

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS : AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

II. THE COLLECTION FOR JERUSALEM (Ch. 8 : 1 - 9 : 15)

Now, my brothers, let me tell you about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia. They have had a severe test in the affliction that they have had to endure, but amid all this the abundance of their joy, coupled with the depth of their poverty, has yielded fruit to overflowing in the lavishness of their generosity. To tell the truth, they did not simply give what they could, but more than they could; and they gave it spontaneously. They begged me very earnestly that they might have the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the people of God (at Jerusalem); and the scale of their gift far surpassed my expectations. And what was the secret of this extraordinary generosity? Simply this: first of all they gave themselves to the Lord, and then, by God's will, they gave us not so much their money as their very selves. So I have urged Titus, who has already made such a good beginning (with you), to bring it to completion by receiving *your* gift.

Now, my dear friends, I know that you overflow in every spiritual gift — faith, eloquence, knowledge, and zeal of every kind — and in your love for me which I cherish so dearly. See to it, then, that you overflow in this grace too — the grace of generosity. I am not giving you orders; I am just giving you an opportunity of proving your love in the light of the eagerness which others have shown. Above all, you know what grace was shown by our Lord Jesus Christ. *He* was rich; yet for your sakes He became poor, in order that you might be enriched by His poverty.

This is how I look at the matter. It is only proper that you should show special generosity, for you gave the Macedonians a lead a year ago, not only in taking action, but even before that, in making up your minds to do so.¹ Now then, bring the

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 16: 1 ff.

action to completion; let its completion, in proportion to your resources, match the original eagerness of your determination. When the eagerness is forthcoming, God accepts it in the light of what a man has; He does not expect a man to give what he does not possess. I do not want others to get off easily while you bear the heaviest burden; I am trying to have the load shared out equally. At present you happen to have a considerable surplus which can supply their deficiency, so that on another occasion *their* surplus may make up *your* deficiency; in this way there will be an equality of sacrifice. You remember what the Scripture says about the manna: "The man who gathered much had nothing left over, and the man who gathered a small quantity did not run short."²

Now God be thanked for putting into the heart of Titus an eagerness to match your own. Yes, so eager was he for you to have this opportunity that he has responded at once to my urging; indeed, his eagerness is such that he is setting out³ for Corinth on his own initiative. The brother⁴ whom I am sending with him has a splendid reputation in all the churches for his service in the gospel. Besides, he has been chosen by the (other) churches to travel with me and share the administration of this gift; we are administering it for the glory of our Lord Himself and as a token of our eagerness in this matter.

You see, I am resolved that no one shall have any excuse for finding fault with me in connection with this lavish gift which I have to administer. I take redoubled precautions to make sure that the whole business is conducted honestly, not only in God's sight but in men's also.

With these two I am sending another brother, whose diligence I have often proved in many matters; and his diligence is all the greater in this business because of the great confidence which he has in you. If any one asks questions about Titus, he is my partner, he has shared in my work where you are concerned. If any one asks about the two brothers who accompany him, they are messengers of the churches, they are a credit to Christ. So then, let all the churches see the proof of your love; let them see how truly I spoke when I boasted to them about you.

But there is no need for me to go on writing to you about this service for the Jerusalem Christians. I know how enthusiastic you are about it; in fact, I have been boasting to the Macedon-

² Exodus 16: 18.

³ Epistolary aorist.

⁴ Traditionally Luke.

ians about you. "Achaia", I tell them, "has been ready since last year!" So the example of your keenness has stimulated very many.

Well, as I have said, I am sending our brothers to Corinth. I don't want my boasting about you in this matter to turn out to be empty words. What if the Macedonian delegates were to come to Corinth with me and find that you were not ready yet? You would certainly feel embarrassed, wouldn't you? to say nothing of me, after all my confident assertions!

That is why I have thought it necessary to urge our brothers to visit you before I come, so that they can complete the collection of this generous gift which you have promised already. Let it be ready as a generous gift, not as something grudgingly parted with.

What I mean is this: the man who sows sparingly will reap a sparse crop; the man who sows liberally will reap a liberal crop. I want each one of you to give what he has already made up his mind to give. Don't treat it as though it were a painful or compulsory due you had to pay! No! God loves a giver who gives joyfully. And God is able to bestow every grace on you in overflowing measure, so that at all times and in all circumstances you may be adequately provided and may overflow with every kind of good work. That is what the Scripture means when it says:

He scattered abroad; he gave to the poor;
His piety abides for ever.⁵

And God, who supplies seed for sowing and bread for eating, will certainly supply seed for you to sow in ever-increasing abundance, so that the fruits of *your* piety will be multiplied. Then you will always be rich in liberality of every kind, for through this ministry of ours your liberality produces thanksgiving to God. You see, the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of God's people, but it overflows in many thanksgivings to God. God will be glorified by the evidence which this service provides — evidence of your professed obedience to the gospel of Christ and the sincerity of your fellowship with them and with all your fellow-Christians. He will be glorified, too, by their prayer for you, for they will be filled with affectionate longing for you because of God's grace which has so abounded in you. God be thanked for His great gift — a gift no tongue can describe!

⁵ Ps. 112: 9.

III. PAUL'S CONTROVERSY WITH THE CHURCH OF CORINTH
(Ch. 10: 1-13: 14).

(a) *Paul vindicates his apostolic authority* (Ch. 10:1 - 18)

Please listen to me; this is Paul entreating you in the name of Christ's own gentleness and moderation. I am humble enough, you say, when I am face to face with you, but bold and fearless at a distance. My prayer is that I shall not have to be bold to your faces when I am with you, with that confident boldness which I think it proper to show to certain people — to those, I mean, who consider that I behave according to natural human standards.

Well, even if I do behave according to natural human standards I do not fight my battles with worldly weapons. The weapons I use for fighting are not of this world; but they are powerful in God's hands for the demolition of strongholds. With them I overthrow lofty imaginations and everything that is high and lifted up against the knowledge of God; with them I take the minds of all prisoner and force them to render allegiance to Christ; with them I hold myself ready to punish all disobedience, when the full extent of your obedience is revealed.

Look at some obvious things. Whoever is sure that he belongs to Christ's party may think again and be assured of this — I belong to Christ as much as he does. If I boast a little too much of the authority which the Lord has given me—authority to build you up, I hasten to add; not to pull you down — I have no need to be ashamed. I do not want you to think that I am trying to terrify you by the letters I write. I know what people are saying: "His letters are weighty and powerful; but when he is with us his personal appearance is not at all impressive and no one pays any attention to what he says." Listen: anyone who says that can bank on this — when I come to you I will be as resolute in action as I am resolute in the letters I write when I am away from you.

I do not want to go so far as to include myself among certain people whose only testimonial is their self-commendation; I would rather not be compared with them. They show their lack of true understanding by the way they measure and compare themselves alongside one another. But I will not boast beyond due measure, but by the measuring rule which God has allotted to me — and I will apply that measuring rule to you too. I am not exceeding the terms of my commission as though you did not rightly fall within my province; I have come to you already

with the gospel of Christ. I do not boast beyond due measure by intruding upon a sphere in which others have been commissioned to labour; I have good hope that, as your faith increases, my own sphere of labour will be increased the more abundantly by your aid, according to the measuring rule which I have been given. That is, I hope to preach the good news even beyond your territory.⁶ But I will not boast beyond due measure by taking up another man's measuring rule and trespassing on his field of labour because it lies ready to my hand. "Let him who boasts make his boast in the Lord."⁷ The man who is truly approved is the man whom the Lord commends, not the man who commends himself.

(b) *Paul boasts "as a fool"* (Ch. 11:1-33)

I wish you would put up with some foolish talk from me for a little. Yes, please do put up with me. I am jealous over you, I know, but my jealousy is like God's. I think of your church as a pure maiden whom I have betrothed to one man to the exclusion of all others, and I want to present you to him — to Christ, I mean. But I am afraid that your affections may be seduced from their single-hearted devotion to Christ, as Eve was seduced by the serpent's craftiness.

If someone comes and preaches a different Jesus from the Jesus whom I preached, if he offers you a different Spirit from the Spirit whom you received, or a different gospel from the gospel which you accepted — O, you put up with him all right. (Why should you not put up with me, then?) I reckon that I do not fall short in any way of those super-apostles. You may think me inexpert in speech, but I am not inexpert in knowledge; and I have made this abundantly clear to you throughout.

Was it wrong of me to humble myself that you might be exalted, when I preached the gospel to you free of charge? I impoverished other churches by taking my wages from them so that I might serve you. When I lived among you and found myself in need I did not make myself a burden to any of you. My brothers supplied my needs when they came from Macedonia;⁸ I refused to live at your expense, and I will still refuse to do so. It is Christ's own truth that I speak when I declare that no one shall deprive me of this ground for boasting anywhere in the province of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do. Why then? I will tell you.

⁶ Cf. Rom. 15: 18 ff. ⁷ Cf. Jer. 9: 23 f.; 1 Cor. 1: 31. ⁸ Cf. Acts 18:5.

My reason for taking this line, and for continuing to take it, is simply that I mean to give no opportunity to those who would like to find one, those boasters who would like to tell you that I am no different from them. Such people are false apostles, workers of deceit, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder: even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so it is not surprising that his ministers should disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. But their end will be in keeping with their deeds.

Again I say: don't let anyone think me a fool. But if that is what you do think of me, never mind: accept me as a fool, but let me indulge in a little boasting just as they do. What I am now saying I do not say in the Lord's name: I am playing the part of a fool in this boasting business. There are many others who boast by natural human standards; why should not I? You are wise men, but you are always ready to put up with fools. That is plain to see: you put up with anyone who enslaves you, anyone who eats you out of house and home, anyone who robs you, anyone who treats you arrogantly, anyone who slaps your face. I feel it a disgrace when I think of their behaviour; I have been so weak with you by comparison with them. Yet, if any of them has anything to boast about, so have I—speaking as a fool, of course.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descended from Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? Going to the very extreme of folly, I can say, "So am I," and more so — by my more abundant labours, by my more frequent imprisonments, by my repeated encounters with death. You ask is that really so? Listen: five times I have received thirty-nine lashes at the hands of the Jewish authorities; three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. I have suffered shipwreck three times; I have spent a whole night and day in the open sea. In my many journeys I have often been exposed to dangers by river, dangers at the hands of bandits, dangers at the hands of my own nation, dangers at the hands of Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the desert, dangers at sea, dangers among counterfeit Christians. I have endured toil and weariness, sleepless nights without number, hunger and thirst, lack of food time and again, cold and nakedness — not to speak of the burden which I have to bear every day, anxious care for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not share his weakness? Who is tripped up on the Christian way, and I do not burn with indignation for him?

No, if I must boast, I will boast of things which proclaim my weakness. Here is one: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the ever-blessed One, knows that I am telling no lie. In Damascus the representative of King Aretas was guarding the gates of the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped him that way.

(c) *A Vision and its Lesson* (Ch. 12:1-10)

I must go on boasting, I suppose, though it is a futile business. Let me turn to visions and revelations of the Lord. What do you think of this?

I know of a Christian man who, some fourteen years ago, was transported into the third heaven. God knows whether he was in the body or out of it at the time: I cannot say. This man, then—and only God knows whether he was in the body or out of it—was transported to Paradise. There he heard unutterable words, which a man may not even repeat. I will boast about a man like that, but not about myself, unless it is to expose my weakness. Even if I do decide to boast, no one can call me a fool, for I shall be telling the truth. But I forbear, in case the surpassing wonder of the revelations makes anyone think that I am exaggerating beyond the power of eyes to see or ears to hear.

Well then, to keep me from being unduly proud, I was given a bodily ailment, a sharp rankling pain, a messenger of Satan to keep me under and prevent me from becoming too proud. I prayed to the Lord about this three times and begged Him to take it away. But He said to me: "My grace is all that you need: my power is most fully displayed by means of your weakness." This taught me a lesson, and now I will rather boast in the things that expose my weakness, and that right gladly, so that Christ's power may take up its abode in me. That is why I rejoice in my infirmities, in the injuries I suffer, in my privations, my persecutions and distresses; I rejoice in them for Christ's sake, for it is when I am weak that I am truly strong.

(d) *The Signs of an Apostle* (Ch. 12:11-13)

Well! I have been making a fool of myself. But it was you who drove me to it. Instead of having to commend myself like this, I should have been commended by you. Even if I am a mere cipher, I have not been outdone by those super-apostles. The true tokens of an apostle were performed in your midst as I worked with constancy among you, by the signs and wonders

and mighty works that attended my ministry. In what way did I treat you worse than the other churches — unless it was that I did not make myself a burden to you? Pray forgive me for doing you such a terrible wrong!

(e) *Paul promises a third visit* (Ch. 12:14-13:4)

Look: for the third time now I am about to pay you a visit. I will still refuse to make myself a burden to you; it is not your property but yourselves that I want. It is parents who ought to save up for their children, not children for their parents. And I will most gladly spend all I have, and be expended myself, for the sake of your souls, even if the more I love you, the less you love me.

Very well, you will say; granted that I did not live at your expense, but that was just my low cunning, so that I might trap you all the more craftily.

Tell me: did I rob you at second hand — through any of the men I have sent to you? I urged Titus to visit you, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus rob you? Did he and I not exhibit the same spirit? Did he not follow in my footsteps?

You have been thinking for a good while now that I am writing all this in self-defence. I tell you in the sight of God, in the name of Christ, that is not my motive. It is for your own benefit that I am doing all this, my dear friends. I am afraid that when I come I shall not find you as I should like to find you, and then you will not find me as you would like to find me. I am afraid that once more there will be quarrelling, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambition, slandering, whispering, boasting and unruliness. I do not want to come again and have God humiliate me before you; I do not want to mourn over many who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity and fornication and licentiousness of which they were guilty.

As I said, then, this is the third visit I am to pay you. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word will be confirmed."⁹ I have told you before, and I tell you again; I told you on my second visit and now I tell you while I am away from you; I tell those who sinned before and I tell all the others: if I come again, I will not spare you. You want proof that it is really Christ who speaks in me, do you? You shall have proof, and you will find that the Christ by whose authority I speak is not weak in His dealings with you, but present in power among you. It was in weakness that He was crucified, indeed, but it

⁹ Deut. 19:15.

is by the power of God that He now lives. If I am weak, it is His weakness that I share; but I shall live with Him by the power of God and come to you in that power.

(f) *Paul prays for their improvement* (Ch. 13:5-10)

Examine yourselves, to see if you are still believers; test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves well enough to realize that Jesus Christ dwells in you? — for indeed He does, unless you are counterfeits. But I hope you will recognize that there is nothing counterfeit about me. God grant that you may do no wrong—not so that I may be proved genuine, but that you may do what is right, even if by the same token I should be shown up as counterfeit. We cannot do anything against the truth; whatever we do, truth must prevail. When I am weak and you are strong, I am glad; that is just what I pray for, that you may be firmly established.

That is why I write like this when I am away from you; I do not want to be severe when I am with you. If I do seem severe, I am exercising the authority which the Lord has given me; but He gave it to me to build you up, not to pull you down.

(g) *Final greetings and benediction* (Ch. 13:11-14)

For the rest, my brothers, may all go well with you. I want you to be established and encouraged, to be of the same mind and live at peace: so may the God of love and peace be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the people of God here send you their greetings.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.