

THEMATIC STUDY OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

BOOK SURVEY

"It has been generally admitted that this Epistle is written without much definite arrangement or plan. It treats on a variety of topics mainly as they occurred to the mind of the apostle at the time, and perhaps without having formed any definite arrangement before he commenced writing it. Those subjects are all important, and are all treated in the usual manner of Paul, and are all useful and interesting to the church at large; but we shall not find in this Epistle the same systematic arrangement which is apparent in the Epistle to the Romans, or which occurs in the First Epistle to the Corinthians." Albert Barne

While the above observation by Albert Barne is very correct, yet there seems to run through this epistle one glaring theme: **"The Apostle Under Trial"**. In this year's Prayer and word conference, we're considering the theme: **"Help to Continue"** taken from Paul's statement in Acts 26:22 *"Therefore having obtained help of the Lord, I continue to this day..."* This statement was made as Paul stood in the court room of Festus, before King Agrippa on trial; he could say "I continue", even in the face of the trials. Our choice to study his second epistle to the Corinthians is because it gives us a broader view of the trial of this Apostle, beyond the courtroom of Festus. In the epistle we see what that "Help" which enabled him to continue really is.

The epistle opened with a reference to the suffering the apostle and his team were currently facing; to them it was death stirring on their faces, and here was his responds: "Yes, we had the sentence (answer) of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" 1:19; he has come to know the resurrection life through faith in Christ. Throughout the epistle he made reverence to these sufferings, and summed it up as "light afflictions" because of the hope of eternal glory that far outweigh the sufferings. Besides the physical sufferings and depravations, the apostle exposed the inner struggles he was going through; his apostleship and motive was called to question by the very people he so loved and poured out his life for; the very people he had opened his heart widely to, would not open their heart to him; the more he loved, the less he is loved (2cor.6:12-13, 11:15); nothing could be more trying than this! On the other hand was the fear that his labour might be in vain, owing to the sinful indulgence of some in the church, and false teachers infiltrating the church, this seem to affect him inwardly more than anything else as he stated: *"Beside those things that are **without** that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches..."* 11:28.

Amidst all of this, the voice of God came to the apostle: *"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* 12:9. Thus the apostle could say, *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves... but our sufficiency is of God"* 3:5. Our desire is to find such sufficiency that could keep a man under such severe trials, testing, and suffering.

This letter was written about 58AD while Paul was at the peak of active ministry. It was written from Macedonia as a follow up to the report of Titus on the effect of His first letter (written about a year ago),

and to prepare the ground for his second visit, having cancelled his visit initially proposed, causing so much gainsaying from his detractors. The aim is that the people might be prepared to receive the benefit of his ministry. Thus he addressed such issues as to why cancelled his proposed visit which was to see the effect of his previous letter. He commended them for their repentance and gave further instruction to reinstate the incestuous brother. He also asserted his apostolic authority, pointing to the spiritual impetus of such authority, as not needing letter of commendation, nor does he need to use deception or to bully them into accepting his authority, but that his authority is seen in his care and desire to edify.

It would be notices that unlike his other epistle where principles are laid out before precept, this letter have no definite pattern, therefore we consider that the best way to study this letter, and for the purpose of this conference is to view it thematically as outlined below:

STUDY OUTLINE:

STUDY 1: THE BASIS OF MINISTRY

STUDY 2: THE MOTIVE AND FOCUS IN MINISTRY

STUDY3: THE ESSENTIAL NATURE AND PROVE OF MINISTRY

STUDY 1: THE BASIS OF MINISTRY: Discuss the following as essential basis for ministry

1. The Call of God: Chapt.1:1; 5:13-15 (See also 1Tim.1:12-14) Acts 26: 19, Gal. 1: 11 - 17
2. Suffering, Test and Trial: Chapt.1:3-7; 4:6-11; 6:4-10; 11:23-27
3. Death to self and Faith in God: Chapt.1:8-11; 3:4-5; 4:11-12, 5:14-16
4. Grace, anointing of the spirit and deep spiritual experiences: Chapt.1:21-22, 3:5-18,4:1, 12:1-10

SUMMARY 1

The call of God in the basis of every true ministry, this call is primarily our salvation experience, and then the conviction as to God's purpose for us in His work. This gave the apostle the confidence as he could boldly assert that "I am an apostle by the will of God..." Yet, that he was in the will of God does not exonerate him from testing and suffering. This is a necessary part of his training if he would be able to minister God's consolation to others, he should himself have experienced such consolation in suffering. We also see God using such suffering and testing to teach the apostle not to depend on human strength, but to die to self

and live in the resurrection power through faith in Christ. It is based on this, he could lay claim to the Grace of God, the anointing and the help of the spirit for ministry.

STUDY 2: THE MOTIVE AND FOCUS IN MINISTRY: Discuss the following as the motive of the Apostle in Ministry

1. The glory of God: Chapt.1:20; 2:14-15; 3:18; 4: 1 – 2, 15, 5: 12 - 17
2. The Salvation of men: Chapt.5:16-6:2;
3. Love and deep concern for the progress of the church: Chapt.1:23-24; 2:1-11; 4:12-15; 6:11-7:4,7-12; 11:1-4,28-33; 12:14-15; 13:11-14
4. Eternity consciousness: Chapt.4:16-18; 5:1-11

SUMMARY 2

Paul's motive in ministry was seriously called to question. And the apostle beyond every reasonable doubt showed what his motives were. Firstly, it was ultimately to glorify God, - In doing this he presented himself like a primer of war in the victory parade of his captivity (2: 14 – 15), and he stressed the fact that we glorify God through our lives, having renounced all hidden things of dishonesty. He expressed his deep desire in labouring for the salvation of all men – in fact; some of his detractors took him to be mad because of his fervent zeal, but to this, the apostle replied that it was the love of God containing them... This naturally results in his undying passion for Christ and the church. We see Paul's unparalleled care for the body of Christ expressed in this letter. Above all, was the consciousness of eternity knowing that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ – How we need to always bear this in our consciousness.

STUDY3: THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF MINISTRY

1. Ministry by life: Chapt.2:14-16; 4:3-14; 6:3-10
2. Sincerity, accountability and administrative Excellence in Ministry: Chapt.1:12-20; 2:17; 4:1-3, 8:16-24,9:1-5, 12:14-18
3. Partnership and Support in Ministry: 2:12-13; 7:5-6,13-16; 8:1-15; 9:6-15 (Comp.1cor.9:11)
4. Spiritual authority and the power of Ministry: 3:1-3; 5:17; 10:1-18, 11:5-21, 12:11-13,20-13:10

SUMMARY

We conclude this study by looking at the essential nature of the ministry. One glaring fact is that the ministry is by the help of God. Firstly, it is the exudance of the life of God in that constitute ministry

and this life will be tested through adversity. Then, even at that, to prove the resurrection power. Also we see what partnership and support God grants us as a help in the work. Above all, God grants us the anointing and spiritual authority.