serving boasting in the flesh, OR, is it the power of God in words given by the Holy Spirit of God? I am convinced it is the latter and not in any way the former. Paul's apostleship is therefore established here quite consistently with the working of God's abundant grace. For where can we look to see weakness made strong as abundant grace works? It is in Paul's life, isn't it, as we see so often written here.***

What are the applications of this to our lives and our circumstances, such as they are today? Where are we with this? Are we satisfied with his grace? Will we respond as Paul did: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

IV. Paul's Promise: The Full Power of His Apostleship Always Stood Ready:

- ***Now we reach the end of our review of Paul's defense of his apostleship. He was soon planning to come to Corinth! His anticipations of that dominate some of the letter:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 10:7-11

7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he *is* Christ's, even so *are* we Christ's.

8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters *[alone]*.

10 For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.

11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present.

- *The Corinthians were exhorted to consider not “appearances” but the spiritual authority revealed already in his ministry toward them in Corinth. They were “living letters” and he expected them to say “amen” when they read this letter together. These letters of the apostle demonstrate the same authority revealed before in person and that will be revealed again, in person.*

Yes, that demonstration will be by way of his weakness and trials and many sufferings, as it was before, all of which the false teachers used against the apostle.

*But by God's grace those would be used, he was confident, to magnify the strength of the Lord **THROUGH** him and his apostleship.*

*His desire was that it would not be necessary, however, to use harshness or rebuke, and that the needed reforms would have already been made **BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL**.*

- *But, due to how the Lord had already worked in Corinth, the apostle asserts with great assurance, that his authority in Christ with the very words of Christ Jesus would have already well certified his apostleship to them. For he would soon be present in the flesh and the Lord's working would surely then again be manifested as it had been before:*

[READ] 1 Cor. 2:1-5

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.
4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:
5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Or, in these words saying it all in so few words of truth:

2 Cor. 10:11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present.

- *We should not see this as a threat, but as a somber notice to those at fault, whether the false teachers or other members of the assembly, that in their presence the apostle might be “humbled”:*

2 Cor. 12:19-21

19 Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we *do* all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

21 *And* lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

- *Such grace, such mercies, such power through weakness so often displayed, the Lord reigned supreme. And that we now may “reign in life through one man, Jesus Christ” is wonderful indeed. How many have been drawn into faithful living and service through these very words?*
- *Is this second letter enough to convince the gainsayers of the uniqueness of the Pauline apostleship, ministry, and, message? How has the study of this letter made a difference for you?*

May the glory of the Lord be revealed in us always. Amen.

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