

2 CORINTHIANS: DEFENDING GOD'S SERVANT TO HIS CRITICS
Part IV: Reasons For Being Confident In A Ministry With Intense Troubles
(2 Corinthians 2:14-17)

I. Introduction

- A. 2 Corinthians was written "to defend the authenticity of " Paul's "apostleship and his message" to a church of believers who were susceptible to heeding false teachers who critiqued him, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552.
- B. As such, Paul faced intense troubles in that ministry that at one point left him so restless, he left Troas for Macedonia en route to Corinth though God had opened a door of ministry for him at Troas, 2 Cor. 2:12-13.
- C. Yet, Paul had reasons to be confident in his ministry in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, and we view them for insight:

II. Reasons For Being Confident In A Ministry With Intense Troubles, 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

- A. Paul's expression of thanksgiving to God for always causing him and his missionary team to triumph in Christ in 2 Corinthians 2:14 is a remarkable statement that contrasts sharply with the previous context:
 - 1. In our last lesson, we learned Paul was so restless in spirit that he had left Troas for Corinth by way of Macedonia though Christ had opened a door of ministry opportunity for him at Troas, 2 Cor. 2:12-13.
 - 2. His restlessness was caused by a difficult disciplinary issue he had to initiate at Corinth, and of the potential spiritual defeat the troublesome Church at Corinth could experience at Satan's hands if the Church did not cease its discipline on the sinful man who had since repented, 2 Corinthians 2:1-11.
 - 3. Thus, for Paul to follow his report of his great restlessness in spirit that kept him from ministering in an open door given to him of the Lord by a claim of God's consistent provision of spiritual victory in ministry is a remarkable contrast that requires an explanation!
- B. Paul then illustrated this claim by way of the actions of a conquering Roman general, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16a:
 - 1. When a Roman general's forces conquered an enemy army, he would lead a line of his battle captives in triumph behind his chariot or horse upon which he rode into the Roman capitol with the burning of incense during the march, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible, 1977, p. 1234.
 - 2. When the procession reached the capitol, some of the conquered captives were put to death though others were saved alive to serve the general's interests, *Ibid*.
 - 3. Applying this illustration, Paul wrote that Christ, likened to the conquering general, was leading His procession of people to whom Paul and his team were sent to evangelize, and Paul's team was giving out the incense savour of Christ through the presentation of the Gospel they preached, 2 Corinthians 2:14.
 - 4. Just like the burning incense odor was to the Roman general's captives either an odor of life, resulting in their prolonged lives, or of death, indicating that they would shortly be executed, so every person who was being exposed to the Gospel that Paul's team proclaimed would either be blessed with eternal life upon believing it or suffer eternal damnation and spiritual death upon rejecting that Gospel, 2 Cor. 2:15-16a.
- C. The **reasons** Paul was **confident** of **success** in his ministry with its **intense troubles** are given in verses 16b-17:
 - 1. The calling of proclaiming the Gospel with such vast consequences in the lives of every one of his hearers was a great one to say the least, so Paul asked, "And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Cor. 2:16b NIV) This question is enhanced in force when we consider Paul had left an open door of ministry at Troas due to the restlessness in spirit he experienced due to his ministry troubles at Corinth!
 - 2. Accordingly, Paul noted how and why God made him and his evangelistic team so successful, 2 Cor. 2:17:
 - a. First, Paul and his team did not minister in self-interest for the greed of money like many false teachers, but they gave the Gospel without any financial greed, with Paul even working to pay his own way so as not to allow room for his message to be discredited by his hearers, 2 Cor. 2:17a with 1 Cor. 9:18-19.
 - b. Second, in concert with his practice of not peddling the Word of God for greedy gain, Paul and his team ministered in sincerity, relating to others in candid honesty as men commissioned by the Lord without any false or hidden motives to the contrary in hypocrisy, 2 Corinthians 2:17b ESV.

Lesson: *Though plagued with ministry problems that could bother Paul to where he became so restless he could not take advantage of a ministry opportunity that even God had opened up for him, Christ still caused Paul and his team to have constant success in ministry because of their absence of financial greed and their sincerity before all.*

Application: *For constant victory in ministry even amid intense ministry troubles that may at times be so unsettling that they distract us from ministry opportunities God gives us, may we not only trust God for success, but stay free of greed and hypocrisy that He might use us as credible vessels of His truth and thus grant us constant success.*