

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: April 4: 2 Corinthians 7: 2-16: Some Notes

If you thought that Paul was a bit too sure of himself for comfort, or indeed that Paul was insisting that we as Christians should be very sure of ourselves (confident that we are right with God and getting it right), this passage is a useful corrective. Paul had obviously been worried stiff that, while his motives for writing (as with his motives for his unsuccessful visit) had been good, he might have messed up big time, and made things worse. Perhaps unexpectedly, he also shows that he does mind a great deal what the Corinthians think about him. All, I guess, a bit like a parent having been a bit hard on the kids (for good reasons), and being dead scared that “Mummy, I hate you!” will be the truth of the matter; and maybe a bit deserved. If Paul’s rejoicing at the news from Titus seems a bit over the top, that only matches his (as it happens) over the top worries about the outcome.

We all know (from one direction or another) that a sense of guilt can go either way. (The Peter way or the Judas way?) Someone can bitterly resent being made to feel guilty, and maybe become inventive with justifications for doing what has been pointed out as wrong. “The Ukrainians deserved to be bombed.” “The Jews brought it on themselves.” And of course in human relationship situations it can often be the case that there are faults on both sides.

The word edification is a bit clumsy, but it is about helping people to learn from their mistakes to be more valuable in future, rather than learning that they are valueless. The teacher who hands back the less than perfect essay with praise for the good bits and suggestions for improving the bad bits, is doing a much better job than the teacher who holds the essay up disdainfully and then drops it in the bin saying “This child is clearly an idiot”.

How do we handle having to correct/criticise someone? Is the brutal truth and the lying commendation equally bad? Do we overdo the praise or overdo the criticism? Have we skills in reconciliation? Are we good at learning from our own mistakes, even when they are pointed out rather unkindly. “Maybe you should have asked someone else to do it?” “What’s that meant to be?”

Paul, not a father in the usual sense, speaks quite a lot about the father/child relationship with his converts/disciples. (While always recognising who the real Father is.) It is interesting that the Old Testament is full of bad parenting stories: David and Solomon both let some of their children get away with murder. Isaac and Jacob and their spouses messed up big time with favouritism. Abraham’s treatment of Isaac would not win a parent of the year award.

How do our churches rate for their nurturing of both adults and young people and children? Paul clearly expected both individuals and churches to exercise Godly discipline –

responsibility for and to each other. In a going to church rather than a being church era, does this notion still run?