

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:24-2:3

Session 14: The Fourth Accusation, cont.

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.²⁴ Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

If you remember, Paul had planned to make a double trip to Corinth, stopping there first, and then moving up north into Macedonia, and then back down south to Corinth. But after they rebuffed Paul at his first visit, he decided to leave, instead of staying to fight it out to establish his authority as an apostle.

And, instead of coming back to see them, as he had said, he decided instead to return to Ephesus, which he did. This was fuel for the fire for Paul's critics; here he goes changing his mind again.

But Paul tells them, in verse 23, that his change of mind was not made lightly, but actually, it was out of the doctrine working in him. Paul says that the reason he did not return to Corinth immediately was to spare them.

Spare them, how? In their present condition, Paul would have to come to them in judgment and severity. But instead, he writes the "tearful letter" and has it delivered to the Corinthians. Only after hearing Titus' report that the church, or at least the majority of it, had returned to him, does Paul decide to come and see them again. But, as we will see in future chapters, Paul does not make that trip immediately. He will tell us later in this letter that his reason for continuing to postpone his trip was to give time for the holdouts to repent and return to Paul as well.

Paul loves the Corinthians. If the holdouts do not change their minds, he knows what must be done; and he takes no pleasure in it. Accordingly, Paul decides (I believe after much prayer and consideration) to write the "tearful" letter and then to send them 2 Corinthians, so that he deals with everyone in the assembly by mercy and longsuffering.

When Paul says, “I call God for a record upon my soul;” this is a solemn oath before God that what he is telling the Corinthians is true; that it was out of his love and tenderness for them that he did not make his return visit.

2 Corinthians 1:24 **Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy:** for by faith ye stand.

It is by verse 24 that we know the accusation: that Paul is domineering. But Paul says he does not want to have dominion over their faith, but he wants to be a “helper of their joy.” He is doing everything he can to restore the entire Corinthian church.

Think about it. If Paul comes to them in his apostolic authority to punish those who have acted sinfully and disorderly, this would be a cause of distress for some, since it would include their family members and friends. Therefore, Paul defers to letters before a visit.

His hope is to promote their joy, and increase their spiritual happiness by allowing the book of 2 Corinthians to add to his “tearful letter.” He has planted the seed, and now he is “watering” it, so to speak.

So, let’s sum up how Paul dealt with this fourth accusation.

- 1) 1:12: By the testimony of Paul’s conscience regarding that which was true concerning his word and ministry toward them.
- 2) 1:23: By that which was true regarding why Paul changed his mind about coming to see them a second time.
- 3) 1:24: By that which is true regarding Paul’s position of authority over them in the Lord, and regarding his intentions toward them.

There are some things that I want to address about verse 24 before we move on to the next category of the sufferings of Christ. Speaking of the Corinthians, Paul is walking a fine line between having dominion over their faith and letting the church spiral out of control; which would ultimately result in the dissolution of the church.

Actually, to a degree, the apostles did have dominion over the faith of those who were not apostles, as they were not under the infallible influence of the Spirit. And as concerning disciplinary matters, Paul had that authority too, which we saw back in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, **with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,** ⁵ **To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh,** that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

What does that mean, “to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh?” It means to remove him from the local church, and turn him out into the world, where Satan has full capacity to destroy this man through his sin. This is no small matter.

Today, we have the inspired scriptures of our apostle. That ought to be enough to do the job of keeping the church holy and pure without riding roughshod over the faith of its members.

Back in the 70s and 80s, there was a movement called the “Shepherding Movement.” It began with a group of 5 leaders of the charismatic movement in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The goal was to increase the spiritual maturity of the people through a model of structured discipleship.

The idea was this: as a Christian, you need to have a relationship with a personal shepherd, and that personal shepherd that you are accountable to will make decisions for you, such as: Who you should marry; the kind of car you can drive; where you should live; what kind of work you should do; who you associate with; things like that. Just about everything needed to be cleared by your shepherd.

This is the polar opposite of sonship. I am a pastor, (and that word actually carries the connotation of being shepherd) but I am not your tutor and governor, which is the Bible’s way of saying, it is not my job to tell you what to do in all the areas of life. It is my job to teach the scriptures. That is my playbook, so to speak.

I am, if I can say it this way, an under-shepherd to the Lord Jesus, who is the great Shepherd. And while I do have to give an account for those whom I pastor, I am not, as Paul said in verse 24, supposed to have dominion over your faith, let alone the mundane (earthly) areas of your life. Those are decisions we all should make as we learn the scriptures and they work to change us and conform us to the image of Christ.

There is another pendulum swing to this, and that is to allow members of the church to engage in sinful behavior. Church discipline is a difficult subject, and we will have an opportunity to study it as we get into chapter 2.

Getting back to verse 24, Paul does not intend to have dominion over the faith of the Corinthians, but he is not willing to allow rebellion and sinful behavior either. And it takes some wisdom to know what to do and when to do it. So, instead of returning to Corinthians immediately to get all this sorted out, Paul decides to write those two letters, giving those in the church time to respond in their own minds to his appeals.

2 Corinthians 1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, **but are helpers of your joy**: for by faith ye stand.

By the next phrase in verse 24, Paul identifies himself as a “helper of their joy.” By this he is saying that he (along with Timothy and Silas) desire to be fellow workers in the Corinthians’ joy of believing and living the truth. Paul’s main objective is to promote their joy in the Lord by their obedience to the doctrine. It is for this reason that Paul decided not to return to them immediately. I get the idea that Paul was thinking that if he had returned to them like he had planned, it would give occasion to his critics to say that Paul was taking charge over their faith. So, Paul found another way.

2 Corinthians 1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: **for by faith ye stand**.

Paul knows that the Corinthians have a standing before God which is independent of him; their faith is in Christ, and Paul seeks to confirm that faith.

By this last phrase, Paul is saying that what he has taught them has been on the authority, not of himself, but of God. The gospel he preached to them, the doctrines he taught them, they all came from God through Paul, and that faith that was delivered to the Corinthians: that is the faith that they stand in.

Summary: Paul's conscience, elevated by the scripture, is absolutely clear and does not condemn him. Paul's motive for changing his mind about returning to them for a second visit was so that he could spare them the harshness of the discipline that was coming to them, and give them time to change their mind.

Yes, Paul is their apostle, and as such, he carries an authority which they do not possess and to which they should submit. But Paul is not interested in establishing "Who's the Boss," but he wants to restore this church back to the truth, back to the Lord, and back to himself. Yes, he could have returned immediately and confronted them; in fact, he could have stayed when he first arrived, but he did not.

Pauls' decision to leave was not out of cowardice over a showdown, though that is what he gets accused of, after the fact. Paul's decision to leave was not because he got caught having some hidden agenda, and he had no answers for his critics, though he will get accused of that one, too. Paul wisely "read the room" and made the best decision he could make with their future restoration in mind. And his motive in doing so had nothing to do with himself, and everything to do with them.

This issue has so many dimensions to it that it will carry over into the next category of the sufferings of Christ. The second category of the sufferings of Christ spans 2 Corinthians 2:1-17.

And what are the charges? That Paul lacks genuine love, care and concern for the Corinthians. When you hear or read this, these may just seem like synonyms of criticism against Paul. But these are not random, as they would often be in our conversations today. Paul's inspired writings have structure and order to them.

These are not accusations just haphazardly strung together against Paul, but these are issues, which Paul will deal with individually in this section of his letter. Then,

Paul will explain two very important aspects of the remedy for these attacks: 1) the “comfort” that is working in him and 2) the “salvation” which he has from the effects of the sufferings of Christ involving his personal integrity.

Breakdown of the doctrine:

- 2 Corinthians 2:1-4: The **honest reason** for not yet coming to them, which is based upon his genuine **love** for them.
- 2 Corinthians 2:5-11: The **honest care** Paul has for the Corinthians, demonstrating his genuine love for them.
- 2 Corinthians 2:12-13: The **honest concern** and genuine love Paul still has for them, proven by his actions in **Troas**.
- 2 Corinthians 2:14-17: The **comfort** Paul operates upon and the **salvation** that Paul has from the sufferings of Christ involving his personal integrity (which attacks are designed to produce suffering by feelings of inadequacy, failure, dejection, despondency, etc.).

In this chapter, Paul continues the discussion of the subject he introduced in chapter 1. Paul knew that if he came to them personally, instead of writing the letter, he would have felt compelled to discipline them with severity. Paul continues now, in verses 1-4, to give more detail about the reason for his forbearing to visit them yet.

Let's begin by reading the passage.

2 Corinthians 2:1 But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. ² For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? ³ And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, 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. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

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The Most Important Decision

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we pray to understand the doctrine in 2 Corinthians and put it into practice in our lives. May we respond like our apostle to the sufferings of Christ. Amen.