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Paul's Planned Third Visit
12: 14-21

Paul's planned third visit DIG: How did Paul distinguish himself from the false apostles? Who were they? How must he be feeling as he thinks about the Corinthians? What do Paul's rhetorical questions reveal about his intentions versus their perception of him?

REFLECT: To whom is God leading you to minister? How can you show the spirit of verses 14 and 15? What will it cost you? How will you prepare? How will you keep from being a burden on those to whom God is sending you? What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

The Corinthians' love may have diminished for Paul, but his would not diminish for them.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your love** for me never diminishes! Praise **You** that **You** are the perfect parent always lovingly guiding and when needed, disciplining but always in **love**. It is a comfort to know that **Your love** for me is powerful and unending. It is also wise and can always be trusted. **You** know the future and what is best for me, so I can always rest in following **Your Word**. It is a joy to **love You** back! How wonderful that even in trials, when I trust and follow **You**, **Your love** and wisdom turns the trials into eternal **rewards (1 Cor 3:11-15)**. What peace I find in **loving You** and following **Your** ways. **You** are so Awesome! In your holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*

On **his** first visit, in 50 AD, **Paul** founded the church at **Corinth**. **His** second visit, in the spring of 54, was the impromptu painful visit (**to see link click Ao – Paul's Painful Visit**). So now, writing in the autumn/winter of 54/55, **Paul** mentions a third trip to that conflicted church. **Look, I am ready this third time to come and visit you (12:14a).** One of **Paul's** main purposes for this letter was to prepare **the Corinthians** for an impending visit to **their city**, a visit to which **he** had alluded a number of times **(2:1** and **3, 9:4, 10:6)**, and **he** mentions **the visit** several times at the end of **his** letter. **He** spoke of the upcoming visit to offer a

measure of accountability to the church; **the apostle** wanted to make sure **they** were ready for **his** arrival. **He** wanted **them** to have **joy** at **his** coming **(2:3)**, but **he** also wanted **them** to have the offering for Jerusalem ready **(9:4)**. Moreover, it is clear that **he** planned to deal directly with **the false apostles** (see **Af – The Problem of the False Apostles**), as well as **with those** who were rebelling against **God** and **His** appointed **apostle (12:20-21; 13:1-2** and **10)**.[285]

First, **Paul** reiterated **his** financial policy: **And I will not be a burden to you; for it is not what you own that I want, but you (12:14a)!** Then **he** offered to **the Corinthians** another explanation for **his** policy of refusing **their** support, as well as a declaration that all that **he** and **his** coworkers' ministry had been done honestly. Earlier, **Paul** had explained that **his** refusal to accept **their** support didn't mean that **he** didn't **love them** and would continue **his** set policy to undermine the pompous **false apostles** (see **Bz – Servants of Satan**). **After all, children are not supposed to save up for their parents, but parents for their children (12:14b).**

The image of **a parent** recalls **his** earlier plea: **In like exchange, (I speak to you as children) open wide your hearts too . . . make room for us in your hearts (6:13). He** had described **his** relationship to **them** as **the father** who cared for **them** and who begot **them (First Corinthians 4:14-15)**. **He** brought **them the Gospel (10:14)**; arranged for **their marriage to Messiah (11:2)**; **exalted them** at **his** own expense **(11:7); loved them** faithfully, as **ADONAI** could attest **(11:11)**; sacrificed **himself** for **them (12:15)**; devoted **himself** to **their edification (12:19, 13:10)**; and like any good parent, pointed out **their** faults and reprimanded **them (12:20)**.

Here, **Paul** continued the theme of being a **loving** parent. **And as for me, I will most gladly spend everything I have and be spent myself too for your sake.** This is the best litmus test for the sign of **a** true **apostle**. **The** true **shepherd** would be willing to spend and be spent on behalf of **his sheep. He** would serve at great cost to **himself** and for the benefit of others. This is what **Paul** did. The least **they** could do would be to **love** and honor **him** in return. Sadly, **the Corinthians** relationship was upside down: **If I love you more, am I to be loved less (12:15)?** The more affection **Paul** gave, the less **they** returned it.

Be that as it may – despite **their** unreturned **love** for **him** – **Paul** would still not be **a burden to them. Their love** may have diminished, but **his** would not. Despite **their** hesitancy, coldness, and hostility, **he** would continue to **love them**

sacrificially. **The Corinthians** must agree that **he** had never asked for nor taken any financial support from **them** for **himself**. But someone apparently had twisted **his** actions and made up a conspiracy theory that **Paul** had hatched some deep dark plan to deceive them by profiting from the collection for Jerusalem. Possibly, someone claimed that the collection was a ruse by which **Paul** would have **his** associates gather up the money and he would secretly skim some off the top without knowing. So, sarcastically, **he** mocked **them**, saying: **Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I took you with trickery (12:16)!**[286]

Rather than respond directly to the accusation, **Paul** asked four rhetorical questions. The first two expect a negative answer and the last two a positive response. **Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? I urged Titus to go and sent** another **brother with him (8:10); Titus didn't take advantage of you, did he?** The idea that those highly respected men would join **Paul** in a plot to defraud **the Corinthians** was completely absurd. But if they were not involved in any such plot, how could **Paul** have been? **Didn't we live by the same Spirit and show you the same path (12:17-18b)? They** had all acted with the same integrity and honesty toward **the Corinthians**, and **they** knew it.[287]

Paul's words, **"Perhaps you think that all this time we have been defending ourselves before you,"** may be surprising. Most readers would think that it is obvious that **he** had been **defending himself**. But **the apostle** was not being insincere with that statement. He wanted to make it crystal clear to **the Corinthians** that he was not a prisoner at the bar having to submit to an embarrassing cross examination. **He** had committed no offense and need not exonerate himself. It was **God**, not **they**, **he** must please.[288] **No, we have been speaking in the sight of God, as those united with the Messiah should; and, my dear friends, it is all for your strengthening (12:19).** Everything **he** did in relation to **the Corinthians** was to **build them up**. **They** were **his friends**. **He loved them**, even when **they** exasperated **him**.

The apostles' fears concerning **the Corinthians' sins** were well founded, given **their** history (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ce – The Pagan Background of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts**). **He** had dealt extensively with **sin** in **their** congregation in the severe letter, and even made a visit to **Corinth** to confront **their sin** and rebellion in person (see **Ao – Paul's Painful Visit**). With good reason, then, **Paul** was **afraid of coming and finding them not the way I want you to be . . .** still in **unrepentant sin**. **He** knew that there was potential for

that, even though most of **the congregation** had repented **(7:6-11)**. **And also, of not being found the way you want me to be. I am afraid of finding quarreling and jealousy, anger and rivalry, slander and gossip, arrogance and disorder (12:20). Paul's** great fear for **the Corinthians** was that, influenced by **the false apostles, they** would fall back into **the sins** which **they** had previously practiced.[289]



Paul feared that **God** would permit a repetition of **the humiliation he** had experienced on **his** second painful visit and that **he** would **be grieved over many of those who sinned in the past and have not repented of the impurity, fornication and debauchery that they have engaged in (12:21).** In **his** heart, **Paul** knew the truth – that the problems plaguing the church at **Corinth** were caused not so much by the truly converted believers there, but by those who were **wolves in sheep's clothing** (see the commentary on **Jude Ah – Godless People Have Secretly Slipped In Among You**). **Yeshua's** ominous words would apply to those **enemies of God (James 4:4)**: **Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:21-23)!** There were those in **the congregation** that would hear those words. **Paul** felt compelled to warn **them** of **their** dire destiny.[290]