

“I Determined This For Myself ...”

“... that I would not come again to you with sorrow. For if I make you sorry, who then is he that maketh me glad but he that is made sorry by me? And I wrote this very thing, lest, when I come, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Cor. 2:1-4).

Some commentators speculate that Paul made a visit to Corinth sandwiching it in between his first letter and this second one. Luke’s account of Paul’s work in Acts makes no mention of this although that, within itself, does not rule out the possibility of such a visit. Luke omits many details from his history. Take, for example, Paul’s visit to Arabia sometime after his conversion (Gal. 1:17-18). Luke is silent about such, but Paul’s record of it tells us such a trip was made. Paul did spend about three years in Ephesus and Luke’s words “so that all they that dwelt in Asia heard of the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10) indicates that during these years in Ephesus Paul’s work was not confined exclusively to that city: he preached in other Asian cities as well. Thus the silence of Acts about a visit to Corinth in between the writing of 1-2 Corinthians (Acts 19, 20) does not rule out such a visit. After all, Luke does not intimate anything in Acts of Paul writing letters to various churches, yet we know that he actually wrote at least 10 during the time period covered by Luke in Acts. Yet, with all these considerations, we do not believe statements in Paul’s second Corinthian letter warrants the conclusion for a hurried Corinthian visit in between his first and this second one. It seems that the greater evidence weighs against such. Had such a visit been made, how could his detractors accuse him of being fickle, promising a visit to them but failing to make it? Paul’s words, “I would not come again to you in sorrow,” while implying by the word “again,” that he had come to them with sorrow, does not necessitate a “personal coming”: that “coming again in sorrow” could just as well been fulfilled in the first letter he wrote them. Paul’s first letter, while obviously creating pain and sorrow, was written that he might have joy from them when he came.

Paul did not want his visit to Corinth to be an unpleasant one. Much needed tending to and time would be needed to make the corrections his first letter called for. His letter was straight forward, sharp and to the point. Yet, for all its frankness and reproof, it was a letter composed out of the love the apostle had for them.

Paul had written out of “much affliction and anguish” accompanied by many tears. Whether the afflictions mentioned by the apostle were trials we know he was experiencing in Ephesus or the mental afflictions that had come as a result of news of the many problems in Corinth is uncertain. Certainly his anguish of heart and tears were the result of the problems there and the necessity that he write the letter he did. But, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that his letter, however painful it was, was written because of the deep love he had for them. Is there any conscientious parent that has not been compelled to administer discipline to a child, only to have that child tearfully

retort, “You don’t love me”? Few children understand what parents mean when they say as they punish the child, “This hurts me more than it hurts you.”

There is nothing pleasant about either administering or receiving discipline. The Hebrew writer said, “All chastening seemeth for the present not to be joyous but grievous ...” (Heb. 12:11). Yet the end result — for those who learn from it is good. “Yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Paul wrote Corinth, and although the letter initially produced sorrow, but for the greater part of the church, good resulted. As he wrote later, “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what longing, yea what zeal ...” (2 Cor. 7:11).

Never forget then, that although there is additional sharpness in this letter, it was not intended for the greater part of the church (his first letter had already brought about major changes among them). The letter was intended for an apparently small, yet vocal minority who needed more correction to bring about the desired result. And, if one can read anything from the calmness and tranquillity Paul’s letter to Rome exhibited (which had been written from Corinth after 2 Corinthians), one would conclude this letter finished the job!

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