

The apostle continues his rather emotional appeal for their hearts. Not to draw them to him but to the Lord he represented. They had responded to his first letter in a positive way despite his personal anxiety about whether it was too harsh. He had been genuinely concerned that his letter would turn them off and he would drive them from the Lord. He deeply desired to commend the Lord to their hearts and their hearts to the Lord. But to enjoy a relationship with someone we need to avoid harming them or insulting them. Believers can insult the Lord sometimes. If we attempt to enter into relationships with unbelievers or with unrighteousness (whether found in believers or unbelievers) we are excluding or displacing the Lord and the Father from our lives personally and from our collective fellowship in the assembly. This is not because God is selfishly holding onto our affections as some possessive people do. His purpose is our blessing which brings out glory and thanksgiving publicly to His name. He draws out our hearts to Himself. It is safe to worship and depend upon Him, but not other beings. Not family, friends, social connections, authorities, organizations. He is our source of blessing, no other. He is not swayed by flattery or corrupted by alliances meant to procure advantages for the partners. While His yoke is in one sense infinitely unequal, it is easy and light, Matthew 11:28-30. He is not honored by compromises of His truth or righteousness in order to simply achieve outward unity with other believers. On the other hand, in the interest of unity, He strongly commends personal sacrifices, longsuffering, forbearance, and forgiveness for any who may have in some way caused us harm, Ephesians 4:1-4; 1Corinthians 6:1-8. To be faithful to the Lord we are to endure mistreatment at the hands of the world, even of our brethren, but never link ourselves with any element of the world whether secular or religious.

So Paul can openly ask them to receive him and those associated with him almost in the same breath as commanding them not to associate the assembly, or themselves personally, with unbelievers, unrighteousness, darkness, idolatry, etc. He could honestly say he, and those with him, had wronged no man. *"We have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man."* He was blameless. Each of us should be able to say that about ourselves and our associates.

Paul is now enthusiastic about the Corinthians, excited about the blessings he wanted them to enjoy. He doesn't hold back on his feelings and tells them so. He gloried in them. The thought of them was his comfort and joy when undergoing deep trials and persecutions. What a model of a positive approach to

others despite their spiritual weakness and departure. He doesn't write them off despite some unbecoming behaviors and bad attitudes still festering among them. He instead sets the stage to approach them in more depth about this, chapters 10-13. But first he rejoices in their humble and forthright response to his first letter. This was a great encouragement to him. And it was a great start toward completing much needed internal cleansing and healing of the assembly in Corinth. They perhaps haven't yet realized at this point there is more to deal with in their midst. So he commends their first response and uses that as a stepping stone to the next steps necessary to fully restore them to the purity and loving relationships the Lord desires to see in each assembly.

He now marks the signs of repentance in their response to his letter. Titus had returned to Paul and reported this to him. They were now honestly appalled at their own carelessness and lightness in ignoring the open wickedness they had harbored among them. This response to his prompting was a tremendous encouragement to Paul as he was going through immense trials and persecution elsewhere. Note, their response to the wickedness was not a ho-hum, routine sort of thing but showed itself in several strong emotions. It was repentance of a godly sort, not as the world repents, merely being sorry they got caught and must suffer consequences. No apologies that aren't really apologetic at all. No excuses. Simply open, humble, refreshing action before the Lord.

There was in them towards Paul:

earnest desire, vehement desire for, longing.

mourning, moaning, lamenting.

and a fervent mind toward him, heat, zeal (in a favorable sense) ardor.

There was in them towards the situation:

carefulness among them: action, haste, zeal, diligence, earnest care, watchful interest.

clearing of themselves: Grk. **apologia**, a defense against an accusation. (They wanted no part of this wickedness. They wanted to clear themselves of it, not because they were innocent of harboring it, but because they repented of harboring it.)

indignation: displeasure, annoyance, vexation, irritation, pain.

fear: Grk. **phobes**, terror, fright, alarm through reverential fear of God.

vehement desire: earnest desire, longing for.

zeal: Grk. **zelos**, envy, jealous.

revenge: As in Romans 12:19, not revenge but vengeance, of believers, not vengeance

upon the wicked person but self avenging retribution upon themselves.

When Titus came to them they showed him deep respect, (thereby also to Paul and to the Lord whom he represented.)

obedience of them all: attentive hearkening, compliance or submission, obedience.

with fear: terror, fright, alarm.

and trembling: literal trembling.

they received (accepted) him.

What a testimony their response gives to the seriousness of sin and of wickedness found in a local assembly claiming to be the Assembly of God

Yet Paul's motive in writing to them was far higher than to simply clear them of sin by disciplining the guilty one or avenging the one wronged. Not simply to bring about justice but to show them how much he loved them. To lift them up out of the trough of self indulgence and self esteem, and now of remorse, to lead them to realize how much they really loved God, how much God wanted to bless them and what had been standing in His way.

What a model for our attitude when confronted with wickedness amongst us. What a model for us when we think we are standing for the truth and for righteousness and are opposed by our own brethren. Let us study it carefully and adopt it into our thinking and ways. Here is righteousness enforced with no hint of self-righteousness or pride. Enforced strongly but lovingly in a positive tone. Faithfully uncompromising but faithfully brotherly. Christ's honor first but Christ's love for His own throughout.

The wicked one repents in the atmosphere of Godly fear and holiness of his brethren. The assembly is cleared before God and man. They had carelessly permitted leaven (sin) to be introduced among them but now had purged it out by judging the wicked acts and the wicked person who did them. When they put him out of their midst and were then no longer considered leavened by sin. Now Paul and other assemblies were free to continue to associate themselves with the assembly at Corinth. Both he and Apollos had stayed away, only sending a letter and messengers to seek

repentance and restoration. Now, by the grace of God, even the one who had sinned was repentant and would be included in their midst again. His spirit would indeed be found to be saved in the day of the Lord. This was one of the intents of the assembly discipline noted in his first letter.

1Corinthians 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

His wicked behavior had made unclear to them whether he was really one of Christ's. His claim of being a believer hadn't prevented their action against him.

2Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

But being a believer, he was safe, for God has promised to keep us safe to the end. In carrying out that promise, God in grace faithfully acts in different ways to engineer our safety already procured by Christ's death and resurrection. In this case it was preserved through assembly discipline exercised by faithful believers gathered unto the Lord's name. God seems to prefer to work through personal contacts by individual believers who faithfully go to another whom they observe to be sinning or in danger of sinning, Matthew 18:15-16, and Galatians 6:1. This prevents things from getting so far along as they did in Corinth, necessitating assembly involvement. Yet when necessary, perhaps because of our inaction, He may use other more providential means to draw an erring one back, such as illness, bankruptcy, bereavement, etc. If all else fails He takes the erring one home. **He is faithful!** And so He has recruited each of us to engage in the good work of the godly care and keeping of our brethren. What grace!

Now they are ready for his admonition in chapter 8 to go through with their promised gift for the poor in Jerusalem. They were no longer hindered by open sin. They could now give from a good conscience.

By Ron Canner, June 30, 2004