

The Corinthian Repository (Nos. 21 – 24)

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21) Discipline and Forgiveness (1 Corinthians 5:3 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-8)

When it is do with assembly discipline, the apostle leads the assembly in charge and action.

But when it comes to restoration, love and forgiveness – the apostle deliberately wants the assembly to take charge. He would forgive the defaulter only after they had forgiven. In godly love and for love – the apostle wanted the assembly to be the first in expressing forgiveness and love, for that is what the assembly is in principle.

22) Principles relating to God's resources in the assembly (2 Corinthians 8 and 9)

God's wisdom in the assembly is intended to harmonize every resource on the principle of equality. This is the first principle (2 Corinthians 8)

God's wisdom not only spreads out the resources uniformly in the assembly, but God also supports and provides fresh resources to His assembly. This is the second principle (2 Corinthians 9)

23) Principles relating to resource distribution within the assembly and among the assemblies (Acts 2:44 and Romans 15:25-26)

The church at Jerusalem was under the apostolic spell of unity brought about by the Spirit. There was internal reorganization of resources on the principle of equality. This illustrates the fundamental truth of the local assembly as being the Body of Christ.

But the apostle Paul introduces a new principle – not only a local assembly can redistribute its own resources but one assembly can help other assembly. This illustrates the universal organic unity of the assemblies as the Body of Christ – a Pauline revelation.

24) A brief statement on the sufferings of the Apostle Paul as seen in the Epistles of the Corinthians

The epistles of the Corinthians reveal the sufferings of the apostle with great spiritual instruction. **They are exclusively dealt in five different ways: 1 Corinthians 4, 2 Corinthians 1, 2 Corinthians 4, 2 Corinthians 6 and 2 Corinthians 11 and 12.** Each of these sections, reveal a peculiar character of the apostle as he faced the challenges and struggles of life for the testimony of the Lord. Let us briefly consider them:

Firstly, in 1 Corinthians 4 – the apostle speaks of the special character of sufferings as being one of the apostles. In the later stages of the epistle – he speaks of his sufferings as being one with his own followers facing persecutions – Timothy, Titus, Silas and others (Compare 2 Corinthians). But here – the apostle identifies himself with the other apostles, and brings out that special character of suffering that is attributed to the apostles, in their unique testimony to the Lord's name: 'for I think that God has set us the apostles for the last, as appointed to death. For we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men' (v9). But it was in the sufferings of his apostleship – that Paul had brought the Corinthians to the Lord: '...for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the glad tidings' (v15). Here – the sufferings of the apostle is seen according to his calling (as an apostle), but at the same time, these sufferings have had its perfect fruit in the conversion of the Corinthians to the Lord's name.

Secondly, in 2 Corinthians 1 – the apostle speaks of the opportunities that his sufferings had brought on him – the opportunity to share his comfort in Christ with the Corinthians: '... who encourages us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to encourage those who are in any tribulation whatever, through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God' (v4). Here, there is a special fruit of joy that a suffering saint possesses and which is, that he becomes a channel of the Spirit's comfort for other saints. In the assembly – we have faith, hope and love as the cardinal principles of Christian testimony (1 Corinthians 13), but here in the 2nd epistle – we have 'comfort' brought out by the energy of the Spirit as a testimony of God's presence with His suffering people. In the later stages – sufferings (as we shall see), also prompt the expansion of the heart and this is the final stage. But we shall proceed.

Thirdly, in 2 Corinthians 4 – there is a great discovery as the apostle narrates his sufferings. He explains a motive behind these sufferings. Now, this is a new development. The first time, the apostle describes his sufferings, which is in 1 Corinthians 4, there is no reason given to his sufferings, but rather that he is now become a spectacle to the world of men and angels, and that his sufferings have led to a fruit – the conversion of Corinthians unto faith.

Similarly in 2 Corinthians 1 – the apostle speaks of the opportunity of his sufferings which is, that he can share his comfort in Christ with others, but again the motives are not discovered. But here – in 2 Corinthians 4, the motive is unfolded as to the reason behind the sufferings in a very expressive manner: ‘...for we who live are always delivered unto death on account of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh’ (v11). It is clear, that God allows us to suffer so that we may lose our confidence in the flesh, and that our confidence is then diverted to the risen Lord. The Christian by faith lives his life in connection with Christ and not by the reasoning of the flesh. It is this heavenly image that is borne on the Christian due to the sufferings that he experiences. The apostle already reveals this in principle at the beginning of the 2nd epistle itself: ‘but we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have our trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead’ (v9) – but here, he makes this grounded as a principle for all time in a Christian’s life.

Fourthly, in 2 Corinthians 6 – the apostle speaks of the manner in which he engaged himself in these sufferings. This invites us to see the disposition of the apostle as he faced these sufferings. He has already shown us what he has gained for others through these sufferings, and what are the motives because of which he has been allowed by God to pass through these sufferings. But here in 2 Corinthians 6, the apostle lets us know: how he deals through these sufferings. He lets us know – that it is by nine virtues, that he handled these sufferings. They are: in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, and through the arms of righteousness (v6,7). Christian suffering is not mute endurance as it is with a fatalist enduring the hardships of life, or that of a stoic being calm and reposed in the face of death – for all this is done in the merit of one’s own gratification and natural power. Christian suffering is qualified as such because it has in it the testimony of heavenly grace being endowed upon the moment – in the Holy Ghost and in love unfeigned. The power to endure must be given by and through the Holy Ghost, and not my one’s own natural determination to stay silent. By doing so – testimony is borne to God. A stoic can endure a trying circumstance, but he does it not by the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore – his merit of endurance has no connection with God’s glory and purposes. There is expansion of the heart – to accommodate to every circumstance. The Corinthians accepted the authority of the apostle and this was evident in the manner they dealt with the fornicator. But now the other test came – would they also accept the persona of a suffering apostle facing the indignities of his adversaries? They could accept authority in its apostolic form as an extension of the glory imparted by the authority in Christ, but would they embrace suffering as an extension of grace in Christ? The heart needs to be expanded to accommodate Christian suffering – not just Christian authority (the latter being fundamental but the former being maturity): ‘our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians, our heart is expanded. Ye are not straightened in us, but ye are straitened in your affections’ (v11,12)

Fifthly, in 2 Corinthians 11 and 12 – the apostle speaks of his sufferings as the proof of his apostleship. But there is also the other suffering that he describes as – the ‘thorn in the

flesh' (v7). This is something very personal for the apostle. But this suffering brought in the ultimate vindication of God's wisdom for the suffering apostle – for it brought in two things at the same time: **firstly**, the power of Satan is allowed as a check on the flesh and **secondly**, the power of Christ is manifested in the weakness of the apostle. The former is peculiar for usually the power of Satan is accompanied by the boast of flesh but not its restriction – but here, the reverse is executed: ‘that I might not be exalted by the exceeding greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn for the flesh, a messenger of Satan...’ (v7). The second is profoundly given – the Lord is met in these sufferings: ‘for this I thrice besought the Lord’. The Lord is met with knowledge and not in ignorance – for the apostle knew why he had been given the thorn in the first place. But the Lord’s response is not a reiteration of what the apostle already knew as to the cause behind the thorn – but to the principle by which, He Himself is most gloriously manifested in us: ‘my grace suffices thee; for my power is perfected in weakness’. It is one thing to suffer for the testimony of Lord’s glory – the glory that is yet unrevealed to the world of men, while the Christian suffers in testimony. But it is another thing to suffer in order that this Lord’s glory may be actually revealed in us and through us for the world of men around us – an astonishing development. This power is seen in patient endurance.