

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 20

Comfort after Conviction

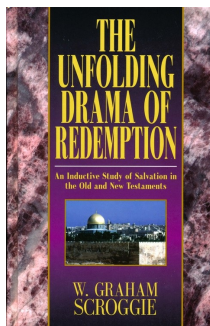
It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ... when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ... JOHN 16:7,8

Study 20a: The BACKGROUND

The reason for the 'second' epistle

From allusions here and there in 2 Corinthians it may be inferred that 1 Corinthians was not as effective as Paul could have wished in checking those tendencies in the church which he deplored, and Timothy was not strong enough to enforce the apostle's directions. It may indeed have been Timothy who brought back such a report that Paul decided that nothing would serve but a direct confrontation with the church. This visit – the 'second visit' of 2 C. 13:2 – was a painful one for Paul and his converts alike (2 C. 2:1). The opposition to Paul came to a head, and one member of the church in particular took the lead in defying his authority. Paul was deeply humiliated (cf. 2 C. 12:21) and withdrew – perhaps fulfilling his plan to 'pass through Macedonia'. He then sent the Corinthians a stinging letter – one which he assures them he wrote 'out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears' (2 C. 2:3f.). This letter (which may be called 'Corinthians C') was sent by the hand of Titus, and when Titus had set off with it Paul began to be sorry he had sent it. In it he assured the Corinthians of his love for them, but demanded that they give evidence of the love they professed for him by acknowledging his apostolic authority, and in particular by subjecting to church discipline the man who had taken the lead in defying his authority. [Bruce 164]

Peculiar difficulties, historical and literary, attach to this Epistle, as it is well nigh impossible to say with confidence what Paul's movements and actions were in relation to Corinth, in this year. It is influentially held that the Apostle wrote not fewer than four Letters to this Church (1) the lost Letter of 1 Cor. v.9; (2) our 1 Corinthians; (3) a stern Letter (2 Cor. ii.3; vii.12), which, it is thought, cannot be our 1 Corinthians, but rather 2 Cor. x.i-xiii. 10; and (4) a glad Letter, which would be our 2 Cor. i-ix; xiii. 11-14. No one can read 2 CORINTHIANS with any care and not be struck with difference in outlook and tone between chaps. i-ix, and chaps. x-xiii. The former division is jubilant and conciliatory, but the latter is sad and



severe, and it is widely felt that these two notes could not possibly have been sounded in the same Letter, and that, therefore, to the Letter chaps. i-ix, has got attached a fragment at any rate, of a previous Letter, chaps. x-xiii.10 ... To compare the two Letters to Corinth will prove instructive. The First gives insight into the character and condition of the early Churches; the Second, into the life and character of the Apostle Paul. The First is objective and practical; the Second is subjective and personal. The First is systematic; the Second is not. The First is deliberate; the Second is impassioned. The First warns against Pagan influences; the Second, against Judaic influences. The two together are valuable beyond all estimate for an understanding of the problems of first century Christians, and for an appreciation of the greatest missionary of the Christian era. [Scroggie 137,142]

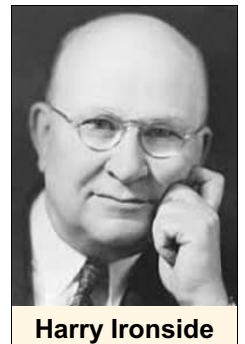
Study 20b: With ACTS the BEST BIO SOURCE for PAUL

What information about Paul's life is only found in 2 Corinthians?

This Epistle is the most personal of the Writings of Paul; nowhere else is he portrayed so intimately; nowhere is his rich humanity so in evidence. To appreciate the Letter one must understand the situation ... This Epistle tells us things about Paul which are not hinted at anywhere else. For example, his escape from Damascus (xi. 32,33), his revelations and visions (xii. 1-4); his "thorn in the flesh" (xii. 7); the five Jewish scourgings, two Roman scourgings, three shipwrecks, and many perils (xi. 23-27). Thus, though Paul speaks much about "boastings," he certainly was not a boaster, or he would have told Luke all about these experiences, and Luke would have recorded them in the Acts. [Scroggie 143]

The only way to know the 'God of all comfort'

[1:3] And then notice the next title Paul gives Him, "The Father of mercies." That is, our God is the source of every mercy that comes to us. David says, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6). Some of these mercies we do not always appreciate. We sometimes think perhaps that God is dealing hardly with us when He is really dealing with us in mercy. A friend of mine who went to Heaven some years ago, told of a time when he was riding on the top of an omnibus in Vienna, Austria, and they were held up because a flock of sheep was going down the street. As the folk on the bus leaned over to see what was going on, they noticed that there were two dogs running hither and thither to keep the sheep in the way. This friend turned to a stranger seated beside him and said, "Do you know the names of those two dogs?" ... one of them is 'Goodness' and the other is 'Mercy,' for David wrote about goodness and mercy following him all the days of his life." You might not think it was goodness and mercy to have a couple of dogs yapping at you to keep you from going to the left or to the right, but it is God's mercy that keeps us in the straight and narrow way, and He uses trial and difficulty for that very purpose. He is "the Father of mercies." [Ironsides 16]



Harry Ironside

1:1-7 As Paul sees Christian life, can we have BOTH 'comfy Christianity' and the 'God of all comfort'? (John 14:1,27; 15:18-21; 16:1-6,20-22,32,33)

[1:7] It is hard for us to realize, but it is true that God can do far more with a broken man than with a man who seems strong in his own strength and power. And so He permits trouble to come upon His people, and even upon His chosen vessels, in order that they may be humble and broken in spirit before Him. [Ironside 27]

1:8-10 How does Paul reconcile his tribulations with God's goodness?



Charles Hodge

[1:9] God brought him into these straits *in order that* he might not trust in himself, but in God who raiseth the dead. These two things are so connected that the former is the necessary condition of the latter. There is no such thing as implicit confidence or reliance on God, until we renounce all confidence in ourself. When Paul was convinced that no wisdom nor efforts of his own could deliver him from death, then he was forced to rely on the power of God. [Hodge 386]

[1:10] You remember the old fable in our school-books, how the sun and the wind were trying to see which was the stronger. The traveler went on his way and each tried to see which could get him to take his overcoat off first.

The wind blew and blew, but the traveler wrapped his coat about him more securely. And then the sun beamed upon the man and he began to perspire, and off went the coat. It is when worldly prosperity shines upon the Church that off goes the robe of righteous behavior. But when the wintry blasts of trouble and persecution break upon it, then the Church wraps itself all the more closely in the garment of salvation. Paul knew that tribulation was for blessing. God uses broken men, and if men will not humble themselves before Him in order to make them vessels to carry His testimony to others, He will give them experiences to break them. [Ironside 31]

1:11-2:4 Identify the criticism that some of Paul's critics had already levelled against him

[1:12] Paul had informed the Corinthians that it was his purpose to go direct from Ephesus to Corinth, thence into Macedonia, and back again to Corinth, v. 16. This plan he had been induced to modify before the former epistle was sent, as in 1 Cor. 16,5 he tells them he would not visit them until he had passed through Macedonia. On this slight ground his enemies in Corinth represented him as saying one thing and meaning another. They seem also to have made this an occasion for charging him with like inconsistency in doctrine. If his word could not be depended on in small matters, what dependence could be placed on his preaching? [Hodge 388]

Paul's detractors and calumniators made a threefold assault upon him; they attacked his person, his teaching, and his character; and his defence is along these three lines ... He was accused of fickleness (i. 17,18,23), of pride and boasting (iii. 1; v. 12), of obscurity in preaching (iv.3), of weakness (x. 10), of rudeness of speech (xi. 6), of being contemptible in person (iv. 7-10; vi. 4-10; x. 10; xii. 7-10) of being

dishonest (xii. 16-19), of being hardly sound of mind (v. 13; xi. 16-19; xii. 12); and this Letter is largely an answer to these charges. [Scroggie 141]

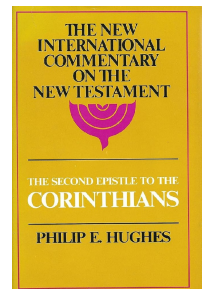
2:5-11 How does Paul see Satan overmastering the saints?

[2:11] The danger which the Church, with its desire for a pure and unsullied membership, must avoid is that of a discipline so inflexible and so inexorable that it thereby sets a false limit to the grace of God. To deny a penitent fellow-Christian all hope of divine mercy and restoration is indeed to allow Satan to gain an advantage (v.11). [Hughes 67]

The greatest of all the Father's comforts

[1:21,22] The term "earnest" means a deposit which is in itself a guarantee that the full amount will be paid later ... it is not surprising to find Paul using this same expression, "the earnest of the Spirit" later in our epistle in a distinctly eschatological setting (5:5), while in Eph. 1:13f. (Where, as here, he conjoins the idea of the sealing with that of the earnest) he speaks of the Holy Spirit as "an earnest of our inheritance", a foretaste, that is, or down payment, which guarantees the final possession in its fulness of that "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for those "who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:4f.). [Hughes 41-2]

[1:22] The word [*arrabon*], pledge, is a Hebrew word, which passed as a mercantile term, probably from the Phenician, into the Greek and Latin. It is properly that part of the purchase money paid in advance, as a security for the remainder. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his people, is that part of the blessings of redemption, which God gives them as a pledge of their full and final salvation ... The indwelling of the Spirit, therefore, renders the believer secure and steadfast; it is his anointing; it is the seal of God impressed upon the soul, and therefore the pledge of redemption. The fruits of the Spirit are the only evidence of his presence; so that while those who experience and manifest those fruits may rejoice in the certainty of salvation, those who are destitute of them have no right to appropriated to themselves the consolation of this and similar declarations of the word of God. The perseverance of the saints is a perseverance in holiness. [Hodge 401]



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