

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

The greatest threat to winning a war is not weapons of mass destruction on the other side but treason on our side. If our ambassador is working for the enemy we are in trouble. Paul used a different analogy to make the same point when he talked about arranging a marriage only to discover that the bride was not a virgin. The church is the bride of Christ.(Eph.5:23-29; Rev.21:2) The Lord wants us to be utterly faithful to Him, not having affairs with the world that is fighting Him. Eve was unfaithful to God when she listened to the Devil's message which doubted the word of God and said that she could be like God, but without God.(Gen.3:1-5) Seduction or treason is the result of listening to a false message.(11:1-3)

In the rest of this chapter, Paul outlined the 8 characteristics of the secret agent or the seducer. The first is that he preaches a different message. He is speaking of a different Jesus, a different Spirit and a different gospel. There is no other. The one who tries to preach a different gospel is accursed!(Gal.1:6-9) These are strong words to make a vital point. Every message we hear needs to be checked for content with the rest of the Bible by which the Holy Spirit will confirm its truth or otherwise to us.(Acts 17:11,12; I Jn.2:27) Eve's mistake was that she did not check the Devil's message against what God had already told them.(11:4)

The second feature of the secret agent is his competitive attitude as a supposed messenger of God. Some people were comparing Paul as an apostle to the other apostles and putting him down. If leadership is about being a servant not one who dominates,(Lk.22:25-27) there is no basis for competition.(11:5,6)

The third way of recognizing the secret agent is on the matter of cost. Paul had preached the gospel without charge, preferring to find a job with Aquila and Priscilla to support himself.(Acts 18:3) He was always determined not to undermine the message of God's free grace in Jesus by seeking payment even though God intended that those who are blessed by teaching should support those who taught them.(I Cor.9:14-18) If teaching comes with a price tag, beware!(11:7-9)

The fourth clue to the secret agent is that he does not care for those he seeks to persuade by his message. God is love,(I Jn.4:16) that is why He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us,(Jn.3:16) and love will be the hallmark of His disciples.(Jn.13:34,35) We will love like He does, because He through us He will do it!(11:10,11)

Fifthly secret agents work under cover. They wear a disguise, pretending to be messengers of Jesus. The Devil in the Garden of Eden was beautiful in appearance not slimy and repulsive as we assume a serpent to be.(Ezek.28:13-17) Jesus used the word hypocrite,(Matt.23:13,14,15,23,25,27,29) which denoted a Greek actor portraying a character by wearing a mask, to describe the

activities of religious secret agents. In times of war, traitors have been punished by death.(11:12-15)

The sixth mark of the secret agent is that he lacks the confidence of the true disciple of Jesus who can boast in any company about what God has done and will do. There may be an arrogance on the outside but look beneath the surface and you will find a deep insecurity in the false teacher.(11:16,17)

The seventh indication of the secret agent is that he boasts of his credentials of birth, training and office. He builds himself up to be important so that he can enslave followers whom he can exploit. The disciple of Jesus, on the other hand, will stand out because of the simple authority of his message, as God speaks through him.(Matt.7:28,29) This is the only credential we need.(11:18-22)

The final exposure of the secret agent will come in hard times, when it is so obvious that he lacks the comfort, the strength, of the real Christian under affliction. Paul recounted just a summary of the toughest moments of his ministry. He had suffered at the hands of man, faced natural disasters, and the day to day struggle for basic needs. Sometimes the threats were actual, sometimes they were potential causing fear and therefore they were inward. Even when the world around looked harmless Paul had ongoing concern for the Christians he loved such as those in Corinth who had wandered off track under enemy fire.(11:23-29)

Our first real trial as Christians will probably be the one we remember for ever. As a very young Christian, Paul had with characteristic energy and enthusiasm, leaped into action sharing Christ in Damascus, only to have to make an undignified escape in a basket over the city wall at night.(Acts 9:23-25) This would be the story of the rest of his life.(11:30-33)

Faced with such huge affliction, Paul had needed huge comfort. In chapter 12 he described some of the highlights of his comfort.

12:1-6 Q.1 Assuming Paul was talking about his own experience what were the important features of his revelation? Why did he seem to separate the experience from himself? What was he boasting about? Why did he hear 'inexpressible words'? Would they not have been helpful to us? What can we learn from Paul's example?(Col.1:18)

12:7-10 Q.2 Why was Satan allowed to attack Paul? Compare his experience with that of Job.(Job 1,2) What do we learn from both stories? What form may the 'thorn in the flesh' have taken? Why are we not told what it was? Why did God not take it away when Paul asked him to? Isn't this an example of prayer not being answered? What did Paul learn through this? What can we learn through suffering? Should we seek to suffer to help us grow faster?

12:11-13 Q.3 In what sense did Paul want them to have a true view of his

ministry as an apostle among the Corinthians? How would it help them?

12:14-18 Q.4 How could this be Paul's third visit to Corinth?(Acts 18,20)

When might his second visit have taken place? What was he insisting was his and Titus' purpose and expectation in coming to them again? How can we establish such a relationship with those God uses us to care for? Why is it so important?

12:19-21 Q.5 What is the only reason for Paul coming back to Corinth? How should this guide us in ministry? What two kinds of problem was Paul concerned he might find when he revisited Corinth? How had each kind already been discussed in I Corinthians? Why are both so destructive in a church? What is the real reason for each?