



Comfort/encouragement from Second Corinthians ...

Paul's Beginning Defense

The apostle Paul had significant enemies inside the congregation at Corinth. These enemies attacked him on a personal basis, ranging from castigating his personal appearance to challenging his apostleship. The purpose of such attacks was ultimately to destroy the doctrine Paul preached, and to hinder his authority to correct and discipline. His enemies within the local body are unnamed, but some of them came from the ranks of those who wanted to meld the teachings of Christ with Greek philosophy. This, of course, would have catapulted the false teachers into positions of influence and authority. More than in any other epistle, the apostle deems it necessary to face these challenges, and, when necessary, defend his apostleship. Modern saints would do well to consider the nature of the challenges, and carefully

to note the divine responses.

- ▼ **The necessity of a good conscience** — One of the things God grants the true saint is a clean conscience. There is no fake way of salvation that will produce a clean conscience in an individual; a good conscience can only be received by those who obey the gospel of God from an honest heart. "Immersion now saves you," is Peter's affirmative, stating that immersion into Christ is the "appeal to God for a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21). Hence, through the blood of Christ — shed on Calvary, sprinkled in glory — the individual's heart is sprinkled clean from an evil conscience when his body is washed (Hebrews 10:22). The redeemed, now possessing a clean conscience, must maintain it, as Paul instructed Timothy, telling him to keep "faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Timothy 1:19).
- ▼ **The testimony of Paul's conscience** — When a Christian is suffering from a guilty conscience, he is vulnerable to attacks. Rather than handling the jabs from the adversary in a gracious, creative, and intelligent way, he is locked in to a system of defensiveness. This is generally immediately perceived by the opposition, and like a shark smelling blood, the enemy closes in for the kill. Paul, aware of this, and knowing that he has to fend off his opposition, has maintained a clean conscience, and is willing to put that on the line as he initiates his defense in Corinth. "For our proud confidence is this," is how he introduces his offensive thrust against enemies of the gospel in Corinth, "the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you" (2 Corinthians 1:12). Paul clearly maintained a good conscience, following advice he was later to give Timothy, and was therefore unassailable and bold as a lion.
- ▼ **Some characteristics** — The apostle makes it clear, as he occasionally does, that his motives in preaching the gospel are pure. He stresses that he comported himself in "holiness"; this is major, for if his conduct were in any way unholy, then he would have had little effect with truth-seekers. His pure motive is expressed in that his work was done in "godly sincerity"; there was no pretense, and his upright character showed through. He also emphasizes that he did not operate on the basis of "fleshly wisdom," which is also a shot at his enemies. James noted that the fleshly wisdom — wisdom of the world — is "earthly, natural, demonic." And where such intelligent but twisted wisdom is, "there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:15,16). The apostle's conscience was clear, in that he knew he was not using fleshly wisdom to further his position, but operated in accordance with the wisdom of God, the first characteristic of which is "pure."

The apostle Paul is often insistent that he accomplished what he did only by the grace of God; he carried out his responsibilities, but he is always willing to acknowledge that the major work was the result of God's grace. The apostle's conscience is clean in regard to his conduct in his contact with the world in order to reach the lost; but he is especially confident in his interaction with the brethren, for herein he had closer and more frequent communication. Thus he is ready to deal with issues inside the congregation.

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