

## LESSON TEN

# PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Scriptural Reference: II Corinthians Chapters 1 thru 4.

### A. **AUTHORSHIP:**

The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle from Philippi in Macedonia, not many months after I Corinthians had been written.

Paul had spent the greater part of three years at Ephesus. He stated that he would remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, which would be in June AD 57. From there he planned to go to Corinth by way of Macedonia. He had sent Timothy on a mission to Macedonia and Corinth and he had returned to Ephesus and was now ready to accompany Paul. Titus, who also had been sent to Corinth, was to join them in Troas. However, Paul and Timothy went on from Troas to Philippi in order to meet Titus. Apparently they were eager to learn from Titus, the state of affairs among the Corinthian saints.

Paul was pleased with the good news that Titus brought from Corinth. He wrote the letter immediately, and sent Titus back with it, accompanied with two other brethren (II Corinthians 8:16-24). They delivered the letter and also had charge of completing the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem.

### B. **THE EFFECT OF FIRST CORINTHIANS:**

Much could be written concerning what had happened in the Corinthian church between the time of the writing of first and second Corinthians. Paul referred to this in II Corinthians: *"For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a Godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!"*

Although much repentance had followed the reception of his first letter, there were certain points of correction still needed. However Paul had found areas of intimate fellowship which he wanted to discuss with them first, before proceeding to more discipline.

### C. **THE CONTENTS OF THIS EPISTLE:**

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is the most personal of Paul's letters. It is the most autobiographical of Paul's writings. Much of the epistle is spent upon Paul's own ministry, its motives and sacrifices. He vindicates his authority as an apostle and endeavors to prepare the church of Corinth for his arrival.

The verses of the first nine chapters are written in the past tense, while the verses of the last four chapters are written in the present or future tense. It has been suggested that these last four chapters were probably written earlier and then attached to the letter.

#### **D. FELLOWSHIP IN SUFFERING:**

Paul longed to draw the Corinthians closer to himself. In the beginning of this letter, he tried to accomplish his purpose. He told them that as they were partakers of the suffering, so would they be partakers of the consolation. Paul had suffered. He planned to tell them more about that but he recognized that they had also suffered. They too, had gone through their affliction and tribulations.

Paul gave thanks for the comfort that he had received from the Lord. This word "comfort" comes from the same Greek word as "comforter" in the Gospel of St. John. It is stronger than mere consolation. God encourages but also supplies a foundation for encouragement. The benefit of suffering is that it produces a Christian capable of assisting others.

He reminded them of the certainty of the promises of God—that these promises could not fail. Suffering causes one to know in a greater measure the certainty of the promises of God. Also, suffering establishes one in Christ and makes them to realize the reality of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which seals them.

Paul established the basis of their fellowship in their suffering and consolation in Christ.

#### **E. PROGRESSIVE SALVATION: (II Corinthians 1:10).**

Paul preached a deliverance of three tenses: past, present and future. Here we have it expressed one more time. He had been delivered, he was being delivered, and he will yet be delivered. He knew what he had been delivered from in the days gone by; he realized what he was being delivered from at that particular time and he knew God who would still yet deliver him.

There is a lesson here for the student. Some testify of what God has done in the past and they may look forward to the future. Not only must this be true but also they must have an up-to-date testimony what the Lord is doing for them now.

Paul gave all the glory to God. He praised God and thanked the saints who had prayed for him.

#### **F. THE MATTER OF DISCIPLINE: (II Corinthians Chapter 2).**

Paul delayed his going to Corinth in order that he might spare them. It was not his desire to chastise them further. He did not want to go to them in heaviness but in order to help them. He did not want to cause sorrow, but love. He wanted them to know his love for them (verse 4).

It would seem that Paul's first letter had changed the Corinthian church to such an extent that even those who had been upholding the man in sin had now turned against him in discipline. Apparently Paul did not know this until he met Titus. Paul, on learning this fact, advised a change of attitude toward the man who had repented. He did not want them to exclude him forever from their fellowship in Christ. This showed that the apostle could be very hard on sin but soft and merciful when there was true repentance. He did not want the man lost, but he wanted him to be saved.

In the latter part of the chapter it would seem that the Apostle Paul was likening his ministry to the incense-scented triumphal processions of conquering emperors returning to Rome with long lines of captives. Some of these captives would be put to death; others would be permitted to live. Paul's ministry bore the fragrance of God, which meant death or life, according to one's reaction to hearing his ministry. He looked upon his ministry as a march of triumph.

### **G. LIVING EPISTLES: (II Corinthians Chapter 3).**

Apparently there were some Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem who came, carrying letters of introduction. Paul's enemies at Corinth were still asking regarding Paul's authority, saying that he had no letters of commendation from Jerusalem. This, of course, was absurd. Paul himself had founded the Corinthian church. As such, the church was Paul's letter. He needed no other letter of commendation than the church at Corinth.

Paul proceeded to contrast his ministry with the ministry of these Judaizing teachers. Their gospel was the gospel with the law, which was written on stone; his was written on hearts. The two gospels are contrasted by Paul: one of the letter, the other of the spirit; one unto death, the other unto life; one veiled, the other unveiled; one unto condemnation, the other unto righteousness; one passes, the other remains.

### **H. PAUL'S LIVING MARTYRDOM: (II Corinthians Chapter 4).**

In chapter 4 the apostle set forth before the Corinthians the vision of the true ministers. Paul never found preaching an easy task. Its purpose was to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty. Ministers must not work in craftiness, nor should they handle God's Word deceitfully. They should commend themselves to the consciences of men by the declaration of truth. The purpose of the true ministry is to preach Christ that He might save. The treachery of Satan must be exposed for he blinds men's minds by philosophy and vain deceit, that the light of God's gospel cannot help them.

Paul showed the Corinthians that they must see beyond their troubles and their persecutions. God would not let them be destroyed when they are cast down. Although delivered unto death every day they have the assurance of eternal life. Although they feel their outward strength being used for God they feel the buoyancy of the inner life and by the eye of faith they see the glories of things eternal though all around them the earth crumbles and falls away. With joy Paul spoke of his glorified body, with which he knew he would be clothed, when he awoke in the likeness of God.

Paul's life was a living martyrdom. At his conversion the Lord had said, "*I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*" (Acts 9:16). The sufferings began immediately and continued for over thirty years. There was a continuous succession of beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks and privations of every kind. Finally he was taken to Rome to be executed. In all of this, Paul rejoiced for he saw the future glory, which would be his. It was this that he impressed upon the hearts of the Corinthian saints here. He showed them that we are only earthen vessels that the glory may be God's and not ours. As long as we are kept by His power, Satan's power cannot conquer us. Here is the source of victory. The spirit outward afflictions that we face here are nothing because our inward man is strengthened from the power of God.

