

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 3

Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians

AIM: to teach my pupils the truth and teaching of the book of II Corinthians.

POINT OF CONTACT: The book of II Corinthians calls the Christian several things which we will discuss later in the lesson. One thing that a Christian is called in the book is a Bible; another is a preacher. You might start the lesson off by saying, "There are several Bibles in this room. Point to one of them." After the pupils have pointed to every Bible in the room, let them guess a while; and then explain to them that we are Bibles for the world to read. The same thing could be done by telling the pupils that there is a preacher who is going to be in the class today. Ask them to guess who it is. After they have exhausted their own minds, you can explain to them that each of them is a preacher, as you will show them later in the lesson.

INTRODUCTION: In Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, he dealt with grave and pressing problems confronting the church. Then word reached Paul that opposition had arisen in the Corinthian church against his rigid rules. Some even questioned his apostolic authority. Paul, of course, was grieved about this, and the immediate purpose of the letter was to fortify the Corinthians against the opposition that Paul did not have authority from God and to defend Paul's position in the ministry. The book covers many, many different subjects. Consequently, it is not quite as coherent as I Corinthians. Alford says, "In no other Epistle is there so much varying and rapid shifting from one subject to another. Consolation and rebuke, gentleness and severity, earnestness and irony succeed one another at short intervals and without notice." Of course, this is probably because it was written hastily to defend Paul's position and his apostleship.

The book, though it has many doctrines, is basically a presentation of Paul's apostleship and a defense of his right to minister among them.

I. PAUL'S PROOF OF APOSTLESHIP.

1. He was an Apostle by the will of God. (II Corinthians 1:1) You will notice here that he starts off saying that he is an Apostle, and then he spends the entire book proving it. His first proof is that it was God's will that he be an Apostle. There were several qualifications that an Apostle must meet. One of these was that he must have seen the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul met this condition because he did see Christ on the road to Damascus. He calls himself "an apostle out of due season," which means that he was an Apostle, not of the earthly ministry of Christ, but after the earthly ministry when he was given the privilege of seeing Him. It is thought that he was the one that God chose to succeed Judas. Of course, the Apostles met and voted upon another, but that man somehow never entered into the work of the Apostles. No doubt Paul was God's choice to succeed Judas.
2. His work commended his apostleship. (II Corinthians 3:1-3) Paul was using the logic here that if he were not an Apostle, how could he have been used of God to lead them to Christ and help them to grow in the grace of the Lord? He was saying, "You yourselves are proof of the fact that I am genuine."
3. His behavior while with them. (II Corinthians 4:1, 2) Nothing is as good a credential for a Christian as the way he lives. Paul explained to them that he had been honest and truthful while among them. Somebody has said, "One example is worth a thousand arguments."
4. His message. (II Corinthians 4:5) Paul advanced this credential: He preached not himself, but Jesus Christ. A false prophet would have preached himself and exalted himself. Paul reminded them that he never tried to do this. This reminds us of the words of John the Baptist, who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." This should be the desire of every Christian.
5. His sufferings. (II Corinthians 6:3-10) The very fact that he was willing to suffer so much for his position proved that he was truly sent of God.
6. There were many other efforts on Paul's part to prove that his ministry was authentic. He closes by reminding them in II Corinthians 13:3 that he was of the truth, as is found in II Corinthians 13:6, 7. The interesting thing is that he turned and asked them the question and challenged them to prove their sincerity. He had proved himself. Notice II Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobrates?" Paul said, "I have proved myself; now you prove yourselves. Check and see if you are saved. See if God be in you. You have been looking at me; now look at yourselves." This would be a

good thing to ask the class to do Sunday. Ask everyone to investigate his own heart to see if he really is born of the Spirit of God.

II. THE PARENTHESIS. There are several parenthetical chapters in II Corinthians. A part of chapter 7, perhaps a little of chapter 10, and definitely all of chapters 8 and 9 are parenthetical. They deal with the grace of Christian giving. Since Paul deals with this, we too shall deal with it. Let us notice the observations about Christian giving.

1. It is a grace. “In II Corinthians 8:7 Paul was telling the people, ‘You folks are abounding in faith and utterance and knowledge and diligence and love,’ and then he reminds them that giving was a grace just like the aforementioned.” The great reason that we ought to teach tithing is not because the church is poor or because God needs the money, but it is a Christian grace. It is a sign of growth in grace. It is a part of growth in grace. It is necessary for growth in grace. It even represents true growth in grace. It is the gauge by which other growth can be measured.
2. If we give much, we shall reap much; and if we give little, we shall reap little. (II Corinthians 9:6) The reason so many Christians have so little is that they give so little. The late Paul Raker used to say he preached on tithing a lot because he wanted a rich church, and if he had a giving people, he could have a rich people.
3. Our giving is to be done cheerfully. (II Corinthians 9:7) The word “cheerful” is a strong kind of cheerfulness. It is akin to the kind of cheer when you have won something, such as a game, or when you have received a delightful surprise. It also means “hilarious.” It means to “jump up and down and click your heels.” This is the kind of cheer we are to have when we give.
4. It is the way to guarantee that we will have enough. (II Corinthians 9:8) We say, “Save for a rainy day.” Paul said, “Give for a rainy day.”
5. Christ is the great example in giving. (II Corinthians 8:9) Because He gave, we are to give.

III. SOME THINGS WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS CALLED IN II CORINTHIANS.

1. The Christian is called the Epistle in II Corinthians 3:2, 3. This is a very interesting statement. Paul said, “You are my Bible. You are my Epistle.” Many people will not read the Bible. Many people will never read a sermon or hear a sermon, but they see us daily. We are their Bible. We are their sermon. This poem should challenge us:

*God has no hands but our hands to do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet to lead men to His way.
He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men that Christ died;
He has no help but our help to lead them to His side.*

*We are the only Bible this careless world will read;
We are the sinner's Gospel, we are the scoffer's creed.
We are the Lord's last message, written in deed and word.
What if the line is crooked? What if the print is blurred?*

*What if our eyes are busy with other works than His?
What if our feet are leading where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking of things that Christ would spurn?
How can we hope to aid Him and hasten His return?*

2. The Christian is called an ambassador in II Corinthians 5:20. An ambassador is a representative of a king in a foreign country. Philippians 3:20 says that our citizenship is in Heaven. Consequently, we are in a foreign country. Since we are here, we are to be ambassadors; that means, we are to represent the King. We are to do His works, speak His words, do His business. This means we are to be spreading the Gospel of the King.
3. The Christian is called a minister in II Corinthians 5:18. He has “given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” This is interesting. We are all preachers. The preacher is not the only one who is supposed to bring people to Christ. Every Christian is supposed to do this. We are all ministers. The only difference is that the preacher is a full-time minister, whereas the laymen ought to be part-time ministers. We all do the same work; one just has more time to do more of it.
4. The Christian is called a temple in II Corinthians 6:16. The first place where God met man was the altar. Upon the building of the Tabernacle, God dwelt among man in the Holy of Holies. When the Tabernacle had run its course and the Temple had been built, God dwelt in the Temple. In this New Testament age, however, God's presence is in each believer (I Corinthians 6:19; Romans 8:9). This means that our bodies are New Testament temples and are to be held as sacred vessels. Then, we are church buildings. Everywhere we go, a church building goes. We have to be reminded of this. A lot of people will never come to the church building, but they can see the message in us. Let us be fit temples to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.