

2 Corinthians
Verses 2:12-3:6
Explanations
July 3, 2011

I. Worrying about the Corinthians

2 Cor 2:12-13

12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,

13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.

Paul visits Troas in his second (see Acts 16) and third (see Acts 20) missionary trips. Troas was the route that Paul used to go to Macedonia (that is into Europe). While some commentators try to reconcile this incident to one of these two earlier Acts visits, it would appear best to assume that this is a third time.

Paul finds himself in Troas with many opportunities. However, because Titus has not reported to him on the Corinthians, his heart was not with the people of Troas but with the people of Corinth. So, with the leading of the Spirit, he departs Troas to head toward Corinth. Paul continues discussion of his trip to Macedonia in 2 Cor. 7:5. Between here and there, he discusses why he gives thanks to God.

II. Fragrance

2 Cor 2:14-17

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

“Fragrance” and “aroma” refer to offerings to God (e.g. Lev. 23:18). Elsewhere (e.g. Rom. 12:1), Paul urged the Romans to sacrifice themselves for Christ. The contrast of the “smell” to believers and non-believers is interesting. Paul stated to the Corinthians in 1 Cor.

9:14 that they should pay preachers, but apparently in verse 17, he is contrasting himself as one who takes no pay to those who profit from preaching the gospel.

III. Paul's Letter of Recommendation

2 Cor 3:1-3

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.

3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Perhaps some other pastors had suggested that a letter of recommendation was necessary for Paul since they had them. Because Paul brought the gospel to the Corinthians for the first time, he points out that they are really his testimony.

There are at least two OT references here. Of course, the law itself was originally written on stone with regular words, but the new law is written on the heart (Heb. 8:10). A second reference, albeit somewhat more indirect, is the fact that God had promised to remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh (Ezek. 36:26-27)

If the Corinthians are letters of recommendation concerning Paul, then the lives of all Christians are a testimony of Christ to unbelievers. How do/should non-believers view us? How can we better represent Christ?

IV. Spirit of the Law/Letter of the Law

2 Cor 3:4-6

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God.

5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Why should our confidence come from? Why?

If there is any doubt that Paul's reference to letters is not also to the law, verse 6 eliminates it. How does the letter of the law kill? How does the Spirit of the law give life?

Why is inadequacy important? From Charles Stanley:

-Inadequacies drive us to God

-Inadequacies relieve us of trying to do God's will in our own strength

-Inadequacies force us to surrender our lives to God by following the Holy Spirit

-Inadequacies provide God the privilege of demonstrating His strength

-Inadequacies free God to use us to the maximum (no pride)

-Inadequacies allow God to receive the full glory of His work

-Inadequacies enable us walk in contentment and quietness of Spirit

-His adequacy is based not on himself or any man, only on God. So, his credentials come only from God.

The bottom line is that knowledge of our inadequacies help us to put a correct emphasis on our relationship to God. He must become greater, we must become less.

Did God choose us for a reason? Does God have any conditions for those he chooses?

V. Homework: How bright does the glory of God shine in our lives?