

By the time Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem the second time, I was already their faithful assistant.¹ That was about ten years before Paul wrote *First Corinthians*. I served Paul through most of his ministry, but my name is not even mentioned by Luke in his book of *Acts*. If Paul had not mentioned me a few times in some of his letters and written one short letter to me that is in the New Testament, you would not know I ever existed. It was a good day whenever I was second fiddle in Paul's band. Most of the time I was third or fourth.

When Paul needed someone to carry his important letter to the Corinthians, he chose me.² I may not have been his first choice, but Timothy³ was in Macedonia and I was probably the next best choice. Paul and I agreed that we would meet in Troas after I stayed in Corinth long enough to get their response to the letter.⁴ Unfortunately, when I got to Troas, Paul was nowhere to be found, so I went to Macedonia, hoping to find him there. I suspected Timothy was still in Macedonia and I knew Paul wanted to see him, too.

Fortunately, it wasn't long before Paul showed up in Macedonia, and we all had a joyful reunion.⁵ I told Paul of the repentant spirit of the Corinthians and he was overjoyed, although I also told him that some issues needed to be addressed.⁶ Paul waited a few days, then had me scribe for him while he wrote another letter to them that you know as *Second Corinthians*.⁷ Even though I was the one who brought him news from Corinth, Paul added Timothy's name to the letter.⁸ It hurt my feelings at the time, but later I would find out why he did that.

As you read *Second Corinthians*, you will definitely get the understanding that Paul personally knows the Corinthians, and that they had talked and corresponded about many topics in the past. He was plowing old ground, not new ground.

¹ Galatians 2:1

² 2 Corinthians 7:12-14

³ Acts 19:22

⁴ 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

⁵ 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:15-23, 10:10-12

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:1

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:1

As usual, Paul starts his letter by praising God and giving thanks for the Corinthians. He makes it exceeding clear that he has suffered for the cause of Christ and for the good of others. He will return to this theme later, but he sets the groundwork early in his letter.

Paul explains his change of plans about visiting Corinth. He is trying to give them the message that he did not avoid going there because it might be unpleasant, but because it was God's desire and because it was in the best interest of the Corinthians.

Returning to a previous letter, Paul compliments them for being obedient in disciplining a member for bad behavior, but he implores them to forgive the member and accept him back so that he will not be overwhelmed and Satan does not get a foothold in his life or in Corinth.

Paul explains the glory of the Gospel message, and compares the present life with the resurrected life. Then Paul writes one of my favorite passages – a passage that I often thought of when one of us was beaten or persecuted. “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”⁹

There were so many nights that my body ached, and I wanted to give up, but the echo of those words drove me on...”for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Eternal glory! For me, somebody who is second-fiddle at best.

Paul loves to talk about resurrection and reconciliation. From personal experience he knows what it was to be resurrected from a dead life, and be reconciled to Jesus. I never knew Paul to feel guilty, but I also knew him to be realistic about his life. When he writes Second Corinthians 5:10, he is just expressing a fact. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”¹⁰

He knows that verse will strike home to the Corinthians since there is a literal judgement seat sitting in the middle of their city.¹¹ He knows they will visualize Jesus sitting on that judgment seat giving each of them what they deserve...whether good or bad.

Surrounding that judgment seat in Corinth are temples and false idols. So, Paul takes the opportunity in his letter to warn the Corinthians about idolatry. He knows idolatry has been the downfall of the Israelites many times, and is certain it can be the downfall of the Corinthians, too.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV)

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:10

¹¹ This “Bema” seat is an important tourist site

Remembering my report to him, Paul takes special notice of their repentance for their past actions, and even tosses a little credit my way. Just when I was getting frustrated at Paul, he tosses in some good words about me. That guy!

And then, the other shoe drops. Paul informs the Corinthians that he wants them to collect money and be ready to give it to me when I come to them again...sooooo, that was my notice that I will be headed back to Corinth in the fairly near future. He challenges them to give even more generously than the Macedonians. It is assumed that the gifts are going to the church in Jerusalem that is in desperate need. The church there has long been under stress from persecution of the Jewish leaders and suffered from a long famine. Because of the persecution, it is next to impossible for them to buy or sell within the standard Jewish economy.

As he challenges them, Paul gives them information about giving that will be repeated throughout the ages to Christians everywhere. He says that we reap what we sow. He is comparing giving to sowing or planting, and that reaping or harvesting, will be future blessings. Next, he says the Corinthians should give what they have decided in their hearts to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. Why?...because God loves a cheerful giver!

One of the constant problems Paul has is false teachers who oppose him on various teachings. One of their typical accusations is that Paul is not truly an apostle so his teachings are not authoritative. Some people think that these false teachers are what he was referring to when he said that he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep from becoming conceited.¹²

Paul uses his sufferings and persecutions as one proof of his dedication to Jesus. He also offers his consistent and faithful actions as proof of his authority.

Paul maintains that he is actually a weak person. Something that I never saw. He boasts in his weakness, because it proves his strength derives only from Jesus. In fact, Paul tells the Corinthians that Jesus had personally told him, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is perfected by weakness."¹³ This quotation emphasizes once again that Paul has a special relationship with Jesus.

Throughout his letter, Paul continually stresses his care and love for the Corinthians. He is always torn between the need to show his love for them, but the need to discipline them when they need it. Paul is no naive prude. In a rather back-handed way, he makes it clear that they have the tendency for discord, jealousy, rage, gossip, arrogance, impurity, sexual sin and debauchery. I can't imagine that they won't be a little embarrassed that he knows them so well.

I mentioned earlier that Paul added Timothy's name to this letter and it hurt my feelings at the time. I learned pretty quickly why Paul did. He had me carry this letter back to the Corinthians,

¹² 2 Corinthians 12:7

¹³ 2 Corinthians 12:9

and he didn't want them to resent me...especially since I was supposed to make final arrangements for a relief collection from them.¹⁴

I must have done a pretty good job, because the Corinthians fulfilled their responsibilities and were able to provide a collection to Paul on his next trip there.¹⁵ For once, his problem children at Corinth acted like responsible adults. Maybe all of Paul's writings and all of my time with them did make a lasting difference!

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

¹⁵ Romans 15:26