

**Paul's Final Appeal Regarding His Legitimacy as an Apostle
2 Corinthians 12:19-21
Part Two**

We are presently considering Paul's final appeal to those still as yet unrepentant Corinthians who had not yet embraced Paul as a legitimate apostle of Christ and his message as the true gospel message. And where do we find this appeal? This final appeal to the Corinthians is found in **2 Corinthians 12:14-21**.

And what is the question that we are presently seeking to answer as we examine this final appeal to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians? What were the three basic components of Paul's final appeal to those still questioning his apostolic legitimacy within the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 12:14-21?

The first component of his appeal was that Paul focused the Corinthians' attention on the loving and sacrificial character of his apostolic ministry as manifested by his no-charge policy (2 Corinthians 12:14-15). This was the first component that Paul introduced in his final appeal.

And what was the second component of his appeal? The second component of his appeal was that Paul called those Corinthians who were still rebelling against him to make a final decision about whether his no-charge policy was a ploy to rob them or a means to sacrificially serve them as would be expected from a true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:16-18). This was the second component that Paul introduced in his final appeal.

This morning we will continue on in our examination of Paul's final appeal to the still as yet unrepentant Corinthians as we consider the third component of Paul's final appeal.

So, what was this third component? The third component of Paul's final appeal was that Paul outlined for these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians his fears if he arrived at Corinth for the third time and found them still unrepentant (2 Corinthians 12:19-21).

So let me now read for you these verses and see if this is not so. **“All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you.**

Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. (20) For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; (21) I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.” These are the verses that we will be examining this morning as we consider this third component of Paul’s final appeal to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians.

Let us now look at the very first part of **2 Corinthians 12:19**. And what did Paul say to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians in this particular part of the verse? **“All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ.”**

So, what is Paul trying to say to these yet unrepentant Corinthians here at the beginning of **verse 19**? This is what I believe he was trying to say. “Just because I have been defending my apostolic legitimacy to you throughout this epistle, I did not do this because I considered you to be my judges, who might serve me, by rendering a favorable verdict in regard to my apostolic legitimacy, but rather I have been defending my apostolic legitimacy before you so that you might be served through me by what I have said.” This is a quick summary of what I believe Paul was seeking to say in this portion of **verse 19**.

So let us now examine this portion of **verse 19** a little bit more carefully and see if this is not so. So let us begin with the very first words. **“All this time [or in other words all the way through this epistle] you [the still as yet unrepentant Corinthians] have been thinking that we have been defending ourselves to you.”**

And why might these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians have thought that? These still as yet unrepentant Corinthians might have thought that because all the way through the epistle **of 2 Corinthians** Paul had been defending his apostleship to them. But just because he had been defending his apostolic legitimacy to them throughout this epistle, he had not been defending

himself or his companions to them as a defendant might defend himself to a judge hoping that he might be served by a favorable verdict on his behalf. This was not Paul's purpose at all and how do we know that?

Let us continue to read **verse 19**. "**All this time** [or in other words all the way through this epistle] **you** [the still as yet unrepentant Corinthians] **have been thinking that we have been defending ourselves to you** [as a defendant might defend himself to a judge hoping for a favorable verdict on his behalf but this would not be true and why would that be? Let us continue to read the verse. And what does it say? It says this]. **Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ.**" This is what he told them.

So, what did this mean? First of all, Paul was making it clear to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians that he was not speaking to them what he was speaking to them because he viewed them as his judges, but rather he was speaking to them what he was speaking to them because he was standing before God, and speaking to them what God wanted him to speak to them. Isn't this what Paul meant when he told these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians that he had been speaking to them "**in the sight of God?**" This is exactly what I believe Paul was saying to them.

And how did God, the One whom he was speaking "**in the sight of,**" want Paul to speak to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians? God wanted Paul to speak as Christ Himself would speak to them. This is why Paul told these as yet unrepentant Corinthians that he was not only speaking "**in the sight of God,**" but that he had also been speaking "**in the sight of God in Christ.**"

And why would God, whom Paul believed he was speaking in front of, want him to speak to the unrepentant in this way? Lets once again return back to **verse 19** but this time we will complete it. "**All this time** [all the way through this epistle] **you** [the still unrepentant Corinthians] **have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you** [as a defendant might defend himself before a judge hoping for a favorable verdict on their behalf but]. **Actually, it is in the sight of God** [our ultimate judge] **that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.**" And this was very important for these Corinthians to hear if they were going to view Paul's very lengthy apostolic defense in a correct way, and what was that correct way?

Paul had not been defending himself to them throughout this epistle in order to serve himself, but rather to serve them as he, standing before God, spoke to them in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:19). This is what they needed to understand if they were going to view Paul's very lengthy defense in the correct way?

So if this was the correct way of viewing his apostolic defense, and if these as yet unrepentant Corinthians, after listening to what Paul had to say in **verse 19**, chose to embrace what he had said as true, then what should have been their next step?

If the Corinthians, after listening to Paul's explanation, in **verse 19** of his lengthy apostolic defense, chose to embrace what he had said as true, their next step should have been one of repentance! Or in other words, they should have at once chosen to again embrace Paul as a legitimate apostle of Christ and his gospel message as true thus opening the door for them, by the grace of God, to living their lives in a manner worthy of that gospel. This is what Paul would have expected if they, in response to his explanation in **verse 19**, had chosen to repent.

So did Paul expect the Corinthians to take this step of faith and once again embrace him as a legitimate apostle and his gospel message as true in response to his explanation in **verse 19**? No, Paul did not necessarily have that expectation. Paul understood that sin dies hard and that his opponents were still spreading their venom in Corinth. And because of this he did not have this certain expectation that what he had shared with them would necessarily produce the result he of course would have desired.

Because Paul did not have the certain expectation that these as yet unrepentant Corinthians would in fact repent in light of what he had told them, he was fearful of what might happen on his third visit (2 Corinthians 12:20-21).

And this brings us to **2 Corinthians 12:20-21**. So now let me read these verses for you. **“For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; (21) I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may**

mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”

So was Paul fearful of what might take place in Corinth on his third visit even in spite of all that he shared with these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians? Yes, Absolutely! He had several fears. So, what were they?

First of all, Paul’s was afraid that if there was no repentance that neither he nor the unrepentant would find what they wanted from each other when he arrived on his third visit (2 Corinthians 12:20).

And isn’t this exactly what **verse 20** tell us. **“For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish.”** So did Paul in this verse state very clearly that if there was no repentance that neither he nor the unrepentant would find what they wished when he arrived? And I believe that the answer would have to be yes. This is exactly what Paul is telling these Corinthians.

And what did Paul indicate would be the catalyst for evoking this mutual disappointment? Paul indicated that him finding certain bad behaviors among the unrepentant would be the catalyst. So let us continue to read the verse and see if this is not so? **“That perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances.”** So, what would be the catalyst that Paul indicated would evoke this mutual disappointment? It would be him finding certain bad behaviors among the unrepentant.

For if Paul found certain bad behavior among the unrepentant when he came to Corinth, he, rather than coming to them in gentleness, would be forced to come to them with a rod of discipline (2 Corinthians 4:21). This is very reminiscent of what Paul had already said to the Corinthians once before in **1 Corinthians 4:21**. So why would he be forced to come to them with a rod of discipline if this was in fact the way he found them? This leads us to a second thing he was afraid of if he arrived in Corinth for a third time and found these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians still unrepentant and manifesting the fruit of their un-repentance in a plethora of bad behaviors. So, what was this second thing that Paul was afraid of?

Paul was also afraid that if there was no repentance that he might be humiliated by God before them (2 Corinthians 12:21). So let me read **2**

Corinthians 12:21 and see if this is not so. **“I am afraid that when I come again my God humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”** This second thing that Paul said he was afraid of, that if there was no repentance that he might be humiliated before God, was actually simply an expansion on the first thing that he said that he was afraid of in **verse 20**, but in this verse he goes into greater depth about the depth of disappointment.

So, what did Paul mean when he told the unrepentant Corinthians that if he came and found them still as unrepentant and continuing to manifest the fruit of such that he was afraid that he would be humiliated by God before them?

When Paul told the Corinthians that he was afraid that God would humiliate him before them, he meant that he was afraid that God in His providence would permit him to witness the demise of certain unrepentant Corinthians. This is what Paul meant when he told them, **“That when I come again my God may humiliate me before you.”**

What an amazing thing! So few people are willing to take the responsibility for their own sin but here was Paul, as an apostle of Christ, feeling somehow so personally responsible for the failure of these certain Corinthians to repent and to manifest the fruit of their repentance that he saw himself as being potentially personally humiliated by God before these Corinthians even though he knew that their failure to repent and to bear the fruit of that repentance in light of the providence of God in such matters as this was not inherently his fault just like Judas’s failure to repent in light of the providence of God in matters like this was not Christ’s fault.

But this did not lesson for him the prospect of any future pain caused by their failure to repent. What did he go on to say in **verse 21**? **“And I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”** So did Paul believe that his future potential pain might be lessened by the thought that their failure to repent and to bear the fruit of that repentance would never have come about apart from God’s permission to allow it as a part of His providence. No! This thought did not in any way lessen for him the potential of any future pain. And how did Paul describe that future

potential pain? He described it as mourning. Isn't this exactly what the verse tells us? Absolutely!

The word "mourn" (PENTHEO) refers to lamenting stemming from a deep-seated sorrow or grief.

And why would he mourn for them in this deep lamenting way? He feared for them, if they did not repent and truly embrace him as an legitimate apostle of Christ and his message as the true gospel and they as a consequence of this lack of repentance would continue to practice the same type of sins that they had practiced in the past, he would unfortunately and tragically have to personally witness their spiritual demise or in other words their ongoing march to eternal destruction. This is why he feared that he would be mourning for them in this deep lamenting way if they failed to repent.

And this is basically what I believe Paul was thinking when he said to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians at the end **verse 21**, "**And I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced**"

May God give us the grace to understand the importance of repentance, both for others and ourselves in the areas where God has spoken clearly in His word.