

II CORINTHIANS: MINISTERING TO BELIEVERS FACING FALSE TEACHERS

III. The Apostle Paul's Vindication Of Himself, 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10

E. Paul's Selflessness Amid His Supposed Selfishness

(2 Corinthians 12:11-21)

I. Introduction

- A. False teachers, claiming to be apostles, had entered the Church at Corinth, and they had tried to promote their own views while discrediting the person and message of the Apostle Paul. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552)
- B. Paul had saved his most trying task for the last part of his letter, that of addressing the false apostles who had opposed him, and in opposing him, they had opposed Christ's true apostle, and thus ultimately Christ Himself.
- C. 2 Corinthians 12:11-21 presents an example of a leader's truly selfless, godly ministry amid his being alleged to be selfish and sinful, a very hard task, so we view the passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Paul's Selflessness Amid His Supposed Selfishness, 2 Corinthians 12:11-21 ESV.

- A. After listing his credentials as an apostle that surpassed those of the "super apostles," be they the false apostles at Corinth or Jesus' original Twelve apostles with whom the false apostles sought to be identified for their credibility, Paul again stated that he had been a fool in even mentioning his credentials, but that his readers had forced him to mention them when he should have been commended by them, 2 Corinthians 12:11.
- B. However, the "signs, wonders and mighty works" of a true apostle had been performed by Paul among his readers at Corinth, and they had been so over an extended period of time with Paul's "utmost patience," v. 12.
- C. Nevertheless, Paul's readers felt they had been less favored by him than believers in other churches since he had not received financial income from them, so Paul ironically asked for their forgiveness for this! (v. 13)
- D. Paul planned to come again the third time to his readers, and he still intended not to be a financial burden to them, for he was not seeking his readers' money but their hearts, since a spiritual parent, like a regular parent, is to lay up money for his children rather than to be a financial burden to them, 2 Corinthians 12:14. Paul gladly offered to spend and be spent for the Corinthian believers even if they loved him the less for it, v. 15.
- E. The apostle then addressed and countered the possible charge that some might make that he had been crafty in not taking money directly from them but had planned to take his financial percentage from the collections that Titus or the other believers with him would receive from them, 2 Corinthians 12:16-18.
- F. Paul then dealt with the charge that his readers all along might have thought that his ministry team was defending themselves with selfish motives, 2 Corinthians 12:19a. In reality, Paul's team were simply trying to obey the Lord in seeing that the Corinthian believers were truly spiritually edified, 2 Corinthians 12:19b.
- G. Driving Paul's expressions of his credibility was not a goal to defend himself for any egotistical reason, but his fear that when he returned to Corinth that his readers would not have paid attention to his admonitions for righteous living, that he would find "quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder" among them, 2 Corinthians 12:20.
- H. In addition to these sins of a legalistic sort, Paul was also concerned about sins of license, that he might have to mourn over those who had sinned earlier and not repented of "impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality" that they had practiced, 2 Corinthians 12:21; *Ibid.*, p. 584.
- I. In other words, Paul's only concern was to get his readers to take his credentials as a true apostle seriously enough that they might heed his admonitions and not be severely punished by the Lord!

Lesson: *Though Paul had given clear evidence that he was a true apostle of Christ by his long-term expressions of miraculous signs, wonders, and mighty works of a true apostle before them, instead of accepting Paul's credibility so as to obey him and avoid God's discipline, the Corinthian believers had heeded charges by false apostles that slandered Paul in order to elevate their credibility before the Corinthians above Paul's credibility. Accordingly, desperate to get his readers to obey the Lord, Paul had stooped in "foolishness" to list his ministry credentials that surpassed both those of the false apostles as well as those of Jesus' initial Twelve apostles in order to get his readers to heed his admonitions for God's blessing!*

Application: *(1) May we follow Paul's example to rise above what errant charges others might make of us as to our being allegedly self-centered to stoop to list our certifying ministry qualifications in order to get others to obey our true admonitions to be blessed and not punished by the Lord. (2) In today's ministry, following Paul's example in this matter may actually cost a believer a high price such as the loss of his job or ministry, but it is a price we need to be willing to pay that the truth eventually be known, and that God's will be done in our lives and ministries.*