

2 Corinthians 12

Written by K B Napier

Monday, 20 February 2017 13:01

“...a thorn in the flesh...”

Paul mixes several themes in this chapter, but one cannot help but notice that signs and wonders came second to how the Corinthians lived their lives. This completely reverses the order of importance given to these things by charismatics. *(2017 note: Though it is now mainstream, the charismatic movement wreaked havoc in the churches in the mid-1990s, wrecking faith and churches wholesale. Its 'Toronto Blessing' was satanic, spreading evil like wildfire. At the time I warned against accepting ANY of its teachings, but few Christians can resist constant pressure and so they have given-in to gross error. Do not, then, be fooled by its current 'acceptable' status).*

Here, Paul talks of actual everyday activities that reflect the character, rather than signs and wonders. Many assume that as a Christian I am bereft of understanding the topic of signs and wonders, simply because I do not talk about them. I do not talk much about them because they form only a small part of total Christian experience. Paul's own writings, too, suggest this is so.

Perhaps it is worth repeating here that I believe in God's gifts and fruit. I believe they exist today and always have done, to varying degrees. I have experienced several gifts in the past and continue to do so today, expecting this to remain until the end.

What I do NOT believe in, however, are the weird and often dangerous signs and wonders claimed by charismatics. This is because their claims and descriptions do not accord with scripture. I believe in what is genuine, but *not* in what is manufactured and practiced by occultists and cultists.

I find it interesting that the signs and wonders aspect of gifts was made known in my life in the earlier stages. Today, the gifts are concentrated on knowledge, understanding, etc. – those things necessary for my office and for the mental/spiritual/heart edification of others. This does not mean the more outward gifts will not appear again in my life. It just means that I 'go with the flow' and experience whatever is given by God at the time. None of these experiences, though, correspond with the falsity of charismaticism.

Like Paul I am more interested in how people live and what they believe, rather than in any 'outward' gifts they claim to have. Also, like Paul, I want to see their claim in action... *anyone*

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can make a claim! Even so, I have no desire to see or to witness the false claims of charismatics. Constantly, they retort that I cannot disparage them if I have not tried them. They say that I cannot denigrate their meetings if I do not attend them. This is nothing but nonsense!

If I know from scripture something is wrong, I will not wish to be convinced by the claims of men, when what they say and do is patently false. I just reject it out of hand. I do not need to experience false gifts and do not wish to be influenced by them, so I also reject *them* out of hand. I do not care how spectacular the claims are... if they are unscriptural they are evil and not to be touched!

I am even more critical of claims by Charismatics about raising people from the dead, etc. No such claims have ever been proved to be true and, scripture says that once we die we will not return. I have the same attitude toward claims of people seeing Christ in person, because scripture says that no man shall see Him until His Second Coming. Why should I want to believe in these claims when scripture plainly opposes them? And if it opposes them, does this not make the claimants false, liars who are deceived and will deceive? This is why I am implacable when it comes to charismaticism.

I have met many charismatics who, as ordinary people, are very pleasant. But, they teach and practice what scripture does not teach. Therefore, I must reject what they claim and believe. There is nothing 'personal' in this; it is what I have to do if I am to remain faithful to the Lord and His word.

It is simplistic to suggest we cannot possibly ascertain what is good and bad if scripture does not specifically mention this or that. So, if scripture does not specifically say "*crawling on all fours and barking like a dog is sin*", charismatics say it is acceptable! Another way of putting it, is this – if scripture does not say something, then we may fill that space with whatever we think is spiritual and good! Both are instances of 'extra-Biblical' thinking. Even sound Christians can be very poor at biblical logic!

Men and women called by God are not free to think and act outside of Biblical writ. Scripture is given in a remarkable way. It gives us many specific details, but for all the rest we have principles and precepts, from which we may legitimately deduce what is sin and what is holy. Added to this we have offices given by God that help to draw out these principles and precepts as the bases for everyday living. As a man called to preach and teach, I see this as part of my role and office. This is what Paul always refers back to – he has been taught by Christ, but is

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also called to office as an apostle, and is guided in his thoughts and actions by the Holy Spirit.

Charismatics, on the other hand, pluck experiences out of the air and call it 'of God'. They ignore the very first rule of Christian discipline, by rejecting discernment and a proper critical analysis of what they see and hear. And even when they dare to analyse what is going on, they twist what they see and hear so that it 'fits' a particular scripture or human theme. To 'test the spirits' means to acknowledge what is true in what we see and hear. We do not put up barriers of texts as an excuse to accept the experiences. The man or woman who is of God will know straight away if something is evil or good, without the dubious 'interpretations' provided by self-appointed charismatic 'apostles' and preachers. Sadly, charismatics hand over their senses to their leaders and so do not think personally. They adopt whatever theory is thrust at them by men of ill repute in God's eyes.

For myself, I will continue to oppose this deception, even if it brings trouble to my door. Paul was no stranger to this, as the text proves; he says he will still teach the Corinthians, though he knows they might hate him for it. As I have said before, I am in very good company! (I wonder if this is why many charismatics who contact me scorn Paul and his writings?).

When reading this chapter remember that Paul makes very little of the signs and wonders. His main concern is with the *behaviour* of the Corinthians. He does not want them to ruin his work amongst them, or their own reputation as Believers. Those who make spurious claims and who teach and act-out extra-Biblical lies – as do charismatics of the false 'Toronto-style' – are to be rejected without so much as an explanation.

Verse 1

1.

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord."

Paul never wishes to glory in anything he says and does, but the people he is writing to need to be reminded of his credentials and experiences. Why? So that they listen to him and not to false teachers.

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He has said before: 'does anyone have this or that gift? Well, I have it in more abundance!' Here he is referring to visions and revelations. Matthew Poole is on sure ground when he interprets this text, identifying 'visions' as things seen by the eye, but not necessarily coupled with a revelation of their meanings; and 'revelations' as instructions to the mind and spirit accompanied by an audible voice or a dream.

When a man of God receives a vision, it is often accompanied by an 'explanation' or revelation. Others may see a vision but have no idea what it means – Pharaoh had to call Joseph to interpret, for example.

Paul had both gifts, so he is not 'behind' the other apostles in this matter. Christians who have not had such gifts ought not to fret, because God gives gifts as He sees fit. For myself, I have experienced both, but rarely. Nowadays knowledge and its teaching take precedence. I say this not to boast, but to tell critics that I am not talking of things I have no experience of, nor am I condemning what is merely second-hand to me.

I am often asked how a person may obtain these gifts. I have responded that when a person lives and breathes God's will, God will reveal all to him or her, and will give gifts without the need to beg for them (as charismatics do). He may give us the desire to pray for certain gifts – and this desire will be strong and without ceasing. This is from God, Who places in us the desire to pray for the gifts in question. But, when we pray for what is *not* to be given to us and which God does not put upon our hearts, we will not receive it. Often, though, He will give gifts without prompting and they will surprise the recipient.

So, learn scripture, pray when you ought to pray, meditate on His word, live out what you learn and remain faithful, for this is the ground in which God sows gifts and grows fruit. They arise 'naturally' from fertile soil! Logically, if we are not faithful and have no idea what God's will is, we cannot recognise a gift even if it is pushed upon us! Indeed, it is my belief, from observing Christians in their daily lives, that many 'pray' for things and then do not recognise those things when they come – or they attribute them to an human or 'natural' source.

Verses 2-5

1.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

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2.

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body; I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

3.

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.

4.

Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.”

This text is very interesting in its use of language. In the first verse Paul is talking about his refusal to glory in what God had done, and was doing, in his life, even though it was necessary to silence wicked men. Now, he suddenly appears to be giving an illustration about a man he does not name or adequately describe. It is the supposition of some commentators that Paul was actually referring to himself, though it would not really matter or alter the meaning if it was someone else.

It is sometimes the case in literature and in those times, that a man will speak of himself in the third person. In this text it would be because Paul is too shy to speak of himself. In formal theses I may sometimes refer to the third person, ‘the author’, of the piece being written, rather than refer to myself in the first person. Whether the term ‘in Christ’ or ‘by Christ’ is correct, is unknown.

Whether Paul or someone else, the man was taken up to heaven. Paul cannot say if his actual body went there, or if it might have been a vision. John knew he had been taken to heaven, but Paul is unsure... which is comforting! (Paul did not know everything and neither do we!). The ‘third heaven’ usually means the place where God is.

Then Paul refers to a man (himself again?) who was caught up into paradise, to hear things that could not be uttered to anyone else. Again, John was ordered not to repeat certain things back

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on earth. Does 'paradise' mean 'third heaven' or Heaven? We are not told and we cannot tell. In other texts (see article on Christ and the thief on the cross) 'paradise' appears to be separate from heaven, a kind of intermediate place where people wait until the Second Coming. This is of no consequence to Christian daily living or to future desires/outcomes.

The allusion to going to Heaven or paradise is not itself about visions or gifts, etc., but is given as a form of credential. Readers ought not make too much of the mention, because Paul does not give sufficient detail. Paul then says (verse 5) that whilst such a man may glory in what God had done with him, he would not himself glory in his own actions. Rather, he would glory that God gave him infirmities. At all times, Paul deflected glory from himself.

Infirmities can bring pain, exhaustion, and even misery. Our ills and ailments are not the most important factors; the most important thing is not the ailment, but how we respond to it. Paul has already admitted to the Corinthians that on his journeys he and his companions suffered many tribulations and even quaking fear. These are understandable as immediate reactions, but if these reactions continue into all of one's life as standard responses, then we are in trouble. This is because if they become standard, they reflect our inadequacies to others and exhibit a lack of trust in God.

We can do nothing about persistent pain that refuses to go away even with medication, unless, of course, God removes it. We can do nothing about the fear that often comes with serious conditions, because it is a reaction. But, we can do a great deal about our standard responses to situations. God expects that our standard response to all situations is a godly one: humility, reliance on the Holy Spirit, peace, and so on. These mean that our spirits, and even our minds and hearts, can transcend our earthly conditions. When we live like that we are not being superficial or unduly pious for the sake of watching eyes, we are simply walking with God and trusting Him for our every benefit. This is how we can glory in our infirmities.

Bear in mind, too, that when a true Believer suffers, he does not do so without God's knowledge. In fact, the situation may well be sent from God for His purposes – to rid the life of dross and to bring forth the pure gold of a genuine faith. The suffering is a test of our character and resolve to live by His word. Fail it and we will just fall by the wayside, becoming bitter and disillusioned and miserable. I can tell you now, that a person who is constantly depressed is a terrible signal to everyone else. (I am not referring to those cases where a person has a definite physical reason for their depression. I am referring to 'psychological' causes).

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Most people will put up with a miserable person for a short time, but they will not wish to be with him for longer periods. Instead, the depressed person will find that he will be avoided. As I have often quoted, those who have the worst things wrong with them tend to be the brightest and kindest and most joyful. Those who are always or mainly depressed for 'psychological' reasons are actually telling others, by their demeanour, that they do not trust God. The Christian who is always depressed will usually *claim* he trusts God – but his actions and outlook deny this; both are curiously antagonistic. If he truly trusted God, he would be joyful, not looking like someone who has just been dragged over jagged rocks! Is this a terrible thing to say? Not really – think about it.

Verses 6-11

1.

“For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

2.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

3.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

4.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

5.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong”.

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I might wish to tell others of God's workings in and through me, says Paul, but I will refrain; I will not be a fool, *aphron* – be unwise or act rashly. Instead, I will merely tell the truth about God, His word, and what they mean for our lives. I do not want anyone to think more highly of me than God sees me. I do not want you to read into my words anything above what I have already said, even though I have had an abundance of revelations from God (this phrase suggests that it is indeed Paul referred to in the second verse).

Do not place me on a pedestal, says Paul, because of the signs and wonders wrought through and in me by God. Paul certainly does not lift up his own status – his infirmities make sure of that. He sees them as a 'thorn in the flesh'; like a sharp stake, *skolops*, being driven into his body. The majority of meanings of '*sarx*

' or flesh, refer to the physical body, so we may assume from this that Paul had a malady that caused him great physical pain and suffering at times.

Paul says the malady was 'given' to him; *didomi* can also mean to 'grant' something. Thus, Paul is speaking of his malady as being given by God to ensure that he never forgets how human and frail he really is. Though physical, his malady was sent by way of Satan's messenger. That is the 'angel of Satan', a demon. Do YOU suffer something because it has been *given* to you by God, to bring you to a true understanding of yourself and your sinfulness?

We know Paul's malady was extremely painful, by the use of the term 'to buffet', *kolaphizo*, which is an act of violence; to be struck by a fist or to maltreat. When he had this malady, it completely took any idea of superiority from under him! Even in my own life, I am often quite reluctant to be seen, for I have a skin complaint* on the face. It shows either as a 'butterfly' rash, bright red, or as skin coming off the face. Both can be quite distressing, as well as itchy or painful. Much worse, is that other people point it out! Paul's malady, by contrast, seems to be far worse and sent by God as a remedy against pride. (2017 note: Thankfully, this has mostly disappeared now).

In my writing and ministry, I am sometimes accused of being 'proud' or 'arrogant'. Yet, every day I am reminded of my lowly estate by a number of mechanisms; partly by financial insecurity and partly by increasing infirmity and age. I also know that whatever I say Biblically, there are many out there whose academic and other expertise is far greater. There is no way I could be proud, because within my mind and heart I am very aware of my limitations and failures, which are under-girded by my physical and spiritual condition! Any confidence in my writing comes not from myself, but from trust in God's word and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, I am

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daily attacked by Satan's helpers, whose sole task is to make me fall. That is why Paul's admission of his condition is comforting.

At first, Paul prayed to God for Him to remove his affliction. He did this three times. Do we all recognise this? Do we not call on God to remove all kinds of pain, problems and difficulties from our lives? Something hurts or distresses us, so we ask for it to be taken away. But, God is not always going to listen – particularly, as in this case, when it was God Who sent the affliction in the first place. On the third occasion, God spoke to Paul and settled his mind.

God told Paul that His benefits, *charis*, grace, were enough for him. They were 'sufficient', *arke*
o – something to be contented with; making him strong, a kind of barrier against what would attack him from outside. Is this how you see opposition or infirmity or troubles?

God adds that when Paul is at his weakest moments, God's strength will shine through and be manifest. If we paint white on white it will not be noticed – but if we paint white on black, it will be dazzling and obviously white. Thus, it is that when we are at our weakest point, God's activity can be seen by all to be powerful, *dunamis*. It is when men come to the end of their own resources and power that God's power takes over and soars above anything known to Mankind...it is *teleioo* – accomplished completely, perfect, making the one affected whole, so that he will want for nothing at all, *teleios*

In 1978 I had a sudden malady that caused my doctors and myself to think I was going to die fairly quickly, with an intensity of pain and horrific symptoms that I have never experienced since. Yet, during the six weeks I was waiting to die, I was at peace. The pain was indescribable and the symptoms in my body were increasing, yet I was at peace. This was not of my own doing, it was sent by God, because I trusted Him. This is how I can sympathise with Paul and how he sees his 'infirmity'. I also understand how he can 'glory' in them. Do *you*? How do *you* see your various problems and woes? Do you glory in them, because they drive you toward God and draw on His power and might... or do you become miserable and depressed?

When Paul was afflicted the "*power of Christ*" (verse 9) rested on him. It came to 'rest' on him – *episkeno*
, took possession of him; Christ pitched his 'tent' in his soul and worked within him, personally

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helping him through the crisis. If a Christian only sees the problem and constantly strives for human relief, not seeing Christ in the situation making him stronger, then he is lacking in much, including strength, spiritual growth, and faith in God. When we see God in our frailty, infirmities and troubles, we see things in perspective and can handle them, for we are resting in Christ, not in our own efforts and desires.

So, says Paul, “*I take pleasure in infirmities*”. Do not get Paul or myself wrong. Paul is not saying he never felt down or miserable or anxious. Clearly he experienced all these reactions at some time and he admits to it. But, when God told him

why

he had to put up with his infirmities, Paul was made strong. That is why he took ‘pleasure’ in them,

eudokeo

, accepting them as good and for his betterment, causing him to accept them willingly and as a sign of God’s favour. I would prefer God’s favour in the form of pain and suffering than His displeasure in physical health and material goods!

In the past, and even today, some misguided souls think that to achieve blessing they must actively seek out what is painful or bad for their lives. Think of those people in the Philippines who hang themselves on crosses, or the Russians who flog their bare skin until they shred and run with blood! God does not make us do these things and He will not reward us for it. He only wishes us to accept with grace what comes upon us.

Paul therefore says that by knowing God is behind his infirmities, it gives him the strength to carry on regardless of any circumstance - in pain and illness, *astheneia*; in being wronged or injured,

hubris

(reproaches); in necessities,

anagke

, distress, calamity, dire straits; in persecutions,

diogmos

– causing one to run for his life and being harassed, molested, etc.; and when in distresses,

stenochoria

– extreme affliction with no apparent escape.

He is not talking about situations we bring upon ourselves by our own stupidity or carelessness. He is talking about having these troubles because we are witnessing and working for Christ’s sake. It is when he is doing this work, his ministry, and enacting his faith in extreme weakness, that he is at his strongest point, for at those times Christ is his captain and takes over. It is the

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same for us all, if we obey – at our weakest we are at our strongest!

Verses 11-15

1.

“I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

2.

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

3.

For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong.

4.

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.

5.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.”

After saying all that, Paul says that though he does not wish to glorify what his life stands for, he is compelled to do so, and so becomes a ‘fool’. The actions of the Corinthians have made it necessary for Paul to speak of what God does in his life. He must again tell them that he lacks nothing they would expect to see in an apostle. His status as an apostle is equal to that of any of the earliest apostles like Peter and James. He knows because Christ told him so, and *they* ought to know because it was he who brought them to Christ! The trouble with Christians is that once a glorious thing has been witnessed in our lives we quickly forget it. Paul says he is ‘nothing’, yet he must stand his ground as an apostle.

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Paul then reminds them that the signs and wonders of the apostles (including himself) were wrought amongst them. The signs, *semeion*, were miracles that marked the apostles out to be from God. They were divine occurrences that were impossible in nature, so the Corinthians could be sure the apostles were who they claimed to be. They also saw

teras

– wonders, miracles that were only indications of what was to come. These were brought to them in ‘patience’,

hupomone

, by men whose faith and task did not deviate or become put off by trials and lack of enthusiasm by others.

‘Mighty deeds’ were done in their midst; again *dunamis*. That is, acts that were undeniably from God and showed His limitless power and authority. The apostles, too, displayed the marks of *dunamis*

– moral and spiritual strength and true Christian virtues, in their very lives, behaviour, and characters.

What did they lack that others had, he asks? Could it be they lapsed because he was not there in person? Remarkably, Paul then apologises to the Corinthians for this, which, he says, was a ‘wrong’, *adikia* – an injustice. Perhaps Paul really felt that way, but it is open to debate, for how can we blame another person for our own sins, because he was not constantly with us?

I tend to think this is another rhetorical statement to focus their minds, because above all people Paul knew we are all responsible for our own sins. On the other hand, it is possible he was sorry he was not with them when so many heretics were baying at the door of Christians young in the faith (which happens today).

I am coming to visit you for the third time, says Paul, and I will still not ask you for anything. All I want, he says, is yourselves, not what you own or what you have as riches. After all, he says, it is for the parent to look after the child – not for the child to look after his parent. I am your spiritual father, he is saying, so I ought to look after you.

Paul tells them he will *gladly “spend and be spent”* for them. That is, he will spend his own money and resources, *dapnao*, including his

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life and physical strength, to the point of exhaustion (*ekdapanao*

). He then totally disarms the Corinthians by saying that though he is more than willing to do all that for them, he knows some will despise him for it. While he will make them better off by his love for them,

perissoteros

, he will personally become worse off,

hetton

. Very often those we try to help will bite off our hands. Those who receive the most help in life will sometimes dislike or shun those who help them.

In my own ministry I have to speak against those in error, whether they are my brethren or not. Sadly, few can tolerate this and accuse me of being harsh or arrogant. In reality I bear them no malice or negative thought, but only wish for their increase in God's grace. Paul experienced this and openly tells them he expected it to happen. Many pastors and preachers, unfortunately for their own well-being, think all those they are in contact with, love them. They are then shattered to the core when they discover otherwise. Far better if they accepted people as they were, with the ability to carry hate as well as love. At least, then, they will not crumble when opposed. By taking the opposition personally, they become very weak.

Verses 16-18

1.

"But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.

2.

Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?

3.

I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? Walked we not in the same steps?"

But, no matter, says Paul, I know I did not ask you for anything (and so could not be accused of being an apostle to gain money). Instead, I kept myself by my own work and "*caught you with guile*" , by being

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crafty.

If this suggests that Paul used unfair means, he did not! 'Crafty' in this context, is *panourgos*, used in its good sense – something done by skill and wisdom. He thus 'caught' them, *lambano*, without violence or ulterior motive, procuring them for Christ by subtle means (*dolos* – guile). None of this is human activity. The skill and wisdom and subtle means came from God, not from Paul. To say he used human psychological means would be to make him subject to self, an Arminian-style choice of 'methods', which, for Paul, would not be possible, being the archetypal predestinationist of scripture!

Did I defraud (*pleonekteo*; 'make a gain') you of your cash, he asks? Did I pretend to be superior or otherwise try to take advantage of you (verse 17)? Did I use my messengers to make any gain from you? He knows very well he did not do so, but asks anyway, so as to make them think, and to remind them of the honesty of his dealings.

Did Titus or the other brother sent by me take anything from you? Did not he and I act in the same way toward you? ('walked... in the same spirit'). No, he is saying, we both walked in "the same steps", *ichnos*, track or footprint. Our motives and actions were identical; that is, godly and without hidden motives to take anything from you.

Some will remember the man I knew (now dead) who always made me smile. Just before a particular conference was due in some part of the UK he would tell as many folk as possible in the church that he would love to go, but that as he was retired, he would "*trust in the Lord*" for a way to get there and

"have faith"

that God would provide the cash! Lo and behold, many who heard this 'humility' gave him the necessary cash... and he probably had plenty left over to spend on other things, too. This always raised a smile in me, because if folk could be so gullible, they

deserved

for him to 'make gain' from them!

He had a hidden motive and made gain from other Christians. And it worked every single time. No-one bothered to think "Wait a moment, if he is truly acting in faith, why is he going around making his request so very obvious?"

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The trouble was, those who gave to him proved they knew nothing of true faith or of God's working. He was probably just as naïve as they were, and both parties thought he was showing remarkable 'faith', when, in fact, he was 'doing the rounds' and literally *asking* them outright for money! That is not 'faith' – it is successful marketing!

Verses 19-21

1.

"Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? We speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

2.

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

3.

And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed."

We are, said Paul, defending ourselves before you. Note again that Paul is the spokesman for all the apostles. Few Christians realise that in this epistle, he is not acting alone or in his own name, but on behalf of the whole band of apostles, both 'original' and later additions, such as Barnabas and Titus, etc. ('excuse', *apologeomai*, can be an excuse or a defence, depending on the context). We come from God in Christ he says, not for our own benefits, but for yours. They taught and preached for the 'edifying' of people, *oikodome*, to build them up in Christ, in wisdom, piety, and so on.

I am afraid, says Paul, that all our good work has been in vain, and you have succumbed to heretics and liars. He fears he will not find them as he hoped to find them – a vibrant and faithful church. In which case, he says, when he comes, they would not like what they heard.

2 Corinthians 12

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 20 February 2017 13:01

He is concerned that there will be 'debates', *eris*, strife and contention; 'envyings', *zelos*, jealousy and indignation; 'wraths',

thumos

, boiling anger and unholy passions; 'strifes',

eritheia

, trying to obtain church office by pleading one's case (rather like the way many deacons are chosen today), causing divisions; 'backbitings',

katalalia

, defamation and 'evil speaking'; 'whisperings',

psithurismos

, secretly slandering others; 'swellings',

phusiosis

, pride and arrogance, making out to be greater than one really is; and 'tumults',

akatastasia

, confusion and instability.

Much as I loathe to say it, I have found all of the above in many churches, even those considered by some to be 'the best'! In one church in particular, the retiring pastor (with a world-wide fame) admitted to me that he did not tackle church problems adequately for fear of splitting the church...yet he did nothing to alleviate the problems. The result was years of all the sins Paul mentions and more, and the church he once pastored is now quiet, without influence or true Christian witness.

Please, requests Paul, do not make me feel stupid when I come again. I do not want to 'bemoan' (mourn for – *pentheo*) those who have sinned and have not repented. He then mentions the sins they were known to have been captured by in the past: 'uncleanness',

akatharsia

, immorality (in mind or in actuality), lust and inordinately luxurious living; 'fornication',

porneia

, worship of idols, or sex outside marriage; and 'lasciviousness',

aselgeia

, unbridled lust, wanton behaviour and shameless activity with the insolence that accompanies it. I can assure readers that these can all be found in certain known charismatic churches, in particular.

Christians sometimes are mistaken in thinking that they would never personally slip into these extremes of sin. In this they are deluded and are ripe for the same sins! They will probably be

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caught out by the very things they think are 'below' them. We can all sin to the worst degree, and must recognise this if we are to be truthful and strong.

With Paul, thank God if He has sent you a 'thorn in the flesh', because, without it, you might rise above yourself and think you are better than others.

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