

Date: November 12, 2009
Reading: 2 Corinthians 1-5

“You never know what Paul is going to do. He says one thing and does another. Can we trust him when he writes about...”

Some false brethren at Corinth may have been making just such comments about the apostle Paul. Not everyone in every church to which Paul wrote an epistle readily accepted everything that he wrote, despite the fact that he was an apostle of Christ and thus an ambassador of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7; 5:20).

Paul had preached the gospel in Corinth on his second missionary journey and those converted formed a congregation of God’s people. On his third missionary journey, Paul spent three years at Ephesus and had intended to go to Corinth, then to Macedonia and finally return to Corinth from which he would then return to Judea (1:15-16). It appears that this would have been his second visit to Corinth (“a second benefit” – vs. 15).

Paul evidently did visit Corinth, but not according to his initial plans. It was an unpleasant visit, during which Paul’s apostleship was even questioned (see chapters 10-13) and which caused Paul to decide not to visit again under such circumstances (1:23; 2:1 – “came no more” and “would not come again to you in sorrow”).

As a result of his change in plans, some were apparently charging Paul with talking out of both sides of his mouth (“Yes, Yes, and No, No” – 1:17). Paul answered the charge by explaining the reason for his actions, noting also that his preaching to the Corinthians had not been “yes and no” (1:18-19).

It is evident from reading 2 Corinthians (even more so in the later chapters) that the apostle Paul was under attack. It might seem incredible to us that fellow Christians would not have respected the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ, but so it was.

As Paul anticipated his third visit to Corinth, he wrote this epistle in which he defended his apostleship – the ministry he had been given by the Lord (3:5-6; 4:1, 6-7).

Do we respect the authority of the inspired writers of the New Testament? Do we challenge the words of Peter or Paul if their instructions run counter to our own will/desires?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: November 13, 2009
Reading: 2 Corinthians 6-9

In his first epistle, Paul instructed the Corinthians about giving of their means to help needy saints (16:1-3). He broached the same subject with them in his second epistle.

Paul told the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonians in the midst of their poverty (8:1-2). The Macedonians had given freely, imploring Paul with “much urgency” that he receive their contribution (8:3-4).



With reference to the contribution for the needy saints, Paul wrote, “I speak not by commandment” (8:8). Actually, the apostle HAD spoken by commandment in his first epistle, as previously noted. In this epistle, however, Paul tested “the sincerity of [their] love by the diligence of others,” i.e., the Macedonians.

Paul had boasted to the Macedonians about the willingness of the Corinthians to give (9:1-2). He encouraged the Corinthians to show the proof of their love and of the apostle’s boasting regarding their willingness to give (8:24).

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians regarding their giving provides us with an example of how we should raise money for the needs of the congregation. Just as important, Paul’s comments tell us that, although we have a responsibility to give of our means, our giving should also be motivated by love. Like the Corinthians, our giving is a test of our love.

To the Corinthians, Paul also wrote that good works, even great personal sacrifice, without love profit nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

As we “purpose in our hearts” how much we will give, we are being tested, just like the Corinthians. It is not just the amount that we give that is significant; our attitude is also part of the “test” (9:7).

Hopefully we will “pass the test.”

Happy reading,
Allen

