

LESSON TWELVE

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS (Continued)

Scriptural References: II Corinthians Chapters 8 thru 13.

A. **THE GRACE OF GIVING (II Corinthians chapters 8-9).**

1. THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JERUSALEM:

These two chapters contain instruction about the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The subject of this relief fund for the poor members of the Jerusalem church is referred to in four places in the New Testament (I Corinthians 16:1-3; II Corinthians 8 & 9; Romans 15:26-27; Acts 24:17). This collection had been started the previous year (II Corinthians 8:10). Apparently, the Corinthian church had not been very enthusiastic in the raising of this fund, up to this time and Paul dealt with this in these two chapters. Not only did Paul want to help the saints back at Jerusalem, but also he wanted to develop the grace of giving among the churches and to establish fellowship between the churches. He knew the best was to do that would be to interest the saints in Macedonia and the other provinces in helping the saints of Palestine.

2. THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS IN MACEDONIA:

Paul spoke of the liberality of the saints in Macedonia. He said the grace of God was bestowed on them. The things which abounded unto the riches of their liberality were: a) their great trial of affliction; b) their abundant joy; and c) their deep poverty.

How can people of deep poverty give great offerings? Paul stated that they were willing to give beyond their power (verse 3). They begged the Apostle Paul to accept their offering. They longed to have fellowship with the saints by sharing their material possessions with them. They gave themselves first, then gave all they had.

3. PAUL'S CHALLENGE:

Paul exhorted and challenged the Corinthian church to give liberally for the benefit both themselves and the church. He exhorted them to have all in readiness when he came. To encourage them he reminded them of the example of our Lord. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"* (II Corinthians 8:9).

Paul desired them to know the grace of giving. He attempted to teach the Corinthians how to obtain this much-needed grace. Paul taught certain principles regarding the giving of offerings. The offerings were to be given according to these principles: a) voluntary; b) proportionate; c) systematic; and d) above reproach in his business and ministration.

4. THE SPIRIT OF GIVING:

We find emphasized that the first requisite of the grace of giving was a willing heart. God desired everyone to share any burden for his work equally, according to ability. God wants no gift, which the giver begrudges. God does not care for the gift which one gives because he feels he must. He loves the cheerful giver - the person who gladly remembers the needs of the work of God and purposes to have fellowship with Him, even beyond his power.

5. THE RESULT OF LIBERAL GIVING:

The results and blessings of liberal giving are stated here. Paul expressed the truth that he who sows sparingly will reap also sparingly and he who sows bountifully will reap also bountifully. Not only will there be a bountiful return for a bountiful sowing but God will make grace abound toward the giver and all of their needs will be supplied (verse 8). This is something that we all can be challenged in experimenting with. We may prove God in tithing and giving liberally to the need of God's cause (II Corinthians 9:13).

B. PAUL'S PERSONAL APPEARANCE: (II Corinthians chapter 10).

In this chapter Paul vindicates his apostolic authority to the church. It is suggested that some of his enemies had charged that Paul was weak in personal appearance.

There is no hint in the New Testament as to what Paul's appearance was like. Some traditions state that he was small in stature, baldheaded with a slightly prominent nose. Other traditions state that he was of moderate stature with curly hair. Actually there is no record of what the apostle looked like, but the charge that he was of a weak personality was false. Through the preaching of the gospel, Paul was able to turn city after city upside down. He must have been a powerful and dominating person. In reply to the charge that he was weak, Paul wrote that at least he founded his own churches and did not trouble churches founded by others (II Corinthians 10:16).

The student should take special note of verses 3, 4 & 5. We have spiritual weapons and these spiritual weapons are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Through these spiritual weapons, the child of God is able to bring into captivity, every thought to the obedience of Christ. Many church problems and troubles arise from imaginations, which have to be cast down.

C. ESPOUSED TO CHRIST: (II Corinthians 11:2).

In the time of Paul, it was customary to have a middleman arrange for the marriages of young couples. It was very serious if the engagements he made were broken or if either of the persons proved untrue. Engagement among the Jews was a very serious affair, and could not be dissolved without a writing of divorcement. Society has gone far from that standard but it is this standard that pleased God and still is pleasing to the Lord. Paul had this in mind when he wrote the Corinthians: I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.

The church is the bride elect of Christ, espoused unto Christ as a chaste virgin.

D. PAUL'S BOASTING: (II Corinthians chapter 11).

Paul apologizes for his boasting. He seemed to realize that his boasting was wrong but he makes it clear that his glorying is a folly, which was forced upon him. Paul exhorts the

Corinthians to bear with him because of his great concern for their souls. He is jealous for them and he desires that they stay in the simple truth of the gospel.

Paul warns the Corinthians against Satan's messengers. These are false apostles who come pretending to be real superior apostles. This is natural as their father Satan comes as an angel of light.

Paul excels in suffering. If false prophets have reason to boast he certainly does. If the Corinthians suffer fools perhaps they will tolerate him, at least as a fool, if nothing else. As a servant of Christ, Paul declares that he excels all of them. He bears not only the physical sufferings, but also the mental burden of the care of the church.

He challenges his critics to compare themselves with him by every standard. As a loyal Hebrew, as an effective worker for Christ, as a suffered for Christ, his whole career had been an unbroken story of living martyrdom.

E. PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH: (II Corinthians chapter 12).

The man that Paul was referring to in this chapter was his own person. The fourteen years ago goes back to when Paul was stoned at Lystra and dragged out for dead. Paul stated that he does not know whether or not he was dead, but he had an experience that gave him a vision of paradise.

Paradise is the place where disembodied spirits rest in conscious rest with the Lord between death and the resurrection. Prior to the resurrection of Jesus, paradise was located adjacent to Hades but when Jesus arose; he emptied this compartment and transported paradise to the third heaven. It was here that the Apostle Paul was caught up to. His experience was so glorious that the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble.

There are various opinions just what Paul's thorn in the flesh really was. It would seem that it was some physical infirmity for he sought the Lord three times for deliverance but the Lord made it real to him that this was given to him to keep him humble. The promise was given with this revelation that the Lord's grace was sufficient and that his strength was made perfect in weakness.

Some have thought that his thorn in the flesh was poor eyesight. This we cannot prove. However, Paul wrote with a large handwriting (Galatians 6:11), which may have been due to poor eyesight. This also may have been the reason Paul dictated some of his epistles, to some of his helpers. The Galatians would have given him their own eyes (Galatians 4:15).

F. CONCLUSION: (II Corinthians chapter 13).

In conclusion, Paul speaks of this letter as being a third visit. He had written two previous letters and he was counting these letters as visits.

In his final admonition, he exhorts the Corinthians to self-examination, to be certain that they are guiltless before God.

This epistle was written in the year AD 57. Paul reached Corinth in the fall of that year, spent the winter there, and in the following spring, departed for Jerusalem.

LESSON TWELVE

SELF HELP TEST

- A. Discuss fully "Paul's thorn in the flesh."

- B. State four principles governing the giving of offerings.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

- C. Write a full description and character sketch of Paul as revealed in this epistle.

- D. Of what did Paul boast?

- C. Why did he excuse himself in boasting?