

SESSION 3: AN OVERVIEW, PART TWO

PREFACE

April 6, 2025

In our previous session I said that after his greeting and an opening prologue (which still ties into the letter's general theme), this letter could be subdivided into three sections:

1. The Integrity of Paul's Ministry (1:12 to 7:16);
2. The Ministry of Giving (8:1 to 9:15);
3. Paul Confronts the Malignant Ministry of His Opponents (10:1 to 13:13).

The last time we were together we covered the first section, from 1:12 to 7:16; today we will take a look at the final two sections.

The Ministry of Giving (8:1 to 9:15)

With a time-tested method of “priming the pump,” so to speak, the apostle begins with a positive example: the churches in Macedonia. Paul had closed his first letter to Corinth on this subject (1 Corinthians 16), making it clear that this was to be no last-minute, haphazard passing of the hat. In advance of his visiting he instructed them to systematically set aside their gifts for the churches.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Now, in his second letter he returns to the subject. This has been a “world”-wide project of Paul's (the *known* world); he is collecting funds from all his churches to support the churches in Judea. He first mentions the grace and generosity of the Macedonian churches.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

The breadth of this collection is seen by his reference to Galatia back in 1 Corinthians, which is located in the middle of today's Turkey. Galatia was not a city, but a region—a Roman province. But my point here is to show that Paul was collecting funds for Jerusalem from probably all the churches to which he ministered: East to West, North to South.

And even though he had hit roadblocks along the way over the last few years, he was not dissuaded from his task—he had not given up on getting the money to Judea.

Perhaps the passage of most interest and application for us today begins at 9:6 to the end of this chapter. Here is good counsel for all of us. I especially take note of the angle he uses:

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6, 8, 10-11.

The over-arching point Paul is making is a lesson Linda and I learned long ago. Paul's point is *not* a version of the "Prosperity Gospel"; he's not saying *Do this and you'll get rich*. He's saying *The more you give, the more God will give you to give*. God equips each of us to serve Him and His people. Sometimes that is with certain abilities that are valuable in His economy—but sometimes that is with cash. He chooses out some to become channels of his grace and generosity, and the more they give, the more He refills their coffers—as reflected especially in v8.

And God is able to make every grace abound to you, so that in everything at every time having every sufficiency, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Paul Confronts the Malignant Ministry of His Opponents

Now, from the beginning of Chapter Ten to the end of the letter, Paul defends himself and his ministry against those in the church who are actively trying to thwart him. Right off the bat he encourages the rest of the congregation to join the battle.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-2. (NIV?)

Just imagine the apostle's predicament—he who teaches grace and forbearance, who teaches the humility and servitude of Christ Jesus as a pattern for all His followers, must now defend himself, touting his apostleship, his authority, his ministry and calling. He is forced into a position where he must itemize his personal qualities.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:10-11.

It is an uncomfortable position in which Paul finds himself, but he does not hesitate to engage—but he selects his weapons (for himself and the Corinthians) carefully.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-4.

Next, quoting the prophet Jeremiah and repeating himself from his first letter, ➡ Paul points out the proper way to “boast”: not in oneself, but in the Lord.

Jeremiah 9:24;
1 Corinthians 1:31

Read 2 Corinthians 10:17-18.

In Chapter Eleven and most of Chapter Twelve we hear the voice of a Paul we have not heard before. It is a most extraordinary passage. Here is how George H. Guthrie describes it:

Guthrie: The span of 2 Corinthians running from 11:1 to 12:13 presents us with one of the most fascinating, rhetorically charged, and discussed parts of this complex letter. Through much of the book, Paul has restrained his self-recommendations, his godly boasting, holding himself in tenuous check so that he might not be misunderstood as engaging the false teachers of Corinth on their own terms, using their questionable tactics. Now, pushed to extremities, he *seems* to plunge into boasting at full throttle. Yet this “braggart” form of boasting gets turned on its head as the apostle “brags” about things that highlight his weaknesses rather than his strengths.

In this remarkable, dramatic passage Paul presents himself as a “fool.” But at both the beginning and the end, he points the finger of guilt at the Corinthians themselves. Here is how Mark A. Seifrid (SEYE-freed) puts it:

Seifrid: Paul requests permission to be foolish, or more precisely, he asks the Corinthians to bear with him and accept him as a fool. It is only fitting that they should do so. The wise Corinthians should be happy to have a fool as their apostle. As Paul points out, this is precisely what they have been happy to do in their embrace of the apostolic claimants [i.e., the false apostles in their midst]...

The entire controversy concerning Paul and his opponents should be clear to them by now. His request to speak foolishly is intended to force the Corinthians to acknowledge their role in Paul's contention with his opponents. They themselves are the problem. He tells them so at both the outset and the close of his argument.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:3-4.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-13.

This extended passage (Chapters Ten to Thirteen) is chock-full of insights into the man Paul. Chapter Twelve especially contains two fascinating and illuminating—yet both mysterious—episodes. At the end of Chapter Eleven Paul briefly shares the familiar tale about being saved from imprisonment by being let down in a basket through a window in the city wall. This story of being “let down” is immediately followed by his extraordinarily told tale of “a man in Christ” being granted a glimpse of Paradise—the third heaven. 📖

From this Paul moves quickly into a tale about his personal “thorn in the flesh.” All three of these are told by him in the awkward context of his “boasting” as a “fool” in defense of his ministry and authentic apostleship.

As Murray J. Harris puts it, Paul moves from the “embarrassing descent to escape the hands of men” to “an exhilarating ascent into the presence of God.” (as cited by David Garland)

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11.

In v14 of Chapter Twelve Paul returns to discussing his impending visit to the Corinth church—but it remains in the context of his defense; the apostle's emotions are still raw and exposed.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-19.

Finally, in Chapter Thirteen, as he begins to close the letter, Paul abandons his “foolish” and defensive approach, to speak clearly and forcefully to the Corinthians. He expects them to prepare for his arrival by self-examination, changing their ways; he expects them to accept his apostolic authority.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:2-3, 5-8, 10.

IN CONCLUSION

Once again we are astonished at Paul's manner and tone in this letter. But his purpose in all this, as he states in v9, is for their restoration; and as he said in v10, the authority Christ gave him was not for tearing down but for building up.

The last written words recorded from Paul to the Corinthians reveal his true, pastoral heart—no irony, no sarcasm, no “foolishness,” all defensiveness dropped:

Finally, brothers, rejoice, be restored, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:11–14)