

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:17

A CHANGE IN PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS

- 1) Beginning in 1:21, Paul defends himself against charges of unreliability and even deception (12:16-18) because he changed his travel plans, putting off an expected visit to Corinth. Read 1:23; 2:1-3; 12:20-21; 13:10; 1 Cor 4:18-21. Why did Paul postpone his visit?
- 2) Paul, responds to accusations of unreliability by redirecting the Corinthians to Jesus, when he writes that, "...Jesus Christ... was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes'" (1:18-21). How does Jesus' reliability reflect on Paul? And how does this connect to the seal of the Spirit upon them – bearing in mind that the letter is to a very charismatic group many of whom experienced tongues, prophecy, etc. during the year and a half when Paul was founding the church?¹
- 3) *Travelgate* called into question Paul's trustworthiness, which in turn threatened both their embrace of the gospel and their willingness to contribute to the Jerusalem collection. Paul explains his actions (1:15-16, 23) without apology, since as God's agent he's in the category of those promises to which God says "yes" in Jesus (1:18-22). He appeals to them as fellow workers (1:24), calling upon them to sympathize with his "anguish" in ministry (2:4, 12-13).

Although the "majority" are for Paul (2:6), he addresses a divided congregation. What does he risk in this approach, and what does he gain? How would you have responded? What does this tell us about how to approach our congregation in those times when it is divided, or authority is questioned or ignored?

MISSING TITUS IN TROAS

- 4) Paul travels to Troas where he had arranged to meet Titus, but Titus never arrives. Paul grows very anxious both for Titus' safety and because Titus was to bear word of the Corinthians. Beside himself, Paul abandons the wide open ministry opportunities in Troas and travels to Macedonia in search of Titus.

Paul's affection for Titus (and the Corinthians) is characteristic of him. He develops similar bonds with other believers and disciples, such as Timothy. Are there younger believers whom you disciple or shepherd or even just share fellowship with, who would cause you anxiety when in need? How did you come to be in relationship with them?

¹ Fee believes v. 20 refers to worship since that is when the body says "Amen" to God's glory.

THE TRIUMPH, THE GOSPEL AND AROMATIC CHRISTIANS

- 5) Paul refers in 2:14-16 to a Roman triumph, in which a conquering general parades his booty and captured enemy soldiers, who were typically executed at the end of the parade. The Greek is a little ambiguous, but the best reading pictures Paul and his coworkers not as conquerors, but as the captives, with Christ leading the triumph [so Barnett (IVP), Keener, Witherington, *contra* Wright]. This fits perfectly with the imagery of 1 Corinthians 4:9,

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals.

How does this metaphor connect with vv. 12-13, as well as the earlier themes of affliction (1:3-11) and Paul's anguished worry for the Corinthians (2:1-4)? What role does it play in Paul's defense (*narratio*) against accusations that he is unreliable and is playing money games by not accepting patronage while at the same time soliciting contributions for the Jerusalem collection?

- 6) Incense was used in triumphs, probably in thanksgiving to the gods. Paul describes two responses to this aroma, two responses to Paul's suffering for the gospel.
- a) Loosely, what sort of suffering is Paul referring to?
 - b) Among the actors referred to in this letter (Paul, his co-workers Titus, Timothy, et al., the Corinthian minority and majority, the disciplined man, the false leaders), who responds positively, and who responds negatively?
- 7) If we take Paul's metaphor as normative for Christian life and witness (which "spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him"), then the one thing we *don't* want is for our "aroma" to be unremarkable and unnoticeable. Who are the smelliest among us, either in our small group or RCRC? Whose noses are wrinkling and who is inhaling appreciatively? Or does Paul's metaphor only apply to itinerant preachers?
- 8) Paul elsewhere says we are "more than conquerors" – the exactly opposite of captives in a triumph. Read Romans 8:31-39. How are we both conquerors and captives being led to our deaths? Is it possible for Christians to be conquerors *without* being captives? Given your answer to 6(a), where do you see the holy captivity in your life?

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Fun fact: "2 Corinthians 10:10 says that Paul had a weak bodily presence. A common tradition took this to mean that he was unusually short. Paul's very name comes from a Latin word (*paulus*) meaning 'small,' and this may have helped to feed traditions about his height. In any case, John Chrysostom (fourth century) called Paul 'the man of three cubits,' identifying him as only 4 ft. 6 in. tall. Medieval artwork typically portrays Paul as the shortest man in a painting or scene." (Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 301)

Leader's Introduction:

1 Corinthians is interesting because of the many problems it tackles: factions, the resurrection of the body, spiritual gifts, and so on.

2 Corinthians, on the other hand, is interesting because it gives us a window into how Paul deals with messy, sticky, real-world issues.

After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul gets some bad reports about problems in Corinth.

Paul heads out to Corinth to straighten things out and has a very painful visit, in which an individual rudely rejects Paul's authority and the rest of the group is unwilling to call him on it.

Paul leaves things in a bad state, and while away sends another letter, which is now lost. Finally he gets word from Titus that things have improved somewhat, and that the Corinthians finally disciplined this guy – but that the church is still divided. So Paul writes the letter we know as 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians has a letter structure which modern writers don't use, but which was common in Paul's day, called forensic rhetoric. There were whole manuals devoted to this sort of rhetoric. In forensic rhetoric you are responding to a particular accusation or set of accusations.

After the introduction, which we studied last week, follows the *narratio* (1:8-2:14), which we'll look at tonight, where the author lays out all the facts while inciting sympathy from the readers.

Many of the Corinthians were behaving like they didn't know they were dealing with the author of most of the NT, and were being led astray by some newcomers who seemed to fit their expectations much better than Paul did.

We care about this passage and this letter because there are times when *we* are called to lead divided congregations, times when as leaders our authority is disregarded, and in these times we need to know how to not just win the argument, but win hearts as well.