

Exegetical Notes – 2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6

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Verses 12-13

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,¹³ I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

- Paul went from Ephesus to Troas and found the people of that place receptive to the Gospel.
- But he was worried because he expected to find Titus there. Titus was a trusted companion of the Apostle Paul. Some scholars believe that he had carried the “Severe Letter” from Paul to the Corinthians. Titus and Paul were traveling separate routes, preaching the Gospel as they went. Their routes intersected in Troas, and Paul expected to meet Titus there. But Titus did not arrive as expected. Paul was worried that something had happened to Titus either in Corinth or after he had left there.
- When he could wait for Titus no longer, Paul set out for Macedonia.

Verses 14-17

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? ¹⁷ Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

- Paul drops the discussion of his worry over Titus and his travels. He will not return to this discussion until 2 Corinthians 7:5.
- In this discourse Paul begins by giving thanks to God for his place in the plan of God to spread the Gospel. When Roman generals returned to Rome after successful military campaigns, a parade of triumph was held to

celebrate the victory. Those taken captive in the war were paraded through the streets of Rome at the end of the parade. Paul compares Christ to the victorious general. He has won the battle. Paul compares those whom Christ has freed to the slaves at the end of the parade. Those freed by Christ are bound to Him in love and will be as obedient to Him as are slaves. We have been bought by Christ's blood and we are bound to Him.

- He says that we are the sweet or pleasing aroma of Christ to all those who are watching the parade. The streets of Rome had open gutters along them through which human waste flowed. The "aroma" of the city was anything but pleasing. When there was a "triumphal procession," sweet smelling incense was burned along the parade route to counter the unpleasant odor. Paul says that we are that odor. We are the smell of Christ. To those who are saved the odor is the smell of life. To those who do not know Jesus, it is the scent of death. Wherever Christians go, though we are slaves to Christ, we must live to point others to Jesus.
- Paul recognizes the honor that Christians have in being part of God's plan to spread the Gospel to the world by the way we live our lives. But he also recognizes that we are unequal to the task. All Christians are sinners who fall short of the mark. But we must seek to live Christ so that others are drawn to him by us. This is a task that none of us can accomplish without the Holy Spirit's enabling.
- There were some insincere preachers in Paul's day who were preaching the word of God for personal profit. They took offerings for their preaching and pocketed the money. Some of these preachers were popular among the people of the Church. Some people in Corinth actually preferred these men to Paul. Paul thanks God that he does not do what he does to please his hearers so that they will give him money. He speaks to them in sincerity as a "sent one," as an APOSTLE, even if some do not believe he should claim that title.
- In this passage Paul uses the plural personal pronoun. He speaks about himself and those who, like Titus, are associated with him. Paul and his team do not sell the Gospel for personal profit. They preach the word of God sincerely.

Verses 3:1-3

3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our

letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. ³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

- The rejection of some of the Corinthian believers is still painful to Paul (see 1 Corinthians 1-3). His concerns for Titus, because he had sent Titus to Corinth with a scolding letter, have revived this pain. He realizes that those who dislike him in Corinth will say, “O there he goes again tooting his own horn. He thinks he is something else. He thinks that God could do nothing without him!” Paul is aware that even the outpouring of his heart before the Corinthians in thanksgiving to God will be seen by some of them as boasting.
- Paul tells the Corinthians to look at themselves. Many of them have come to know Jesus as Savior because of his work among them. Many of them are growing in Christ because of his faithful preaching and living. He tells them that he needs no other recommendation among them than them. They show the results of his work in Jesus. They are living testimony to the power of Christ working through him and his team.

Verses 4-6

⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- Paul says that he is confident that God is working through him and his team. But his confidence is not in his ability or in the abilities of those who work with him. God has enabled them as ministers of the New Covenant. They do not teach people to follow the old way which was to follow the letter of the law. That understanding of God only leads to death. He preaches and demonstrates reliance on the Holy Spirit of God as do those who work with him. It is in accepting Jesus and living for Jesus, making Him Lord, that we find life. This is what Paul lives and breathes, even if some in Corinth do not see it!

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