

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Here in 2 Corinthians, there is a change of directions in Paul's argument. From now on, his target is no longer his detractors but the church fellowship.

Summary

In 2 Corinthians 12:11-21, having dealt with his opponents, Paul now explains he also had something against the Corinthian church.

1. Impossible Situation vs. 11

Paul found the whole business of speaking up for himself very distasteful (12:11). Sadly, the believers in Corinth had left him with no other option. It would not have been necessary for him to defend his corner if they had sprung to his defense. The Christians in Corinth had listened whilst some made all sorts of unfair criticisms against Paul and they could not find it within themselves to stand up for him. Instead, they allowed themselves to be taken in and began to believe the damaging untruths that were going around.

For all the charges leveled against him, Paul was not at all inferior to these super-apostles (2 Cor 12:11b).

Nevertheless, the church in Corinth was a worldly church (Prov. 18:8). This problem has not gone away with the passage of two thousand years. Malicious gossip often does more harm in the church than outright heresy.

2. Worldly Views vv. 12-14

Paul speaks about 'signs and wonders and mighty works' (2 Cor 12:12) as proof that he was a true apostle, coupled with 'utmost patience.' His rivals could not match his 'signs and wonders', nor they did have Paul's capacity to stay the course. The Corinthians were impressed by the deeds of power, but concluded that the trials and hardships were marks of failure. Some Christians today are like the Corinthians. Paul ironically offers an apology for his failure to exploit the church in Corinth (12:13). He then refers to his impending third visit to Corinth (12:14), disarmingly appealing to the normal realities of family life (12:14b). Paul loved the Corinthians and would gladly spend himself for them. Sadly, they had such a worldly view of spiritual leadership that they interpreted his kindness as weakness. Today, people are much too ready to assume that a kindly person is weak and ineffectual.

3. Withheld Love vv. 15-16

In spite of everything, Paul would 'most gladly spend and be spent' for the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:15). Nevertheless, the more Paul gave himself to these believers, the less he was appreciated.

“What Paul had a right to expect, and had not received, was recognition for all his consecrated hard work, appreciation and love.”

4. Alleged Corruption vv. 16-18

A particularly nasty accusation was making the rounds in Corinth (**2 Cor 12:16-18**). There was not the faintest shadow of truth in it. This may seem remote, but we would do well to remember that, even today, people often give credence to those with axes to grind.

5. Defended Motives vv. 19-21

Paul concludes by defending himself once more; this time not against the claims of his rivals, but against the rumors which had been entertained by church members. **First**, Paul knew that God approved of him and he could therefore afford to be somewhat relaxed about the assessment of mere men (**12:19**). If, however, he allowed untrue accusations to go unchecked it could have a disastrous effect on the church. **Secondly**, Paul was concerned for what he might find when he arrived in Corinth; a church at odds with itself (**2 Cor 12:20**). Paul was making a plea for transparency. Let neither the church be disappointed in him, nor he in the church. **Thirdly**, Paul's final plea (**12:21**) shows that he was concerned that a lack of spiritual maturity would eventually lead to outright sin and that he would find himself mourning over those who had not repented. May God save us all from the self-satisfied attitude that murmurs, "Things are not right round here, but don't blame me."

6. Challenging Examples

We have here both an example to avoid and an example to emulate. Too many of the Corinthians were much too ready to credit gossip and wounding accusations that had no basis in fact. This was a church that was too easily impressed by flashy showmanship and prone to overlook less spectacular but more valuable qualities. Loyalty was conspicuous by its absence in Corinth. It was a church that evaded responsibility rather than confronting it.

Paul's record showed a complete contrast to the fickle and changeable behavior of the Corinthians. He was slow to respond to criticism even when it was wildly unjustified. Paul valued staying power in the face of difficulties more than mere show, was loyal to the Corinthians, transparent about his motives and did not seek to evade responsibility for a situation even where the problems were not of his own making.

Do you have what it takes to be a loyal Christian?