

Paul And The Corinthians' Support

"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you, for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1-3).

There were some in Corinth who disputed Paul's right to be supported in his work, denying his apostleship. Where their objections came from is not stated, but whether they argued that the fact that Paul rejected their support was "proof" that he knew he had no right to it, or whether there were arguments which followed some other kind of reasoning is not known. Perhaps there were Corinthians who, because Paul did not accept support from them, concluded it was "wrong" to support any teacher of the word, although some among them apparently did accept their assistance (1 Cor. 9:12).

One thing is known of Paul's tenure in Corinth: although he rejected assistance from the Corinthian brethren, the Acts account of his months there showed him to have worked at secular work -- tent making with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3). According to 2 Corinthians 11:6, he *"robbed other churches, taking wages of them"* that he might minister to Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:8). It is interesting to note that the word "wages" in the text indicates the kind of pay given to a soldier; a salary. Whether Paul received regular support from Macedonian brethren or whether just a one-time assistance is not known. What is known is that Paul did receive help from churches other than Corinth while he preached in Corinth. *"And when I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man; for the brethren when they came from Macedonia, supplied the measure of my want ..."* (2 Cor. 11:9).

Nor do we know why Paul seemed so adamant in refusing any aid Corinth might give him. He wrote, *"... and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself"* (2 Cor. 11:9). When Paul said *"so will I keep myself"* he made it clear that he had accepted nothing from Corinth in the past and he had no intention of accepting anything from them in the future. We know this: Paul believed it would hinder his work to accept the help of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:12).

In this regard, Paul's use of irony comes into sharp focus. He asks, *"Did I commit a sin in abasing myself that ye might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God for naught?"* He further used searing sarcasm when he wrote, *"For what is there wherein ye were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except it be that I myself was not a burden to you? Forgive me"*

this wrong" (2 Cor. 12:13). Those who view these words of Paul to have been a sincere apology fail to see the irony of his words. If Paul offered a sincere apology to Corinth for "wronging them" because he would not accept their aid; he repentance was short lived! In almost his next breath he said, "*Behold, this is now the third time I am ready to come unto you; and I will not be a burden to you for I seek not yours, but you ...*" (2 Cor. 12:14).

Why Paul did not ask nor accept financial aid from Corinth, time will not reveal. There is one thing we do know, however. Whether he accepted or refused their help was beside the point: he had the right to have received support from them had he so chosen. He was free -- he was not a slave, therefore he had the right to be recompensed for his labor. He was an apostle. He had seen the Lord. Corinth was his work in the Lord. Whatever he was to others, he was an apostle to Corinth for their knowledge of Christ came from him; the spiritual gifts they received came through him. To deny his apostleship would in essence deny their standing with Christ Jesus.

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