

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART EIGHT

As ambassadors for Christ,(5:20) we have been warned we will face immense pressures but at the same time guaranteed awesome resources which exactly fit the challenge of each demanding situation. We have a simple choice to trust God and accept the post of ambassador, or to listen to the Devil and aid the enemy. There is no place for compromise because as supposed ambassadors we would be double agents! To trust Christ alone is to be a clean earthen pot,(4:7) ready to contain the fabulous treasure of the grace of Christ. Whenever things go wrong, the cross of Christ is the only way for the pot to be clean again and ready for service.(7: 1)

For a third time Paul reviewed his relationship with the Corinthians,(1:12; 6:11-13) realising that if he had used or abused them his words would have been undermined and worthless. His love for the Christians of Corinth meant that their repentance had been a source of great joy for Paul. He was excited to boast to others of what God had done in them. Knowing all this had been his comfort in affliction.(7 :2-4)

Paul continued by describing the two fold pressure he had faced from outside opposition and adversity and inside fears for the spiritual condition of the Corinthians. His comfort had come through Titus, his co-worker.(2: 13) who arrived with good news of a dramatic change of heart in the Corinthian church. How had this come about?(7 :5-7)

Paul had had misgivings about writing his first letter to the Corinthians. Would they ever speak to him again if he wrote what God had given him to say? His fears were groundless! The word of God had done its work causing first, sorrow for sin, and then repentance from sin. It had caused them to agree with God. Criticism by us of the behaviour of others, on the other hand, only produces a regret with no way of escape. It is expressed uselessly as anger, resentment or self-justification. The scripture had brought about a longing to be forgiven, to put right wrong if possible and to be totally different in future. The Greek words Paul used to describe these outcomes are worth exploring further. 'Earnestness' means 'hasty diligence', a sense of urgency to be thorough. 'Sorrow' is literally 'grief at a loss', and reminds us that we and others lost through our sin. 'Vindication' is from the word from which we derive 'apology'. 'Indignation' reinforces the idea of sorrow, meaning 'grieve much'. 'Fear' is our awe of God against whom all sin is really directed.(Ps.51:4) 'Longing' is the desire to put right. 'Zeal' is 'jealousy' for the reputation of God to whom we have been unfaithful. 'Avenging' means 'retribution', but Jesus took the blame so we do not have to search for a culprit. The depth of Biblical repentance is profound.(7:8-11)

The particular problem of the man and his mother who arrogantly boasted of their immoral relationship,(1 Cor.5; II Cor.2:5-10) had been a simple test of whom they would listen to in future, God or man.(7:12)

For Paul, their revolution from tolerating wrong teaching, and therefore behaviour, to seeing things God's way again was a tremendous relief. He and Titus had both been

greatly encouraged by this example of the effectiveness of God's word. In the tough struggle which is often the experience of Christian ministry such moments are a marvellous refreshment. Sharing the task together had brought them closer as a team as they saw people welcoming both the message of God and the messengers. Paul was grateful for what God had done and confident that the Corinthian Christians would grow stronger from now on.(7:13-16)

The next two chapters explore further the nature of grace, our source of comfort and its practical consequences.

8:1-5 Q.1 What example did Paul use of the grace of God in action? Contrast the Macedonians' own circumstances with their response to the needs of others. What was the secret of this amazing behaviour? How might Paul's message about the word of God in chapter 7 have been the answer? What can we as Christian leaders learn from this section about how to encourage Christians to give?

8:6-8 Q.2 What exactly was Paul urging Titus to do in Corinth about this issue? Why was he confident that the Corinthian Christians would give generously to the needy Christians in Jerusalem? Once again, what does this show us about what we today can do which will lead to generosity in others?

8:9 Q.3 Put this verse into words by which you could explain it to a child. I would strongly encourage you to memorise it together with II Cor.9:8.

8:10-15 Q.4 What had the Corinthian Christians decided to do a year before? What was Paul therefore urging them to do now? What did he promise about the outcome of fulfilling their earlier promise? What story in Exodus 16:18 did Paul use to illustrate his promise? How does this promise apply to us as we become aware of need in others and as we face our own and our family's needs?

8: 16-21 Q.5 What other kind of giving apart from money did Titus and his co-workers illustrate? What motivated them to give in this way? Why is this kind of giving also important? What role had the local church had in encouraging the ministry of Titus' friend? What very important practical considerations did this meet? How should we also show the same kind of care in our responsibility for the management of money? What will happen if we do not?

8:22-24 Q.6 What do we know about the third member of Titus' group? Why is this testimonial about him so important if the visit was to be fruitful? How did Paul describe this relationship with Titus, and his expectation of the whole group? How did the background of Titus and the others give Paul confidence in the response there would be to their visit to Corinth?