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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2128 ~ At Ephesus and Macedonia.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

While the Apostle Paul was preaching at Ephesus and seeing the church growing there, reports of apostasy began to be heard from other churches, particularly at Corinth and some in Macedonia in Northern Greece.

What exactly is apostasy? Apostasy is abandoning one's beliefs. The Christians at Corinth were leaving their faith in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as taught to them by Paul; they were taking these matters lightly by disregarding the value of their faith. These people may well have been led astray by false teachers who had come into the church and taught doctrine that Paul had never preached. We have to remember that there was no New Testament Scriptures that the believers could open and check out whether something was true or not.

Some of the Christians in the Corinthian church were turning back to their past life of sin. They no longer believed that the Lord could be trusted to answer their prayers. When our prayers aren't answered immediately, do we too feel that God hasn't heard us or doesn't care enough about us to help? The answers to our prayers don't always come straight away. We need to persist in praying, waiting for the time when God will give us our requests. This test of time either exposes our lack of faith or proves our faith in God's faithfulness. Will we give up on the Lord or will we hold on to the very end?

Our faith is being tested every day. Some people are being tested by adversity and loss; others by prosperity and peace. Will we hold onto our faith no matter what happens to us? Our faith in God is everything valuable for us both now and in the future.

The opposite of our trusting God is unbelief in Him. In Hebrews, Chapter 3, it says: “Be careful that none of you have a heart so evil and unbelieving that you will turn away from the living God ... For we are all partners with Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at the beginning.”

Every time we're confronted with a decision to trust by faith and we choose unbelief, we choose not to trust or hope. As a result, we resign ourselves to the world's ways instead of looking at the promises and power of our God. God calls this evil and He doesn't take it lightly. But if we want to please the Lord, we'll choose to believe what He has said in His Word. In Psalm 77, King David said: “I will remember your great deeds, Lord; I will recall the wonders you did in the past.” Just remembering God's miracles of the past helps us to keep going in the tough times that we might be facing.

Paul consulted with some Corinthian visitors to Ephesus to make sure that he wasn't making a mistake about the condition of the church at Corinth.

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While still at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter ‘1st Corinthians’ to the church in Corinth to help the believers there sort out many of their problems. He also added there some teaching that Christians today still take particular interest in.

Chapter 13 is well known as the 'love' chapter and often part of it is read out at wedding ceremonies to encourage kindness and caring concern by both people saying their vows. Part of the chapter says: "Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil; but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal."

In these words, the word 'love' can be substituted by the phrase 'a person filled with love.' We can read: 'The person filled with love is patient and kind.' Kindness here means that the person filled with love shows kindness to others by always seeking to do good things for others. These three words, 'love', 'patience' and 'kindness', are some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The person filled with love is not self-seeking or easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. If someone hurts or insults the person, they endure it quietly. Many of us nurture hurts and offences in our minds for years. We don't forgive the offending party or we try to but fail. Love from God isn't like that. Love doesn't seek revenge. The person filled with love always protects others, particularly those who may show weaknesses and fault. They don't pass along these faults to others but try to minimise them from view.

If we love someone, it's easy to bear that person's faults and weaknesses. But if we're finding it hard to endure a certain person, then we can be sure our love for that person is very small indeed. When we love someone, we want to trust that person. We want to have hope for that person's welfare, success and happiness. We hope that their heart will be pure and character strong.

In these Bible verses about love, Paul gives us a description of a person filled with love. This is how our own life should be when humbled in Christ's image. This is our goal. In these verses, Paul hasn't described an imaginary person; he's described Jesus Christ Himself. Our goal then is to be like Jesus, the Man of love. And this love comes from God. There is a great difference between God's spiritual love and human natural love. For people since the day Adam and Eve sinned, there is always selfishness mixed up in with our love. But God's love is pure, and will always remain so.

Another difference between God's love and human love is that we love others according to their worthiness. We easily love our family and our friends because in our sight, they are worthy of our love. But we find it much more difficult to love those who are unworthy or disagreeable to us, or sinful. But God loves even the most unworthy and unlovely people and has no favourites. With the help of the Holy Spirit working within us, we too can love these people. We must love them in obedience to our Lord, for Jesus has commanded us to love even our enemies. And we can if we're filled with Christ's love for all sinners.

In Chapter 15, Paul speaks about our earthly bodies that die being likened to seeds that are sown into the ground. God is the creator of every living thing and He's the source of all life. The Corinthian people had planted their seed for food each year and watched as plants grew up out of the ground, yet now they'd stopped believing in Christ's resurrection of new life for their souls? On some unknown but future day, God will give us a gloriously resurrected heavenly body that will never die or fail us like the current earthly ones do.

Paul said that unbelieving earthly people cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Why is that? Earthly people cannot enter God's spiritual kingdom because they are spiritually blind and separated from God's nature of holiness and righteousness. A person must be first changed in their heart and mind to receive God's Spirit of salvation and transformation into being like Christ. All who truly believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and their Lord, are born again spiritually into God's kingdom and they receive new spiritual life through the Holy Spirit.

While we're still in this world, we begin the process of being changed as we study God's Word and learn the way God's Spirit teaches us to live.

In finishing his letter, Paul still had a great love for the people of Corinth even though he'd given them many severe warnings and rebukes. He said: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." The Lord's grace includes the Lord's mercy, His love, fruit of the Spirit, and power of the Spirit. And when we pray for the Lord's grace for ourselves and others, all these things are given to us! May this be the experience for all of us!

Sometime after writing his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul heard that the situation in the Corinthian church had become worse. He made a painful visit to Corinth to confront the people there causing the trouble. At the time of the visit, many in the Corinthian church opposed Paul. After he returned to Ephesus, he wrote a severe letter to the church at Corinth and sent it by his co-worker Titus. This 2nd letter has been lost (or was deliberately destroyed) and no copies of it exist. When Titus didn't return from Corinth promptly, Paul became worried and he travelled to Macedonia to look for him. A public riot over the goddess Diana of the Ephesians versus Paul's message caused Paul to leave Ephesus.

In Macedonia, Paul finally found Titus and he learned from him that the Corinthians had realised their mistakes and they repented of their sins. After hearing this good news, Paul wrote the Corinthians a 3rd letter, which we now know as '2nd Corinthians'. This letter became the most personal of all of Paul's New Testament letters. He opens his heart and shares his deepest joys and sorrows with the Corinthian church.

While trying to help the church, Paul experienced suffering so intense that he felt almost ready to give up. God doesn't shelter His people from trials, not even gifted apostles like Paul who are willing to do His will. We are advised to be kind to people everywhere, for everyone we meet is fighting a battle of some sort. Christians need comfort and we will receive it from our God as we ask for it. Sufferings are not accidents but divine appointments and of which our Heavenly Father is in complete control. We also find comfort in praying, in claiming the promises of the Word and spending times of stillness before the Lord.

When we receive comfort from God, we are expected to share the blessings that we have received and encourage others who are going through their trials. When you suffer, avoid self-pity or dwelling on your inward feelings, as doing this will prevent you from finding joy in the Lord in whatever you are going through. Paul said that when sinners truly repent, we should forgive them and reaffirm our love to them. Otherwise they might become discouraged and give Satan an opportunity to attack them. Love doesn't condone sin, but it does cover sin when God has washed it away.

When the churches in Macedonia heard how poor the believers in Jerusalem were, they begged Paul for an opportunity to send money to help them. Are we in our churches showing the same attitude like that of the Macedonian Christians? Or do we complain about how poor we ourselves are and we try to give as little as possible? We need to remember that our money isn't our own but it's lent to us from the Lord as a gift. All things that we have are a gift from our Lord.

When we are generous towards others, God is further generous with us. Paul said people reap what they sow, so let us not be mean about our giving. God loves a cheerful giver, yet we must first give ourselves fully to the Lord. And those who handle the Lord's money should be dedicated and faithful, making certain that everything is managed in an honest and honourable way.

Paul also spoke in this letter about a personal trial that he had, which he called a ‘thorn in the flesh.’ God had permitted Satan to attack Paul to keep him humble after Paul visited heaven. In the loving will of God, suffering has a purpose that can be fulfilled no other way. Paul prayed three times for God to deliver him from his affliction but the Lord didn’t answer him in the way Paul wanted. However, God did meet Paul’s need and He gave him the empowering grace he required to live with it positively and in thankfulness from the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, let us accept our times of trial and they’ll become a heavenly blessing; but if we fight them and God’s hand in the matter, then they’ll become a heavy burden and a wounding that is slow to recover from.

Every local church problem can be solved by its members being humble and honest and by them drawing on the spiritual resources found in the grace of the Lord Jesus, love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves: “Are we a part of the problem or a part of the answer?”

Let us heed what it says in 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verse 5: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?”

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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