

Lesson 3 – 1-2 Corinthians

Text: Acts 18:1-20:3; 1-2 Corinthians

Key Passages:

- 1 Corinthians 13 – Paul wrote about love and how important it was in solving many problems.
- 2 Corinthians 11:22-12:10 – Paul compared himself to those who attacked him and defended himself.

Background Information:

In Acts 18, Luke described Paul's stay in Corinth which lasted about 18 months during the second missionary journey. It is apparent from historical accounts that the city was generally depraved. Particularly, sexual immorality and idolatry were common, though they certainly were not the only moral issues in the city (1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:9-11). The city is thus sometimes referred to as the "Las Vegas of the Ancient World" due to the number of brothels, saloons, and other immoral establishments there. The wickedness common in Corinth was so well-known that to "live the Corinthian life" became a commonly-used synonym for sinful behaviors (sexual immorality, etc.). Despite this, Paul was determined to teach the Corinthians the Way.

During Paul's visit to Ephesus (Acts 19), it seems that he wrote 1 Corinthians at a time when things were going well, about AD 57 (1 Corinthians 16:8-9); the "open door" Paul mentioned was possibly referring to the renunciation of magic by many at Ephesus (Acts 19:17-19). Given the spiritual immaturity of the new church and the environment in which they were living, it is not surprising that Paul needed to address several problems that existed in the church. Many of these problems were internal, or issues between brethren. While Paul gave many specific instructions, following Paul's admonition to love (1 Corinthians 13) would have solved many of the Corinthians' problems. Paul told them that he planned to visit soon (1 Corinthians 16:5-7).

Following the writing of 1 Corinthians, it seems things fell apart for Paul at Ephesus, as he wrote of trouble so severe that he and his companions despaired even of life (2 Corinthians 1:7-11). After those difficulties, when Paul and his companions had gone to Macedonia, they continued to be troubled "on every side" (2 Corinthians 7:5). However, Titus' good report from Corinth comforted them (2 Corinthians 7:6-7). There were still some issues in the church, though, particularly that some were rejecting Paul's authority. Perhaps for these reasons Paul wrote about how God provides comfort but also defended his apostleship.

Outline:

- I. 1 Corinthians
 - a. Purpose: to correct many of the internal problems that the immature church was struggling with
 - b. There were some issues in the church that desperately needed to be addressed (1:10-6:20)
 - i. Division among the brethren; focus on the message, not the messenger (1:10-4:21)
 - ii. Immorality needed to be addressed, specifically sexual immorality (5:1-6:20)
 - c. Paul answered some questions that the Corinthians had apparently asked him (7:1-11:1)
 - i. Questions about marriage (7:1-40)
 - ii. Questions about meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1)
 - d. Other admonitions (11:2-16:24)
 - i. Disorder in worship, particularly regarding the Lord's Supper (11:2-34)
 - ii. Improper use of spiritual gifts; admonition to love (12:1-14:40)
 - iii. Some were teaching against the resurrection; Paul corrected this (15:1-58)
- II. 2 Corinthians
 - a. Purpose: to comfort the brethren and defend Paul's authority and apostleship
 - b. They had comforted Paul; we all can and should comfort one another (1:1-2:17)
 - c. God provides comfort by charging us with preaching the gospel, a task worth any cost (3:1-7:16)
 - d. Admonition and information about ministering to the needy saints in Judea (8:1-9:15)
 - e. Defense of Paul's apostleship (10:1-13:14)
 - i. Defense and comparison with those who attacked him (10:1-11:33)
 - ii. The power of Christ would be demonstrated when Paul arrived at Corinth (13:1-10)