

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #27 – Adult Bible Study
Study Notes

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

April 22 & 23

10:1-8

The tone changes so abruptly in this chapter that it is difficult to imagine that the same letter we have been reading in chapter 9 goes on. Paul now assumes a defiant and defensive stance.

1. Many commentators think that these four chapters contain the difficult, or painful, letter to which Paul alludes earlier (2:3,9; 7:12) which was written after the painful confrontation had occurred (2:5-11)
2. In these next four chapters, Paul deals with only one subject, the opposition to his work that has appeared in Corinth.
3. A new and fierce tension appears as Paul introduces himself as a “warrior” (3-5). Earlier chapters revealed differences between Paul and the Corinthians, but the differences were being overcome. From chapter 10 on, he is in a fighting mood.
4. In these chapters Paul’s gospel and his position as apostle are at stake. Both have been challenged by some who have come intruding from other Christian communities.
5. Throughout he addresses the Corinthians themselves and not the intruders who were his actual opponents.
6. Paul wishes to display the same qualities as Christ, yet this cannot mean that he should ignore those who are destroying his work in Corinth for to Paul, this is God’s work.
7. Paul doesn’t detail the precise accusations his opponents have made but piecing together information there is some speculation that they were accusing him of
8. Planning and plotting against them behind their backs,
 - Passing around slanderous gossip about them,
 - Changing his mind and broken promises (1:17),
 - Trying to silence criticism by imposing his authority (1:24),
 - Feathering his own nest by his financial dealings (12: 16),
 - Attempting to sway people with empty rhetoric containing no real argument.
9. He was accused of being worldly because he didn’t speak in tongues every day or have visions and special revelations, which his critics claimed to experience. He was also accused of not spending enough time in prayer and developing his own personal spirituality:

10. Paul determines to fight with spiritual weapons

11. Paul fears these intruders may turn aside his converts from the wisdom of Christ crucified and the true knowledge of God to another wisdom and way of life.

12. Chapters 10-13 do not give us the impression that there is a large group supporting Paul on whom he could rely on to enforce discipline, as he had been able to do in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Paul is more likely to find himself excluded if there is to be a decision by majority vote.

10: 7-18

13. Paul moves in two directions as he begins to defend himself, once again.

a. In the earlier verses he seeks to correct any wrong impression of himself that may be circulating in Corinth.

b. In the later verses he argues that his rivals should have no standards for themselves other than those God has set and should also work within the limits God has laid down for them

14. What is at issue here, however, is not simple Christian existence (whether Paul was Christian or not) but Christian authority.

15. It is probable that his opponents claimed authority because they had been and continued to be good Jews. Later in chapter 11 Paul counters with a claim to be as good a Jew as them. Whatever their claim, Paul affirms that his claim is as good

16. Paul uses here, and again at 13:10, a phrase drawn from Jeremiah 1:10 and 24:6. He likes the metaphor of “building” and uses it elsewhere.

17. There is one argument his opponents have been using about his exercise of authority that he can easily counter. His bark is worse than his bite.

18. His actual physical appearance may not have been impressive. The earliest known description of him from Acts of Paul and Thecla in New Testament Apocrypha II 354 says that

“He was small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now, he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel”

*(The **Apocrypha** is a collection of books written in the four centuries between the Old and New Testaments. **Protestant:** Do not consider them canonical, viewing them as useful for instruction but not divinely inspired)*

19. Now that he has defended himself against one criticism, Paul turns more directly to attack his opponents.

20. This attack has two main prongs:

- They commend themselves unduly
- They have intruded into his sphere of labor.

REFLECTIONS

1. If you have experienced a situation when your character was called into question or you were accused of something you didn't do, share how this impacted you and what methods you used to fight back.

2. Paul had an image of Christ that was loving, kind and gentle. He struggled with trying to be Christ like but feeling a need to respond aggressively. How might Paul's image of Christ been misleading him into thinking he could not respond to his critics with boldness? How did Christ respond to his critics?

3. What kind of spiritual "weapons" did Paul use to fight his critics? What kind of spiritual "tools" do you use when dealing with an uncomfortable situation?

4. How is it possible to be in relationship with people who are Christians but are adamantly opposed to your Christian beliefs.

5. Paul is accused of being different in person than in his letters. In today's culture there are many different spheres of engagement that we occupy. We are family, live in communities, participate in church, members of clubs, organizations, sports groups and interest groups. We also interact through social media. In what ways do you feel you are consistent in presenting your true self and in what areas might you need improvement?

Notes by The Rev. Janice Y. Cook, Interim Associate Pastor, The Village Church RSF

RESOURCES

1. Second Corinthians, Interpretation, Ernest Best
2. Second Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
3. The Message of 2 Corinthians, The Bible Speaks Today Series, Paul Barnett
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors
5. C.S. Lewis, Paul and the Theology of Suffering
6. Second Corinthians, New Interpreter's Study
7. The Message Translation – Eugene Peterson