

October 3

Scriptures: Read 2 Corinthians 3

Key Verse: "...who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."
(2 Corinthians 3:6)

Overview

As I pointed out in the introduction to this letter, there is more than a little of self-justification on Paul's part throughout. Perhaps the amount of time spent in this regard is directly proportionate to the vehemence of the reaction Paul received from his first letter to the Corinthians. They were exceedingly angry at his reference to their immorality, and it would appear that there were several vibrant anti-Paul sentiments and actions within the congregation. Reactionary movements always create their own momentum. In this case, Paul was not just being spoken against, he was being vilified.

With this in mind, notice the clever construction of verses one through six. It's a paragraph built around the word "letter" (or "epistle"). In verse one, Paul refers to "letters of recommendation" with thinly veiled sarcasm. Then, in verse two, he switches to a tender imagery, "you yourselves are our letter"—that is, any recommendation he may require is already evident in the fruit of his ministry. Verse three alters the imagery, with Paul referring to the Corinthian congregation as "a letter from Christ". Then, in verse six, he concludes the paragraph with a completely different application. This time, "letter" is equivalent to "law" and is contrasted to spiritual freedom.

I call it clever, because Paul uses a personal injury as an occasion, not for scolding, but for teaching. He rises above the misunderstanding about his letter and focuses instead on a timeless truth: legalism kills, but the Spirit of God gives life and freedom. It's an excellent example of how a skilled teacher can build something timeless on a temporary aggravation.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when You were reviled, You did not revile in return. Your servant Paul was like You in his reaction. Thank you for Your life and Paul's example. Help us, when anyone acts against us, to react as You would. With confidence in Your life within us, we pray this. Amen.