



This week at Magdalen Road church we continued our series in second Corinthians. In these verses Paul defends himself from three grenades being thrown at him by the so-called 'super apostles' last week. Primarily this is a passage about purity, purity of gospel ministers and at the end of the passage purity within couple churches.

The first accusation is that Paul is...

**- ... Deceitful (1v12-14)**

In the Corinthian context where strength and image matter greatly, perhaps boasting would be a very common thing? If Paul *has* to engage in their kind of tactic he will boast, but only on things that really matter like (v12) ministering with integrity and godly sincerity (contra his opponents.

And where they were perhaps slippery and not straightforward in their speaking and strategy, Paul relies not on worldly wisdom but on Gods grace, and in v13 clarity with his words. With Paul what you see is what you get - he is not deceitful.

**- ...Disloyal (v15-22)**

Paul second defence seems to come from the fact that he had said he was going to visit them, but ended up not doing so. In v15 to 17 we read he planned to go and see them, but then from v23 we read that he did not do so. Simply speaking his plans have changed! It may be that the super apostles claim some kind of unquestionable divine revelation, whilst Paul is happy to say that 'he made up his mind' to do something else. We need to have this kind of attitude as we live as Christians. To be organised and make plans, but then also to have a level of flexibility, open to things developing organically.

Paul's main concern however is that the Corinthians know they can trust Paul, but also and especially that they can trust Jesus. That's at the heart of his argument in v18 to 21. Jesus is totally reliable he is God's answer to everything God's ever said. Paul doesn't need shady Corinthian methods to pull the wool over their eyes and persuade them - no it is God who persuades people (v21 to 22). He is faithful and trustworthy.

**- ...Distant (v23-2v11)**

They also claim that Paul doesn't really care! Presumably because his plans changed and he didn't visit they are now claiming that Paul doesn't actually care about them. It becomes clear in 2v4 though that it was actually *because* of his love for them that he wrote a difficult letter and made a difficult visit.

We don't know exactly the situation that Paul is writing about; many think it's a case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5. In one sense it doesn't matter because what *does* matter is that Paul thinks this is v9 a litmus test of their obedience to him and love for the Lord. This is not optional.

We drew out **4 brief lessons** about church discipline:

1. v5 Sin damages the whole body

Because the church is a body so the actions of one member affects & shames the whole.

2. v6 Discipline is to be taken by all

The idea of punishment he was probably public rebuke and the fact he uses the word 'majority' perhaps shows that there wasn't unanimity among them. It's more than possible it was voted upon. However it does show that the leadership could suggest it but the entire membership needed to decide upon and enact it.

3. v7-8 Discipline is always remedial

The nature of church discipline is that it should lead to repentance and restoration. Thus Paul encourages them to forgive him and reaffirm their love for him

4. v11 Discipline can be exploited by the devil.

Paul finishes with a word of caution because Satan loves to divide people and so undo the unifying work of Jesus on the cross. What better way than where tensions are raised and emotions are high?

*Here are a few questions to start your group off on this passage:*

- do you think the purity of the church matters? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Paul is so keen to defend himself?
- Why does he outline in v12 how he conducts himself among them? In this section how do you see Paul being very different from Corinth?
- Why did Paul change his plans to visit them in Corinth? Why does it matter whether he is trustworthy or not?
- How is this a good model for daily Christian living?
- How can we be confident that God is faithful?
- Have you ever experienced discipline in a church? How was it handled? What can we learn from this passage about church discipline? Which of the four aspects outlined do you think we most need to remember?

**As Kitty mentioned we are adapting questions each week from "Caring for One Another" by Ed Welch (available soon) to help us grow in applying together the message of 2 Corinthians:**

- 1. Have you ever asked another person to specifically pray for you? How did it go?**
- 2. How do you hope to grow in being needy (being weak)?**
- 3. Ask someone to specifically pray for you in your weakness this week.**