

## **“But If Any Hath Caused Sorrow ...”**

“... he hath caused sorrow, not to me, but in part (that I press not too heavily) to you all. Sufficient to such a one is the punishment which was inflicted by the many so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:5-7).

The words here refer to a circumstance in the Corinthian church in which 1) someone had caused sorrow to brethren there, and 2) punishment had been inflicted by the many and apparently the offending brother had repented of the deed he had done that necessitated the “punishment inflicted by the many.” Further in the epistle reference is made, apparently, to the same incident (2 Cor. 7:11-12). What was the circumstance that occasioned these words?

The most natural answer to this is the case of a man who had taken his father’s wife, found in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. Paul was astonished at such a condition and grieved because the Corinthians had let it fester, doing nothing about it. His recommendation to brethren was that they “put away the wicked man from among yourselves” (v. 13); “deliver such a one unto Satan” (v. 5); and, that they “purge out the old lump” (1 Cor. 5:7). Through the centuries expositors of the scriptures have referenced the writing here and in chapter 7 to the matter Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 5. But, there have been other writers who think rather that the circumstances occurred during a supposed visit Paul made in the time between the writing of his first and this second letter.

We see no need to look outside of 1 Corinthians 5 for an event the apostle is referencing here. Some would deny that incident as the same here by saying there is a great contrast in writing: 1 Corinthians 5 is (to them) severe and harsh; this one gentle, conciliatory. But is that unnatural, illogical? Do we not see this in both ourselves and others? When we must discipline a child because of a grievous ill on his part, when the child is contrite and repentance, does not his parents comfort and show love to him? If those parent does not, they should!

It is our persuasion that the circumstances in 1 Cor. 5 and 2 Cor. 2:6-7 are identical. The severity (as some see it) of Paul’s words there was said to be “for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). The action commanded by the apostle and followed through by the brethren brought about the very results intended. Is it logical to reject what seems to be the logical thing the apostle refers to in lieu of something we must conjure up in our own mind? Lenski’s comments of this section is very appropriate. He wrote: “If II Cor. 2:5-11 does not speak about the case mentioned in I Cor. 5 we must invent a duplicate of that case (save only that it need not be a case of incest) which would otherwise have the same characteristics ... First Corinthians 5 is so completely the key to II Cor. 2:5-11 that, when this key is disregarded, the door remains locked” (892).

The brother of whom Paul wrote had caused him sorrow although he wrote, “He that hath caused sorrow, not to me, but in part ... to you all.” We must not view Paul’s words

to mean he was not personally affected by the deeds of the brother for in 1 Corinthians as different subjects unfold and he deals with each; it is evident of the great sorrow all those things brought him. We have in Paul's words an example of expressions of early writers in which one part of a statement was denied (although true) in order to emphasize a second part of the sentence. For illustrations of this see John 6:27 and 1 Cor. 1:17. The shameless action of the man who took his father's wife was of great grief to Paul. He was, after all, the spiritual father of that church and concerned about their spiritual well-being and growth (1 Cor. 4:15f). Paul was grieved because of their quarrels, lawsuits, abuse of the Lord's Supper, and denial of a resurrection, as well as other issues he dealt with in that first letter. Still, he was not the only aggrieved one. Surely the whole church had not condoned such outrageous behavior: there must have been others who also were grieved with the flagrant immorality among them. And, certainly the church was affected adversely. Such a situation wasn't even named among Gentiles. And, all sin surely grieves the Holy Spirit, thus God "in whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). So, many, not just Paul were caused sorrow by this brother's behavior. Such is the character of sin.

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