

The Confident Christian (part one)

II Corinthians 1:1-15

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In today's world I believe there are many believers who should be more knowledgeable about the role of confidence in their Christian life. In the course of these next two studies I hope to present some thoughts about this subject in a manner that would be helpful to you personally as a fellow believer.

It is my opinion that much of Christianity has lost sight of the development of the believer on the personal level. Many churches focus so much on the development of the collective group that they may fail to see that true Christianity is a personal thing. The life of the believer is based upon a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the singular sense. The growth of the church collective should result as a fruit of this singular relationship. The true sincere believer will seek the Lord while he may be found, to know Him personally above everything else! It wouldn't matter if this believer were the only one in the entire world that sought to know the Lord; he would want to know Him above and before anything!

In this passage in II Corinthians there are some things said by the Apostle Paul that I believe are the key to a confident Christian life. I hope to be able to show you, my fellow believers, how these things are the key to a walk with Christ, and how the progressive development of these things will enable us as weak unsure believers to become the confident people of God we should be.

I. The background of this letter

It is important when considering the scripture to gain some knowledge concerning the background of the book or letter. In this way we may be able to gather some insight into the circumstances surrounding the writing. Perhaps we will understand what the people to whom it directly concerns would have gotten out of what was written. Knowing this, we should be able to determine how what has been written concerns us, either directly or by way of example.

A. When was it written

It is difficult to consider this question without also taking into account the previous letter of I Corinthians written by Paul to these same believers. These two letters are intertwined in such a way that the second one cannot be considered without acknowledgement of the first letter. We must use one to provide a commentary upon the other.

We know that this was the third letter, written by Paul, included in the scripture. It was written in response to previous encounters he had with these people. Acts records two visits Paul had with these people: they are in chapters 18 and 20. The relationship Paul

had with these believers may be understood by consideration of the two letters that he wrote to them.

A common theory held by scholars is that Paul wrote four letters to these people, and that he may have visited them more than the two accounts recorded in Acts. Two of the letters he wrote to them are included in scripture; the other two are alluded to within these two letters. The first mention of what is referred to as the lost letter is in I Cor. 5:9-11. There is mention of what is known as the painful letter in II Corinthians 2:4-13.

In Paul's first visit to Corinth (Acts chapter 18) he brought them the message of the gospel and he saw a great work of the Lord among them. As is often the case when the truth is taught, Paul also endured persecution there also. After eighteen months with these people he left for Ephesus. It could be from here that he wrote what is termed the lost letter, referred to in I Corinthians 5:9-11. In this letter he spoke to them of the importance of a believer in keeping himself morally pure from the rampant immoral practices that were prevalent in their city (I Corinthians 5:9-13). I believe this letter was written prior to I Corinthians which was also written to them at a later time from Ephesus.

It is understood from Acts chapter 18 that after Gal-li-o was sent to Corinth by Rome as a deputy or ruler (Acts 18:12) that real persecution from the leaders of the Jews in that city began. Paul had a great concern for the spiritual welfare of these believers and knew that they were under pressure from both the Jews and from the heathen in their city. I Cor. was written to these believers in response to some questions they had and in the hope of quelling the disputes that had arisen among them.

Paul's third letter to these believers mentioned in scripture (II Corinthians 2:4-13, the painful letter) may have been written prior to his last visit there in Acts 20:1-2. Corinth is located in the Roman province of Achaia also known as Greece. In II Corinthians Paul speaks of an upcoming visit to them (II Corinthians 13:1) It could be this visit occurred during Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 20), meaning that this letter, (the painful letter), was written prior to this in preparation for Paul's visit, placing the writing of it during the period covered in Acts chapter 19.

II Corinthians was written to these believers after "the painful" letter, in preparation for Paul's visit in Acts chapter 20. This would make I Corinthians the second letter Paul wrote to them, after "the lost letter". It would make II Corinthians the fourth letter he wrote to them, after 'the painful' letter.

B. Why was it written

In reading the letters written to the Corinthians it is clear Paul had a great deal of interest in them, not only as a group, but also personally. What is known as Paul's painful letter to them is alluded to in II Corinthians 2:4-13. This letter was brought to them by Titus while Paul was in Macedonia. It apparently caused Paul great discomfort as he was not sure how it would be received. Paul failed to meet Titus at Troas with news of how this letter was received by the believers in Corinth. (II Corinthians 2:12&13).

When Titus finally caught up with Paul in Macedonia (II Corinthians 7:5-8), he had news of how the message from Paul had been received. This was great news to Paul; he speaks of this in II Corinthians 7:6-7. In this passage Paul speaks of his personal joy at the news brought to him by Titus.

“Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforteth us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.”

In II Corinthians 1:24 it may be the news of the result of the sending to them of what is known as the painful letter that Paul has in mind when he spoke of the active faith by which these believers stood.

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”

In other words, Paul understood that their God-given faith was active within the hearts of these believers so that they received his instruction for what it was, a help for their faith. He was not going to tell them what to do in order to dominate them, but rather to instruct them so that their faith from God would correct them!

The letter of II Corinthians (II Corinthians 13:1), was written to prepare these believers for a visit from Paul, and as a measure of joy regarding their proper reception of what is termed the painful letter from him.

C. What were the circumstances surrounding this letter

It is not recorded for us what Paul actually told these believers during his visit with them. All that we have is the recorded correspondence that he had with them. We do know that his intent was to help them stand in their faith (II Corinthians 1:24). We also know that his intended result of not only this letter (the painful letter), but also his forthcoming visit with them was for their edification and growth in the things of the Lord. II Corinthians 13:8-11.

“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

From these verses we learn of the care and concern Paul had for these people not only as a group (although he addresses them as such), but also personally (for what he says is very personal).

This may be seen clearly by reading verse 24 of chapter 1 after these verses.

Paul's intent is to help them to develop a more personal faith based upon the faith that God had already given them. Paul wanted no part of it except as a fellow helper in the faith. He understood that faith and Christian growth are a work from God alone, and are not dependent upon man's authority.

II The mainstays of the Christian

In the first chapter of II Corinthians there are some important things that reflect the life of the true believer. Upon reading this passage several times, I became aware of five things that all began with the letter 'C' and speak clearly of the life of a believer. These words are found in verses 3,4,6,7,12 of this chapter. They are the word 'comfort' in verses 3,4,and 6; the word 'consolation' in verses 5,6, and 7; the word 'conscience' in verse 12; and the word 'conversation' also in verse 12.

I could not get these words out of my mind, and upon consideration of their meanings I realized that they are in effect the mainstays of the Christian. I was so struck by them that I wrote them on a piece of paper and taped them to the dash of my truck where I could ponder them while I drove. The more I considered what these words taught, the more I could understand why they were used by Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit of God to instruct not only the believers in Corinth, but also you and I. I hope that by the conclusion of these two studies you will gain as much from their consideration as I have. Who knows, perhaps you will tape them to your dash of your vehicle and gain more insight than I have!

A. The believer's comfort and consolation - His position

The first thing that I realized is that comfort and consolation go together. The definition of the word comfort is very interesting. It means a state of ease or lack of distress, lack of sorrow and grief. The English word for comfort comes from the Latin terms 'com' which means with, and the word 'fortis' which means to strengthen. In other words, the word actually means 'a state of ease from strength' or 'to get aide or ease from a position of strength'.

For example, when a small child skins his knee it is the response of the parent to give him comfort or to console him. By so doing, the child is relieved from the grief of the event. The child gets a sense of ease from the strength of the parent; he takes comfort from the position of the strength of the parent. The use of these words together infers a relationship between a stronger and a weaker thing; the weaker getting a sense of relief or lack of grief from the benefit of the stronger. Inserting the idea of the meaning of these words into the times it is used in this first chapter tells us some things about the position of the believer.

In verses 3-7 the words comfort, comforteth, comforted and consolation are used. These words are related to each other. They are either the root word (comfort) or forms of it (comforteth, comforted, console). In these verses, we are given the position of the believer.

In verse 3 we are given the one from whom we seek comfort. God, who is the source of all mercy, The Father of Jesus Christ, is the giver of comfort to us. This is a position of strength, God is the giver of mercies, and we get comfort from His strength.

In verse 4 we come to understand that the believer is the beneficiary of the strength of God. Because of the mercies of God, and as a benefit of the strength of God, we do not have to fear tribulations (which the Corinthians knew first hand) nor any other troubles because we are recipients of the strength of God).

In verses 5 and 6 the believer is presented as having received salvation from the position of strength from God Himself. This is his consolation (mercy and comfort in action). In other words, the believer is granted salvation as a result of the strength of God (comfort) granted to him by the mercy of God (console – the action of mercy).

In verse 7 Paul identifies with these believers in a personal way, by telling them that he and they are all related as beneficiaries of the comfort and mercies of God (their consolation).

We as believers are given our position in these verses. A true believer understands that without the grace and mercy of God he would be without hope and lost in this world. Paul had told these believers this in a previous letter, and every believer understands I Corinthians 1:30, where it says “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:”

We as believers have comfort because of our identification with Christ. I Cor. 15:49

“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

These believers, and we as well, are the active work of the strength of God, His mercy in action which is our consolation.

II Cor. 16:57 “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The believer, as a result of the strength and mercy of God (the position of strength which is the comfort of God), has received the action of His mercy (consolation). This is the position of the believer in that we now have peace with God as a result of mercy and strength.

B. The believer's conscience and conversation - His experience

In verse 12 of this passage, Paul speaks of the testimony of conscience. In this particular instance he is referring to how he knew that they would correctly receive what he had written because he understood from deep within himself (his very inner being or his conscience) that the Lord was active within them.

II Corinthians 1:7 "And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."

Paul is speaking to them about their being persecuted for their faith, both from within their assembly and from without. As they were steadfast, he understood that the comfort (mercy and strength) of God was active in them (their consolation).

As believers our conscience is changed. The inner most controlling force of our person has been changed by the presence of Christ within us (our comfort). Paul had already taught this to these believers. I Corinthians 2:16 "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

The believer has a new conscience, the mind or conscience of Christ himself!
As believers, we have within our innermost thoughts the comfort that we have the very mind of Christ. In a personal sense this is the testimony of our conscience. The lost man has the testimony of his conscience as a witness against himself. Paul in Acts chapter 17 spoke of this before the heathen on Mars Hill.

Acts 17:27-28 "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

The testimony of conscience is the one thing that all men have; the unbeliever has the testimony of it against himself, and the believer has the testimony of it as a comfort. For the believer has the mind of Christ! This is the experience of the believer. We have to understand that we have the mind and conscience of Christ, placed within us as a comfort by God the Father, who is in the position of strength and mercy. This comfort is the consolation or the comfort of God in action!

It is in verse 12 that Paul speaks of his walk within the world and towards these believers; this is his conversation. It is based simply and solely upon the grace of God and was evident in how he had conducted himself among them. Because of his conversation they knew he was solely interested in their relationship with God through faith.

II Corinthians 1:24 "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand."

The correct understanding of the conscience of the believer (the mind of Christ) causes him to have a correct conversation (way of life) before the world, and before other believers.

Because Paul had the comfort of God, he understood the consolation of God. As he had these things he received the conscience of Christ and this was reflected in his conversation. Because of these things, he understood with confidence that these believers would receive his words (those of the previously mentioned painful letter) and would grow in their faith.

The believer is to live by his conscience; the mind of Christ will guide his conversation or way of life!

C. The confident believer

The last thought in this chapter that is of supreme importance in the conduct of the believer is confidence. The word confidence means a feeling of trust in a person or thing, it also means self assurance. In this case Paul had faith, that is confidence, in the person of God, that these people had received the comfort of God within themselves. Because he understood this he was able to address them from a position of self assurance. His self assurance was based upon his confidence in God alone. In verse 12 of this chapter (II Corinthians chapter 1) he told them that his motive was not fleshly wisdom, but rather godly sincerity.

Paul understood that he could have confidence based on the comfort and consolation of God. He had the conscience or mind of Christ to guide him in his conversation.

III. Examples of confident believers in time past

A. I am afraid that we as believers often fail to take comfort in these things and instead of conducting ourselves in a confident manner in our affairs in life, we often waste time in a weakened state. I am not speaking of a cocky, proud manner of confidence, but rather of a solid God-based confidence that gives us the assurance of the power of God that is within us! I am speaking of an inner, strong, tempered assurance that is based upon the consolation that if God be for us, who can be against us!

The scriptures contain many examples for us concerning the confidence of men of faith. It is true that some of them did not have as much truth as we have revealed to them. Some lived their lives in a time when God had not completed his revelation of the truth. There is one thing that all of these men had and is a common thing among them all. They all understood who they were and who God is. Every one of them based their trust in what they understood concerning Almighty God! For this reason they are good examples of the confidence we should strive for as believers. They all had the correct viewpoint of God and men!

B. The examples

1) Moses

Moses is a good example of a believer who had the confidence of God in him. He lived a total of 120 years. He spent forty years thinking he was everything, forty years thinking he was nothing, and forty years knowing God was everything. His life is typical of the life of a believer even in this day. Having been raised in the household of Pharaoh he knew very little of the God of Israel. I believe that God was active in the life of Moses long before he became aware of God.

In Exodus chapter 2: 11-14, we read how Moses (who at that time did not know God) slew another Egyptian who was beating one of the children of Israel. This was in the period of his life when he thought he was everything. As a result he had to flee to the wilderness in order to spare his life.

It was during this period of time when he came to think of himself as nothing. He realized that his strength had failed him! In Exodus chapter 3 we read how God revealed himself to Moses through the burning bush. Upon hearing God Moses knew without a doubt that he was nothing. His answer to God when told what he wanted him to do, is in verse 11 of this chapter, Who am I?

After a period of time, Moses goes back to Egypt to perform the task God had for him. He must go before Pharaoh (Pharaoh considered himself a god), and tell him that 'The I Am' wants Pharaoh to let his people go. After a series of plagues (each one directed against a god of the Egyptians), Pharaoh lets Israel leave his land and follow their God. It is during this journey into the wilderness that I believe Moses began to learn and to cling to God and His Word. He became a man of supreme confidence, not in his own power, but in the Word and strength of God.

This confidence may be clearly seen when he addresses the nation of Israel for the last time in Deuteronomy chapter 29-34. It also is reflected in verse 10-12, 'of the last chapter in Deuteronomy, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel."

Moses became a man of complete confidence in the power of the Lord. It was reflected in his life before the nation of Israel. In these ways he is a type for us as believers in this day:

- 1) In each of us there was a time when we relied upon our own strength; our confidence was vanity.
- 2) In His dealings with us, the Lord took us to the wilderness of despair and we became as nothing in our sight.
- 3) As we mature in our walk with the Lord, we come to understand that the Lord is everything and rest our trust and confidence upon Him and his word.

2) Samson

A judge in the land of Israel who also is a type of a confident believer is Samson. In the story of Samson (recorded in Judges chapters 13-16) we have a man who was called of God to judge over Israel. The Lord placed a vow upon him as a child, and empowered him with great strength. Samson went through a period of time when he was led astray by confidence in his great strength. His confidence was based upon the wrong thing at this time in his life, even though he knew that his strength came from the Lord, he began to believe that the great strength he possessed was within him. This is seen when he looked upon the sign of his strength (his hair), instead of upon its source (the Lord).

This false confidence left him at the end of his life when he realized that his strength came from the Lord. This is what caused him to perform the seemingly impossible task of destroying the temple of his enemies while in a severely weakened state. This true confidence is seen with the dedication of purpose that he shows in his last heroic act.

Judges 16:29-30

“And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said; let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead that which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

When Samson placed his confidence solely upon the Lord as the source of his strength, he was able to perform a mighty deed that surpassed everything else he did in his life.

Samson is a type of a believer in this way:

1) As believers we often place our confidence upon the wrong things. Some base their source of strength upon their relationship with a group, such as church membership, or even upon their association with the Maranatha fellowship. They do this because it is easier than searching out the things of the Lord and believing His Word with the confidence of faith. Their confidence is not based upon personal study and meditation upon the things of God, and may not stand the trials of this life.

2) As a true believer, God is bound to us through the blood of His Son; therefore He may cause us to go through severe hardship, such as Samson, in order to bring us to a point of knowing the true confidence we must have. That is the confidence based upon a sincere and personal relationship upon Him and the truth revealed in His word.

3) Stephen

The account of the martyrdom of Stephen contains the record of another believer who had the correct confidence in the Lord. In the life of Stephen, we have a believer who is slain for his testimony concerning the truth of God. He is an example of a truly confident believer who, knowing that his faith in the truth was going to cost him all he had in this life, held to it with full confidence. He was able to do this because he placed his confidence in the faithfulness of Christ. He looked to the future instead of upon the present. This is seen in verses 59 and 60 of Acts chapter 7.

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Stephen is an example to us as believers in this way:

- 1) Often, even confident believers forget that the present is but a fleeting thing (like the grass it soon withereth and passeth away). Instead of fearing and living only in the present, we should look with confidence towards the future, knowing our God will supply our need now and in time yet future.
- 2) Stephen also reflects a true confidence in God by his attitude toward those who were about to slay him. He asks God to show mercy upon them. This tells us that Stephen understood that even in the worst situations in this life, God is still God, and will work all things out to His own purpose and glory. It is God alone who can condemn, and it is God alone who can give mercy!

There remains one more example of the confident believer, and he is introduced in Chapter 8 of Acts. The life of this man may be the best result of the confidence of Stephen. I have no doubt that the death of a believer like Stephen, whose confidence rested solely upon God, had an effect upon this man. The prayer of Stephen for mercy upon his persecutors was answered through the ministry of this man, not only to Israel, but also to the Gentiles. This is the subject of the next study of the confident Christian.

Conclusion:

I understand that in I Cor. Chapter 1 Paul is speaking specifically to the believers in Corinth and he has in mind his personal dealings with them. He understands their persecution from both the Jews and the heathen; it is very similar to what he faced nearly everywhere he went. He also had a great sense of joy in the Lord because they had received his teachings with the correct attitude. They understood that he spoke the truth to them, the truth that he had learned from Christ. He speaks of these things in the last chapter of this letter, concluding with these words: II Cor. 13:14

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. A-men.”

By these words we understand that Paul knew that the Holy Spirit of God that these believers had, as a result of the grace of the Lord, had produced in the correct reception of his teachings.

There are also many things in this chapter for us. We can see how we take comfort in God’s strength, and how this comfort consoles us in our need. As a result of these two things, we have the conscience of Christ to guide our conversation or way of life. The final point of our Christian walk is that we become a confident believer whose assurance is in Christ alone.