

## **2 CORINTHIANS: DEFENDING GOD'S SERVANT TO HIS CRITICS**

### **Part XI: Overcoming Errant Criticism By Transparently Selfless Actions**

**(2 Corinthians 5:12-21)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. 2 Corinthians was written "to defend the authenticity of " Paul's "apostleship and his message" to a church of believers who were susceptible to heeding false teachers who critiqued him, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552.
- B. One way Paul's ministry team overcame the negative discouragement of their oppressors was by actions of transparent selflessness, what gave their message credibility as presented in 2 Corinthians 5:12-21:

#### **II. Overcoming Errant Criticism By Transparently Selfless Actions, 2 Corinthians 5:12-21.**

- A. Paul explained that he was not trying to commend his ministry team to his Corinthian readers with a false self-commendation, a charge leveled by his critics, but that he was giving them facts to answer the false teachers who boasted in outward appearances and not about what was in the heart as did Paul's team, 2 Cor. 5:12.
- B. Indeed, due to their devotion to God's ministry, Paul's team was even willing to be thought insane by showing disregard for their own welfare in their ministry, 2 Cor. 5:13a. His willingness to face riotous mobs intent on killing him (Acts 19:30; 21:35-40) or to walk back into a city in which he had been stoned and dragged out and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20) would usually be considered to be insane actions, but such actions in reality only demonstrated their total devotion to the Lord's ministry, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 567.
- C. Paul's team was also willing to be considered to be in their right minds as loving and stable people if this were required to convince their Corinthian readers of the truthfulness of their message, 2 Corinthians 5:13b.
- D. The reason for such intense devotion to God's ministry was found in the example of Jesus Christ Himself: Paul's team was motivated by the love of Christ that led to His death for all men since all were dead in sin, and the result of this sacrifice of Himself for that those who trust in Him like Christ should be that they no longer live for themselves, but for the Lord Who died and rose again for them, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.
- E. Therefore, because of his conversion to Christ who selflessly died for him and his salvation, Paul no longer "evaluated people on the basis of externals" as did the false teachers who critiqued him, 2 Cor. 5:16a; *Ibid.*
- F. Paul himself admitted he as a former unbeliever had judged even Christ and His followers based on externals: he had once opposed Jesus and His followers (Acts 22:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:9) for viewing Him and His followers from the external viewpoint, but as a believer, Paul no longer viewed Christ that way, 2 Corinthians 5:16b.
- G. Paul was spiritually positioned in Christ, and due to that fact, he was a new creation: the old was passed and the new had come, the old way of externally viewing people was gone and the new man who judged according to the heart was now operational in Paul's viewpoint and ministry, 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- H. This transformation was from God Who through Christ had reconciled Paul and his ministry team to Himself and given them the ministry of reconciliation to other people, 2 Corinthians 5:18. To explain, Paul added that in Christ, God the Father was reconciling the world to Himself by not imputing their trespasses against them in the cross, and He had entrusted to the justified Paul and his team the message of reconciliation, making them ambassadors for Christ to appeal to the world to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:19-20a.
- I. Accordingly, Paul implored his readers on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:20b. Specifically, Paul explained that the salvation of Christ was composed of God making Christ to be sin for sinful man on the cross though He Himself was sinless that sinful, lost men might become the righteousness of God in Him in their salvation by way of Christ's substitutionary atonement on the cross, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

***Lesson:*** Paul realized that judging men by externals like he had done as an unbeliever was a false judgment, and that Christ exhibited utterly selfless, substitutionary atonement on the cross for him and the world. This realization impressed him as a believer and God's servant to reach lost men by using Christ's example to exhibit selfless actions that impress others to believe his message versus external appeals. By explaining this fact to his readers, Paul meant to impress them to discern the truthfulness of his message that they might believe it.

***Application:*** (1) Since Christ exhibited infinite selfless abandon in going to the cross in our behalf that we might be saved, now that we are justified in Him and have been assigned to minister in His behalf, we are obliged to avoid trying to impress people externally to trust in Christ and rather transparently exhibit utterly selfless actions that men may believe the message God wants us to give. (2) If another believer exhibits transparently selfless actions in ministry, he truly believes what he preaches, so we must evaluate his message in view of God's Word. (3) May we not judge others by externals, but by the heart that is revealed through transparently selfless actions.