

THE CHURCH OF CORINTH (PART 2)

Jon Macon

When he wrote 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul was planning his third visit to Corinth. Paul's plan and intention was for that upcoming visit to be very soon (1 Cor 4:19). Specifically, Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, then visit Macedonia, and then spend the next winter in Corinth (1 Cor 16:5-9; 2 Cor 1:15-16). There was no doubt that Paul would come to Corinth again, but only a question about when (1 Cor 16:3). From Ephesus, Paul went to Macedonia (Acts 19:21-22; 20:1-2). Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while there in Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5; 8:1-6; 9:2), a year after he had written 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 16:1-3 + 2 Cor 8:10-11; 9:1-2), around A.D. 55-57. Paul had delayed his trip to Corinth, and was under criticism from some of the brethren there as a result (2 Cor 1:17-22). There were two major reasons why Paul had delayed his third trip to Corinth. First, Paul wanted to give them some time to straighten out the problems, especially the fornication issue, that he had written to them about in 1 Corinthians (2 Cor 1:23-2:11). Paul was determined not to go to them in heaviness and make them grieve (1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 2:1-2,5). Second, after Paul left Ephesus, Titus had been unable to join him in Troas and Paul was discouraged to the point that he left the open door there and went straight to Macedonia and stayed there (2 Cor 2:12-13). This played a role in the cancellation of his plans to spend the winter in Corinth. He stayed in Macedonia instead. While Paul was in Macedonia, Titus returned to him after visiting Corinth and gave him a good report about the congregation that greatly encouraged the apostle (2 Cor 7:6-7,13-15).

Progress and problems

From 2 Corinthians, we learn that the church in Corinth was growing, and some of the problems from the previous year had been solved. For example, the fornicator had been delivered to Satan as had been commanded, and he repented. Now the church was urged to forgive the repentant brother (2 Cor 2:1-11; 7:6-13). The Corinthians were still suffering persecution, but they were enduring (2 Cor 1:3-11). The church had also been a good example to other brethren by their zeal for giving to the poor saints at Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9). They had "provoked very many" others to also give liberally, especially in Macedonia (2 Cor 9:2). In spite of the progress that had been made, there were still some lingering problems in the congregation. Some of the Corinthian brethren had still not repented of their contentions and divisions and even fornication (2 Cor 12:20-13:2). Some of them were in need of reconciliation with God (2 Cor 5:20-6:2). There was a problem with worldliness, and not being holy to God (2 Cor 6:13-7:1). Paul continued to be under criticism and examination by some of the brethren in Corinth. He was under criticism for not having made his third visit to Corinth as soon as he had planned (2 Cor 1:15-2:13). Some evidently were so bold as to demand letters of recommendation for Paul (2 Cor 3:1-6). This issue of Paul's approval is dealt with continually throughout 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 3:1-6; 4:1-2; 5:11-6:10; 10:7-18; 11:1-12:12; 13:1-3). This segment of the congregation was judging by the flesh (2 Cor 5:12), even to the point of despising Paul for his physical appearance and his voice (2 Cor 10; 11:5-6). Paul was even under criticism for not having taken any

THE CHURCH OF CORINTH (PART 2)

(continued)

money from the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:7-12; 12:13-19)! Paul again defended his apostleship (2 Cor 11:5-6; 12:11-12; 13:1-3), and had to urge the Corinthians (or at least *some* of them) to receive him (2 Cor 7:2). There were still false teachers in Corinth (2 Cor 11), whom Paul called “false apostles, deceitful workers” and ministers of Satan (2 Cor 11:13-14). The Corinthians were receiving these heretics who were bringing “another Jesus,” “another Spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). They even willingly endured being robbed and physically abused by them (2 Cor 11:19-20). Paul warned them that they were in danger of being corrupted by these false teachers (2 Cor 11:1-3).

Paul’s third visit

Shortly after writing 2 Corinthians, Paul traveled from Macedonia to Greece, where he stayed for three months (Acts 20:1-3). During those three months, Paul finally made his third visit to Corinth, which was around 56-58 A.D., five to eight years after the congregation had been established. Gaius was Paul’s host while he was in Corinth (Rom 16:23; see also 1 Cor 1:14). One of Paul’s reasons for coming to Corinth again was to lay his hands on the brethren there to give additional miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1,13,39), or the first gifts to any who had been converted since his last visit, since only an apostle could give these miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands (Acts 8:14-18; 19:1-7; 2 Tim 1:6). Another purpose for his visit to Corinth was to deal with the remaining spiritual problems (2 Cor 12:19-13:10). Paul also came to Corinth for the purpose of taking up their collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Throughout his third missionary journey, Paul had been taking up collections from the churches for this purpose. Paul had received contributions for this need from the churches of Galatia (Acts 18:23 + 1 Cor 16:1-2), probably of Ephesus (Acts 20:35), then of Macedonia (Rom 15:25-31; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:1-4), and finally from the brethren in Achaia, including Corinth (Rom 15:25-31; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:6-9:15). Titus and another unnamed brother went to Corinth ahead of Paul and gathered their donations, and also carried to them the letter of 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 8:6-23). After leaving Corinth, Paul took the money, accompanied by Titus, Luke and several other brethren (Acts 20:1-21:29; 1 Cor 16:3-4; 2 Cor 8:16-24), and traveled to Jerusalem to give it to the poor saints there (Acts 20:3-21:15). While in Corinth near the end of his third journey, Paul wrote Romans (Rom 15:25-31). This was possibly Paul’s last trip to Corinth, as he said he had “no more place in these parts” (Rom 15:23). The last mention of Corinth in the scriptures comes at the end of Paul’s life, in about 67-68 A.D. At this time, Paul was again a prisoner in Rome and was facing execution (2 Tim 4:6-8). Erastus was in Corinth then (2 Tim 4:20). Paul was obviously still concerned about the church at Corinth at the end of his life. His involvement with the congregation spanned some 17 or 18 years.