

Integrity and “Transparency” of the Minister:

A Biblical Case Study in St. Paul in 2 Corinthians

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1. Background to 2 Cor.

- 1.1. The founding of the church, Acts 18 (Paul’s visit to Ephesus v. 18)
- 1.2. The “lost letter,” 1 Cor 5:9 (2 Cor 6:14-7:1 ?)
- 1.3. Report from Chloe’s family about the problems in the church (1 Cor 1:11)
 - About the same time a letter for advice (1 cor 7:1)
- 1.4. **1 CORINTHIANS** (AD. 54/55)
 - delivered by Titus who then returns to Ephesus to be with Paul ?
- 1.5. Timothy to Corinth, 1 cor 4:17, 16:10
 - A new crisis therein by an unknown instigator; a harsh criticism towards Paul, 2 Cor 2:5-11, 7:8-13
 - Timothy unable to handle the situation and returns to Paul in Ephesus
- 1.6. The “painful visit,” 2 Cor 2:1
 - Paul humiliated before the congregation and returns to Ephesus
- 1.7. The letter “written with tears,” 2 Cor 2:4; 7:8 (in which he responds to charges and allegations):
2 Cor 10-13 [?]
- 1.8. According to an earlier - cancelled/postponed - plan (1 Cor 16:5) Paul travels from Ephesus to Macedonia and looks Titus up in Troas without finding him first
 - Finally Paul meets Titus and receives a positive report from him concerning the situation in Corinth, 2 Cor 7:6-16
- 1.9. **2 CORINTHIANS** (AD 55/56; either the whole letter or at least chs. 1-9)
 - Delivered by Titus along with two “brothers” from Macedonia
 - Very soon Paul hears about a new crisis as the “false apostles” are seeking to gain control over the congregation; to this challenge Paul responds with 2 Cor 10-13
 - A robust defense of his apostolic ministry and status, 10:10; 11:27; 12:6f.
- 1.10. Paul returns to Corinth (Acts 20:2)
 - In about a year he pens Romans in Corinth (another great “missionary letter” but in a totally different tone and focus

2. Charges and Allegations towards Paul

- a) Reading “between the lines” 1:13
- b) “Fickle” 1:17
- c) “Bossing” 1:24
- d) “Painful visit” and “Letter with tears” **2:1-11**
- e) Need for letters of recommendation 3:1
- f) Hurt feelings 6:3
- g) Lack of integrity and consistency 10:1, 10
- h) Lack of faith 10:7
- i) Critique of rhetoric skills 10:10; 11:6
- j) Pride 10:13
- k) Apostolic credentials 11:5; 13:3 etc.
- l) Money and creed 11:8-9
- m) Lack of love 10:11
- n) etc.

3. A Defense of His Own Integrity and Building Up of Others: Observations and Principles

3.1. A defense of his personal integrity (with regard to the change of plans) in 1:12-2:4 is prefaced by

- a robust consolation and encouragement of the congregation in **1:3-7** and
- a confidence in their intercession for him during his sufferings and despair, 1:8-11

b) The *defense* itself: 1:12-2:4

- The testimony of the consciousness and affirmation of integrity 1:12, based on reliance on God’s grace
 - cf. “boasting”
- “Transparency” about plans and their changes with appeal to the integrity of his Lord (and his promises): 1:18-24
 - Repeated affirmations on trusting the congregation: 2:3 etc.

3.2. Mutual forgiveness: 2:5-11

3.3. Marching in “Christ’s triumphal procession”: **2:14-17**

- a) A “parody” of victory and loss, death and life – for Christ
 - b) Another statement of integrity and purity of motifs
- 3.4. Another defense of integrity against the charges of “double-dealing” or “duplicity”: ch. 3
- a) A midrash based on Exodus 34:29-35
 - b) Prefaced by a strong confidence in Corinthians and the Lord, 3:1-6
- 3.5. Again: a defense of his integrity and self-less suffering for others: ch. 4
- a) Confidence amidst sufferings: 4:1, 16
 - b) **4:2** “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”
 - c) Self-sacrificial, but hopeful, ministry pattern: 4:7ff.
- 3.6. The doctrine of reconciliation in Christ leads to reconciliation among men and women: 5:11-6:2
- a) Although this passage is – rightly – read either in terms of an exposition of the doctrine of atonement or as an incentive to Evangelism, its initial main purpose is to facilitate reconciliation among the believers in the church and between them and Paul
 - b) Followed by yet another defense of Paul’s integrity and “transparency,” including the affirmation of the purity of motives and willingness to suffer: **6:3-13**
- 3.7. The re-affirmation of the benefits of mutual forgiveness and his confidence in Corinthians 7:2-4
- a) Followed by a positive report by Titus from Corinth, 7:5-16 (a section full of warm emotional affirmations and commendations)
- 3.8. A marvelous theology of financial generosity: chs. 8-9
- a) Praises to the generosity of the Macedonians – and Corinthians, 8:1-9 and 9:1-2 (“envelope”)
 - b) Basis in God’s grace, 8:1, 7, **9**, etc.
 - c) A highly “spiritual” account of the collection to the Gentiles – without “spiritualizing” it!
 - d) A theology of generosity: 9:6-15
 - e) Reflect on the role and meaning of this section in the letter!!!

3.9. The defense of Paul's apostolic credentials and integrity: chs. 10-13

- a) A severe criticism of the opponents and appeal to spiritual "weaponry": ch. 10
- b) A defeat of the false apostles and boasting of his own credentials: ch. 11
- c) The "thorn in flesh" and celebration of God's grace: ch. 12
 - Paul's vision and thorn: 12:1-10
 - Paul's deep concern and love for Corinthians, including stern warnings against sin and transgressions 12:12-21
- d) Final exhortation, a mix of affirming his spiritual authority and vulnerability: ch. 13

4. **Final Discussion and Reflections: Implications to our changing ministry settings and contexts**