

“Open Your Hearts To Us ...”

“... we wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man. I say it not to condemn you, for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die together and live together. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying on your behalf: I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our afflictions” (2 Cor. 7:2-4).

Paul's appeal “open your hearts to us” is an echo of his earlier words, “Our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged ... be ye also enlarged” (2 Cor. 6:1, 13b). Although the church was generally appreciative of Paul, not all felt the same affection and respect for him as the church as a whole did. Paul was aware of the feelings of this minority and could not help but be grieved for it for he knew that he had not consciously done aught to make them feel as they did.

Thus he said, “... we wronged no man, we corrupted no man. We took advantage of no man” (2 Cor. 7:2). The truth is that had Paul corrupted any man or taken advantage of any, he would have wronged them by so doing. But one can wrong another without corrupting him or taking advantage of him.

When we corrupt someone, we make them morally worse than before our interaction with them. In condemning the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees Jesus said, “Woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves” (Mt. 23:15). During the lifetime of Jesus on earth the Jews were busy making proselytes to the Jews' religion. But when they made that proselyte, they made him twice as bad as the one who proselyted him — his teacher had wronged him by corrupting him. It is a sad commentary on anyone that whosoever he comes in contact with is made worse in morals or attitude or temperament than he was before he knew that person. Paul disclaimed any such influence upon the Corinthians. To the contrary, they were better for him having come to their city. In his first epistle he said, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be no deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, no adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, no covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In short, they had been called to be saints through the gospel Paul preached to them (1 Cor. 1:1f).

Paul had wronged none of these Corinthians by taking advantage of them. Paul was careful in his actions to act that none could charge him with profiting from the brethren. He had the right to be supported for preaching the gospel (compare to 1 Corinthians 9 for extensive arguments the author made to prove this point), but Paul did not use that right in Corinth. Later in this letter Paul asked the question, “For what is this wherein ye were made inferior to the rest of the churches except it be that I myself was not a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong” (2 Cor. 12:13). It should go without saying Paul's words “Forgive me this wrong” was not an apology: it was sarcasm. When he spoke of

the contribution being gathered for Jerusalem's needy saints, he insisted each church choose their own messenger to carry their gift to Jerusalem. He was determined to take thought for things honorable in the sight of God and also of men (2 Cor. 8:20-21).

Yet Paul was careful that his brethren not misunderstand him. "I say it not to condemn you" and he insisted, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you. Great is my glorying on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I overflow with joy in our affliction." Paul had to walk a "fine line" dealing with these brethren. The majority loved and respected him and he did not wish his words should be an undeserved criticism of them; but there was an element for whom rebuke was both needed and necessary. That rebuke will come, but not until the latter chapters of the letter.

Jim McDonald