

Exploring 2 Corinthians

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PREFACE

In 2 Corinthians, Paul continues to give exhortation to the Corinthian church. He wanted the Corinthian Christians to grow strong in Christ and abound in all their work as a church. He explains deeper about Christian identity in light of the gospel. As Christians, we are Christ's ambassadors and that our eternal home is in heaven with Christ. Paul also wants us to be aware of the devil's cunning and false teachers who attempt to corrupt Christ's church. He also addresses Christian suffering and sacrifice. Paul reminds believers that God is *the God of all comfort*, and that Christ's power is always at work in the lives of his people. His power is made perfect and manifested in our weaknesses. Like Paul, we can say, "For when I am weak, then I am strong [in Christ]" (2 Corinthians 12:10b).

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Introduction

The book of 2 Corinthians is a letter written about 55 A.D. by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Corinth. Paul wrote this letter not long after writing 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul attempted to solve problems in the Corinthian church, such as divisions, lawsuits, adultery, and disorderly community worship service. Many of the Corinthian Christians had repented as a result of Paul's exhortation. In 2 Corinthians, Paul gave further exhortation about the Christian life, especially about God's comfort for his people in the midst of suffering and troubles, and how his strength is manifested through their weaknesses.

Lesson 1 – God is the God of All Comfort

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

What did Paul tell the Corinthian Christians about his identity (v.1)?

Where do grace and peace come from (v.2)?

What is the significance of referring to God as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (v.3)?

God “comforts us in all our affliction” (v.4). God never promises that he would not let us suffer. He promises us that when we suffer, he will be with us to strengthen and comfort us. Facing struggles and suffering in this broken and sinful world is a part of the Christian life. We have three enemies: the devil, the world, and the flesh—our sinful nature and its sinful desires.

What is one purpose of God comforting us in all our afflictions (v.4)?

Often times the best comfort received by a person who is going through a struggle is from another person who has gone through the same struggle. God comforts, strengthens, and helps us in our suffering so that we can do the same to others in their suffering.

How much comfort do we receive from God (v.5)?

True Christians are in a covenant relationship and union with Christ. We share in his suffering, death, and resurrection. Our suffering and death on Earth will be *swallowed up* by our resurrection at Christ's return (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). His victory of evil and sin has been imputed to us. His resurrection and victory is ours. When we suffer, God gives us comfort abundantly. He gives us all the strength and peace we need to go through and to overcome our suffering.

How do we share one another's suffering and comfort as a covenant community of believers (v.6-7)?

All true Christians are members of one body of Christ. Our lives are all joined together with Christ as the head of the body. We all share in his suffering, death, and resurrection. Therefore, since we are one body of Christ, what happens to one of us will affect the others. We are meant to love, support, strengthen, and comfort one another.

Will God allow us to experience great suffering beyond our strength (v.8)?

How does God use great suffering to teach us (v.9-10)?

What is one way we can help our Christian brothers and sisters who suffer (v.11)?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

Why is it important to live with simplicity and godly sincerity in this sinful and corrupted world (v.12)?

Some of the Corinthian Christians did not trust Paul. They questioned the sincerity of his ministry and message. Paul explained that he was sincere in his conduct and letters to them. He hoped that when Christ returns—“the day of the Lord Jesus”—they would boast and be joyful for trusting him, as he would boast for their growth in Christ (v.13-14).

Paul had made an unscheduled visit to the Corinthian church, where he found some church members causing troubles in the church. It was a painful visit for him. He then scheduled a visit to see them on his trip from Judea to Macedonia and on the way back from Macedonia to Judea. He decided not to do this, because he did not want his visit to be painful again. He thought it was best for him to minister to them through sending letters, and let the Corinthian church leaders take care of their church problems. Because he made an unscheduled visit and then changed his mind about his scheduled visit, some Corinthian Christians considered Paul’s words could not be trusted. Paul explained that he was faithful to them and to the gospel ministry. His faithfulness was based on God’s own faithfulness (v.15-18, 2:1).

What does it mean that “in Christ it is always Yes” (v.19-20)?

What does God do in the lives of his people (v.21-22)?

God establishes our faith in Christ and anoints us with the power of the Holy Spirit to confirm our salvation and to do the work of his kingdom in this world. The Holy Spirit of God who dwells in us is the seal of God’s ownership of us. The Holy Spirit seals or secures our salvation in Christ and our union with him. He is the guarantee of our eternal life with God and complete salvation from evil, sin, and its corruption. Our union with Christ is permanent. God will take care of us as his people.

How does knowing this strengthen us when we go through a trial in life?

Lesson 2 – We are Christ’s Witnesses

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-22 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:23—2:4

In lesson 1, we learn that some of the Corinthian Christians did not trust Paul. Paul tried to convince them that he was trustworthy and faithful to them. If he was not, he asked God to be against him. He explained the reason he decided not to visit them after scheduling a visit was because he did not want it to be a painful visit and to cause unnecessary sorrow for them. It was not because he was indecisive or reluctant to meet them. He thought it was best for him to minister to them through sending letters, helping them to resolve their problems. He wanted to give them time to repent and heal before he visited them. He wanted them to stand firm in their faith regardless of their problems, and to experience joy in Christ. He gave them time to heal, so that when he visited them, it would be a joyful visit.

Paul apparently wrote another letter after his first visit to the Corinthian church. Many Bible scholars have called this *severe letter*. This letter was lost. In this letter, Paul rebuked the Corinthian Christians, especially the trouble makers in the church, to repent from their sins. He told the church leaders to discipline church members who caused troubles in the church. Problems in the Corinthian church included divisions, lawsuits, adultery, and disorderly community worship service. There were also false teachers who came to corrupt the church.

How did Paul assure them of his love for them (v.4)?

What can we learn from Paul about helping a new Christian brother or sister to grow?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

When a church member commits a serious and public sin, it will affect the whole church (v.5). The Corinthian church had apparently disciplined a disobedient church member for his serious sin. Punishment by the church had been given to him (v.6). There are three steps in church discipline: (1) admonition, (2) suspension from the Lord’s Supper, and (3) excommunication. Each step needs to be done biblically, wisely, prayerfully, and lovingly. The purpose of church discipline is to maintain the purity of the church, bring the sinner to repentance, and restore his relationship with the church.

What did Paul ask the Corinthian church to do after disciplining the offender? Why (v.7-8)?

When a church member receives church discipline and shows humility and repentance, the church leaders then need to forgive, comfort, and bring him back to the fellowship of the church, so that he will not be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” Other members need to assure him of their love for him.

Paul explained again the reason he decided not to visit them but to help them through his letter (v.9). He also explained that he stood by their decisions to discipline the disobedient church member (v.10).

Satan works to destroy Christ's church. His *designs* mean his plans, strategies, and deceptions (v.11). Satan is a very intellectual being whom we should not underestimate.

How can we guard ourselves against Satan's *designs* to make us sin and to corrupt us?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Troas was located in modern Turkey. God "opened a door" for Paul to preach the gospel there (v.12). Here we learn that the work of sharing the gospel and inviting people to Christ depends on the sovereignty of God. God opens and closes *doors*. It is God who makes the work of the gospel effective, and not us. It is God who is able to bring people to saving faith in Christ, and not us. God only wants us to be faithful witnesses and to trust in his sovereignty.

How can we encourage one another to be faithful witnesses of Christ to share the gospel to others?

Titus was a member of Paul's mission team. Titus delivered Paul's *severe letter* to the Corinthian church. Paul and Titus had arranged to meet at Troas. Paul wanted to hear from Titus about the Corinthian church's situation after receiving the *severe letter*. Paul was worried—"my spirit was not at rest"—when he did not meet Titus there. Paul then left to Macedonia (v.13). Paul would come back to Troas again and spent seven days to share the gospel (Acts 20:6-12).

What did Paul think about gospel ministry (v.14)?

The picture of *triumphal procession* is from the Roman Empire. When a Roman general won a war, he would have a victory parade in Rome, bringing his captives and spoils from war. Incense would be burned. To the Romans, the smell was a smell of victory, but to the captives, it was a smell of death. Paul uses this picture to describe that Christ is the general who always leads his soldiers in triumphal processions. We are Christ's soldiers. In the gospel ministry, we always win. Gospel ministry always produces fruits—people come to saving faith in Christ. As we witness and share the gospel to people, we "spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere" we go.

"We are the aroma of Christ to God." To those who are saved in Christ, we bring the fragrance of life. To those who are perishing, we bring the fragrance of death (v.15-16).

What does this mean?

Gospel ministry brings life to those who receive Christ and brings death to those who reject him. For us to be a messenger of Christ is a privilege. We are not "sufficient for these things," but God makes us sufficient for this privilege. God only asks us to be faithful and sincere as witnesses and soldiers of the gospel. He will equip and empower us.

How can we be more effective to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere we are?

Lesson 3 – Reflecting the Glory of God in Us

Read 2 Corinthians 1:23—2:17 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

As we have learned, some of the Corinthian Christians did not trust Paul. When people want to know about a particular person, usually the person needs to give letters of recommendation. Paul said that he had a better recommendation. The Corinthian Christians as a church were his *spiritual* letter of recommendation, written on his heart and the hearts of his ministry team members (v.1-2).

What else did Paul say about the Corinthian church and what was the significance of it (v.3)?

The Corinthian church is a *spiritual letter of recommendation*, not written on a paper with ink but written with the Holy Spirit, not carved on tablets of stone but on Paul's heart. The Corinthian church's faith and life in Christ was Paul's *living letter of recommendation* from Christ himself.

From whom did Paul's confidence and sufficiency come (v.4-5)?

God makes us competent to be Christ's witnesses and ministers of the new covenant (v.6). Every Christian is a witness and a minister of the gospel.

There is contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant, God gave his law to his people through Moses. God's law reveals our sins and cannot save us—*the letter kills*. In contrast, Christ has brought a new covenant to God's people, and has sent the Holy Spirit to work in us. The Holy Spirit brings us alive spiritually from death in sin, enabling us to put our faith in Christ alone. The Holy Spirit works in a greater measure in the new covenant than he did in the old covenant.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

God carved the Ten Commandments on tables of stone and gave them to Moses. Moses' face was shining because he came into the presence of God and talked to him. The people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' shining face, so he would put a veil over his face. The old covenant came with glory, but its glory came to an end when the new covenant came.

"The ministry of death" (v.7) and "the ministry of condemnation" (v.9) refer to the old covenant, in which God's law reveals our sins and brings condemnation and death. Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way. We sin against God in our thoughts, words, and actions. We cannot be saved by trying to obey God's law. Salvation cannot be achieved by our works, but is received by God's grace through our faith in Christ alone, who has obeyed God's law perfectly and died for the punishment of our sins as our substitute. God imputed our sin to Jesus, who took our condemnation and died for the punishment of our sin on the cross.

"The ministry of the Spirit" (v.8) and "the ministry of righteousness" (v.9) refer to the new covenant, in which the Holy Spirit brings justification to those who put their faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering

their lives to him. Justification is an act of God's free grace, by which he forgives all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, because the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to us. Justification is a gift of God and we can receive it by faith alone. God declares that we are no longer guilty and condemned, but legally righteous before him, not because of our own righteousness—which we do not have—but because he imputes the righteousness of Jesus to us. We are righteous before God because we have the righteousness of Jesus.

How is the new covenant compared with the old covenant in this passage (v.7-11)?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Many Jews today still cannot see that Christ is the fulfillment of the old covenant. There is a veil covering their eyes, minds, and hearts, spiritually speaking (v.12-15). The old covenant points to Christ. Christ is the true and ultimate prophet, priest, and king. He is the true and ultimate temple and sacrifice as well. He is the Messiah, the promised Savior.

How can one's veil be removed (v.14, 16)

"Turning to the Lord Jesus Christ" means having a repentant heart—turning from sin and turning to Christ (v.16). It means putting your faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering your life to him.

"The Lord is the Spirit" means Christ and the Holy Spirit have a close relationship and function together in the life of God's people. The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of the Lord," because Christ sent the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. When we give our lives to Jesus, we are united with him and the Holy Spirit dwells in us. We have freedom from sin and death (v.17). Christ's victory over evil, sin, and death is imputed to us when we are united with him. His victory is our victory. In him, we can overcome evil, sin, and death.

When will we behold the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (v.18)?

What does "we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" mean (v.18)?

Moses' face shone because it reflected the glory of God. He had to put on a veil to cover his face so that the people of Israel would not be scared. The glory of God on Moses' face gradually faded. In contrast, in the new covenant, all God's people reflect the glory of God in our lives. As we are transformed to be more and more like Christ in our sanctification, we reflect more and more the glory of God in our lives. When we receive our resurrected and heavenly body at the day of Christ's return, we will also physically reflect his glory through our new physical body. Furthermore, the glory will not fade—like on Moses' face—but will last forever.

How can we encourage one another to better reflect God's glory in our lives to the people around us?

Lesson 4 – The Light of the Gospel

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

“This ministry” (v.1) refers to the new covenant ministry which is much more glorious than the old covenant ministry. In the new covenant, every Christian is a minister of the gospel. We have a glorious ministry that brings salvation to people.

Why should we not *lose heart* in the midst of struggle when we minister to people (v.1)?

There were false teachers who came to the Corinthian church with cunning and deception—*disgraceful and underhanded ways*. Paul did gospel ministry and spoke the truth of God’s word with sincerity and honesty to everyone *in the sight of God*. He spoke to people as if he was speaking before God (v.2).

Why is it important for us to do gospel ministry with honesty and without any sort of deception?

Why can’t unbelievers *who are perishing see the light of the gospel* (v.3-4)?

Who is “the god of this world” (v.4)?

Jesus Christ is God who became a man. He came to bear the sin punishment of his people, in order that they can have a new life in him. The gospel is called “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” because the gospel message speaks about the glory of Christ (v.4).

What or whom should we proclaim when sharing the gospel (v.5)?

Who can give light in the darkness of people’s hearts (v.6)?

How a person can come to saving faith in Jesus Christ is totally the work of the Holy Spirit. As Christ’s agents, we simply point people to him and explain to them how the Bible points to him as well. We cannot change people’s hearts, only God can.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

“This treasure” (v.7) refers to the glorious ministry of the new covenant and the gospel ministry. People usually put treasure in a metal safety box to protect it. Christians have “the treasure” from God in “jars of clay”—in themselves. We are “jars of clay.” We have a lot of weaknesses and are easily broken.

Why does God put his treasure in us (v.7)?

How is “the surpassing power of God” demonstrated in our lives (v.8-9)?

Paul had to go through a lot of suffering and persecution in doing gospel ministry. He knew that if he did this in his own strength and without God’s help, he could have died. But with God’s power working in and through Paul’s life, the triumphant *life of Jesus* was manifested in his *mortal flesh*—his weak and mortal body (v.11).

Jesus will sustain his gospel ministry through us. As we do gospel ministry and face danger, suffering, and persecution, our work will bring a new life in other people (v.12). Those who repent and put their faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering their lives to him, will receive a new and eternal life from him.

“I believed, and so I spoke” (v.13) is a quote from Psalm 116:10, in which the psalmist expresses that his faith in God cannot be silent, but will speak of its confidence in him. Likewise, Paul expressed that his faith in God will speak of its confidence in him.

What was Paul confidence about (v.14)?

When will we receive our bodily resurrection?

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

The goal of gospel ministry is to extend God’s grace to more and more people, in order that they may be saved in Christ and bring thanksgiving and glory to God (v.15).

How was Paul empowered to do gospel ministry (v.16)?

In the midst of present temporary afflictions, how should we look ahead to the eternal glory we will receive (v.17-18)?

God has an eternal inheritance for us in his heavenly kingdom. It is beyond comparison than all the things in this world, which are temporary. Present afflictions are nothing compared to what we will receive in heaven. Our hope in Christ is an assurance and a certainty. Furthermore, everything we do for the gospel will not be in vain.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

How can we use our troubles in this world as opportunities to grow our faith in Christ?

Lesson 5 – We are Christ’s Ambassadors

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

The “tent” refers to our earthly physical body, and the “house” refers to heaven or our heavenly physical body (v.1).

How is our heavenly *house* better than our earthly *tent* (v.1)?

How do we groan in our earthly *tent* (v.2)?

We are created by God as a human being with a physical body and a soul. Paul describes that a human soul without a physical body is *naked* (v.3). It is lacking or incomplete, because it is not how God has designed it. Because of sin in us, our soul and earthly body are corrupted. When we die physically, our soul goes to heaven to be with the Lord, be purified completely, and wait to be united again with a new physical body without sin and corruption. The new life we have in a new heavenly body is eternal.

What does “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” mean (v.4)?

Who has prepared us for this glorious eternal life and how does he guarantee his promise for us (v.5)?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Although Christ the Lord is with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us in this present life, the fullness experience of being with the Lord only happens after we die. To be “away from the body” or to die is to be “home with the Lord.” Our souls will immediately be with the Lord in heaven as soon as we die physically (v.6-8).

How should we live our lives in light of our future glory (v.7, 9)?

What will Christ do when he returns (v.10)?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

“The fear of the Lord” is a healthy and reverent fear to God. It is a proper understanding and respect of who he is. God is a loving and just God. People like to talk about a loving God, but many do not like the idea of a just God who punishes sin and evil. Knowing that people will face unimaginable terrifying judgment of Christ should motivate us to “persuade others”—sharing the gospel to our family members and friends more eagerly (v.11).

Paul was careful repetitively in explaining himself to the Corinthian Christians that he was not boasting or bragging about himself. There were false teachers who opposed Paul in the Corinthian church and boasted on external matters. What mattered to Paul was “what is in the heart”—internal matters. Paul hoped the Corinthian Christians would be able to defend him against the false teachers, who opposed and accused him. Whatever Paul did, he did not do it for himself, but for the glory of God and for the good of the Corinthian church (v.12-13).

What does “for the love of Christ controls us” mean (v.14)?

Love has a compelling power that empowers us to do things for the person we love. Our love for Christ empowers us to do the work of gospel ministry for him. Our love for Christ empowers us to live a life of obedience pleasing to him.

What has Christ done for us and what should we do for him in return (v.15)?

Why should we not treat other people according to *the flesh*—worldly perspectives (v.16)?

What have we become in Christ and what does it mean (v.17)?

As sinners condemned to death, we were God’s enemies. However, God has reached out to us and saved us through the sacrifice of Christ, who died as our substitute, bearing the punishment of our sin on the cross. God has reconciled himself to us. Those who put their faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering their lives to him, are forgiven by God and reconciled to him (v.18).

What is “the ministry of reconciliation” (v.18-19)?

Who are entrusted with the message of the ministry of reconciliation (v.19)?

Who are we—as Christians—in this world? What is our duty accordingly (v.20)?

How did Christ die for our sin and how do we receive his righteousness (v.21)?

Jesus Christ *knew no sin*—had no sin. He was the only person without sin. However, God the Father treated him as legally guilty of our sin, imputing (crediting) our sin to him. Jesus was willing to die for us, bearing the punishment of our sin, so that we can receive his righteousness by believing in him. When we put our faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, God forgives us and imputes the righteousness of Jesus to us. God treats us as legally righteous, not because of our own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Jesus imputed to us. In Jesus, we are saved and justified.

Lesson 6 – We are the Temple of the Living God

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-21 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

As Christ's ambassadors, we work together with him to do the work of his gospel ministry in this world. God has given us this great privilege and grace, and we should not take this lightly and waste our time, but should live seriously and purposefully for the sake of Christ's gospel and his kingdom (v.1).

Verse 2 is a quote from Isaiah 49:8, where Isaiah speaks about God's salvation for his covenant people. Paul explains that now is the time of salvation. Christ has come to bring salvation to people from all nations. As ambassadors of Christ, we should be intentional to bring people to him, while this "day of salvation" is still available.

How can we be more intentional to work with Christ for his gospel and kingdom?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13

How did Paul do his gospel ministry (v.3)?

Paul commended himself in every way, not for his own benefits, but for the sake of the gospel (v.4).

How did he do that (v.4-7)?

Verses 8-10 describe paradoxes highlighting the contrast of a worldly perspective and heavenly perspective about Paul and all Christians in general, when we engage in the gospel ministry.

What are those paradoxes and what do they mean (v.8-10)?

Have you experienced any of those?

Paul was honest to the Corinthian Christians. He gave his love and affection to them with a heart open wide and treated them as if they were his own children. However, some of the Corinthian Christians had not given the same love and affection to Paul. He wanted them to do likewise (v.11-13).

Have you experienced a similar situation when trying to help your brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those who are new Christians?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1

What does "do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" mean (v.14)?

Why should we not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (v.14-16)?

As Christ's ambassadors, we are called to be the light of the world. We are to engage the people around us and impact them with the light of the gospel. At the same time, since we are in union and in a covenant relationship with Christ, we are not to have any binding relationships with unbelievers. A covenant relationship is a binding relationship with the promise of faithfulness. To have this with unbelievers would be *unequally yoked*. It would have a bad impact on us. We are spiritually nurtured and sanctified by Christ, but unbelievers are nurtured by sin and evil. Believers' main purpose of life is to enjoy God and to glorify him. Unbelievers' main purpose of life is to enjoy sin and to glorify themselves.

In the life of the church as a body of Christ, membership in a local church is a covenant relationship between believers with one another and with Christ. Therefore, unbelievers cannot be members of the church. The Corinthian Christians needed to be careful of the false teachers among them.

Similarly, believers should not have a binding marriage relationship with unbelievers. A Christian family is like "a little church." They worship God, pray, and study the Bible together in their home.

In the business world, would you prefer to have a business partner with whom you can make a lot of money but indulge in sinful lifestyle, or to have a business partner with whom you would make much less money but live your life pleasing God?

What are we as believers and what does it mean (v.16)?

In verses 16-18, Paul quoted several texts from the Old Testament scriptures, where God spoke to his covenant people—the people of Israel. God's promise to dwell among his covenant people is fulfilled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who are in union with Christ. When we repent and put our faith in Christ, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, the Holy Spirit dwells in us to sanctify us. We become "the temple of the living God."

Unbelievers are "the temple of idols." Spiritual idols are anything we consider more important than God, or anything from which we seek meaning or satisfaction for our lives that only God can give. Our sinful hearts produces idols continuously.

What can be potential spiritual idols in our lives?

When we become Christians, God considers us as his sons and daughters (v.18).

How important is this privilege for you?

What should we do as "the temple of the living God" and as God's sons and daughters (7:1)?

Lesson 7 – Godly Grief

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1—7:1 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-4

Paul pleaded with the Corinthian Christians again to open their hearts wide for Paul, just as he did to them (6:11-13). Paul loved them deeply and wanted them to love him the same (v.2-3). Besides false teachers, there were some Corinthian Christians who did not trust Paul. In all Paul's difficulty as a missionary and a church planter, he was *overflowing with joy* (v.4).

How can our hearts overflow with joy in the midst of life's difficulty?

Happiness is outward and comes as a result of pleasant circumstances. Joy is inward and comes as a result of knowing and trusting God. When we see God as who he is—wise and sovereign—all our struggles and problems fade away. As a result, our suffering becomes an opportunity for us to grow in spiritual maturity and to know God more and be closer to him. Our suffering can become a blessing for us and others when we handle it properly with faith in God.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-9

After Paul sent a *severe letter* to the Corinthian church, he was continuously troubled in mind to know what the church would do as a result.

How did God comfort Paul as he came to Macedonia (v.5-6)?

How did Titus' report give Paul even more comfort (v.7)?

What was the outcome of Paul's *severe letter* to the Corinthian church (v.8-9)?

Church leaders as shepherds of the church must be able to lovingly discipline disobedient church members, even though it causes them sorrow. The purpose of church discipline is to maintain the purity of the church, bring the sinner to repentance, and restore his relationship with the church.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-16

What is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief (v.10)?

To repent is to turn from sin with regret and sorrow and turn to God with the full intention to be obedient. To put our faith in Jesus means to completely trust and surrender our lives to him and rest upon him alone for our salvation. Repentance and faith in Jesus are two aspects of Christian salvation that happen in the same time. Both are God's saving grace for us.

As we grow in spiritual maturity and holiness in Christ, on-going repentance from specific sins is a part of our Christian lives. This is called sanctification—the work of God’s free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die to sin and to live to righteousness.

When we obey the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will repent from specific sins we commit, accompanied by godly grief. As we grow more mature in Christ and as our love for him grows, we will be more sensitive to sins, and will grieve for our sins and turn to him who loves us so much.

What was the outcome of the Corinthian church’s godly grief and repentance collectively (v.11)?

How was Paul encouraged and comforted by their acts of obedience to Christ (v.12-13a)?

What was a further result (v.13b)?

Titus was sent by Paul to deliver the *severe letter* to the Corinthian church, and to report back to Paul about how the church handled their problems. Paul was confident in the Corinthian church that they would respond appropriately to his instruction and be faithful to Christ (v.14, 16).

How did the obedience of the Corinthian church to Christ affect Titus (v.15)?

The Corinthian church received Titus *with fear and trembling*. This means that they received him with proper respect and reverence to God. They acknowledged Titus as a representative of Paul, who was an apostle of Christ and their church planter.

Think about the love of Christ for you, and then think if there are any specific sins that you need to grieve for and turn to Christ in obedience.

Pray together for an encouragement to be faithful to Christ and for seeing more of Christ’s love for us.

Lesson 8 – Generous Giving

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-16 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

What is “the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia” (v.1-2)?

The Christian life is all about the grace of God. Each day of our lives is God’s gift for us. All things we have are God’s gifts for us. This includes the financial possessions we have and the ability to help and share with others.

Even though the Macedonian Christians were poor, they gave and shared what they had generously to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. As a result of their generous hearts, they experienced abundant joy as a gift from God to them. Generous giving results in abundant joy. Both are God’s grace in our lives.

God wants us to learn to give ourselves and what we have to others generously, because as we do so more and more, we become more and more like Christ. We will never be perfect, but there is one who is perfect. Jesus has given his life for us. He died for us, so that we can live in him. As we are in union with him, he continues to share his life with us. When we understand this deeply, we will love him more as a result. Consequently, we will be empowered by him to give ourselves and what we have to others generously.

How much did the Macedonian Christians give to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem (v.3-4)?

How were they empowered to do so (v.5)?

As the Macedonian Christians gave generously, Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to learn to do the same (v.6).

How did Paul try to encourage the Corinthian Christians (v.7)?

God gave the Corinthian church abundant grace that they would *excel in everything*, including the many spiritual gifts they had.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

Paul wanted the Corinthian church to give generously according to their love for Christ. He did not command them to do so—though he could, because he had the authority as an apostle of Christ and as their church planter—rather he asked them to show their genuine love for Christ and his people (v.8).

What did Christ do for us? Why (v.9)?

Jesus left his heavenly glory to be born as a poor man and to die as our substitute for the punishment of our sin, in order that we, who are poor, can be rich in him by believing and putting our faith in him, trusting and surrendering our lives to him.

The Corinthian church had actually begun to give financially to help the Jerusalem Christians a year before (v.10). Paul encouraged them to complete their financial commitment (v.11). The willingness to give generously is pleasing to God. God wants us to give from what we have and not from what we do not have (v.12).

“Fairness” or fair distribution of burden means sharing the burden of one another (v.13). Those who have more should help those who have less (v.14). In verse 15, Paul quoted Exodus 16:18 to describe God’s provision to the people of Israel in the wilderness by providing bread from heaven for them to eat. It was called “manna” and looked like white flakes. God commanded them to gather the manna daily in the morning for their food for the day, and not to take more than they needed. Thus, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

As one body of Christ, we are to carry one another’s burden, in order that everyone’s need will be met. Giving generously to help other Christians is a demonstration of our love for Christ—*the head of the body, the church*.

What are some ways we can generously give to help our needy brothers and sisters in Christ?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Paul sent Titus again to the Corinthian church to help with the collection of financial help for the Jerusalem Christians. Like Paul, Titus cared about the well-being of the Corinthian Christians, and was eager to visit them again. Titus was accompanied by another member of Paul’s mission team, who was “famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel,” and by another Christian brother (v.16-19, 22). We do not know the identity of the two persons. The reason Paul sent three representatives to handle the collection of generous giving was for the right administration of it (v.20).

What was the aim of the right administration for the collection of giving (v.21)?

What does it mean?

What did Paul say about Titus and the other two representatives (v.23)?

What did Paul advise the Corinthian Christians to do (v.24)?

Can you use the biblical principle of generous giving to other areas of life? If so, explain.

Lesson 9 – Abounding in Every Good Work

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-24 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Why is it *superfluous* for Paul to talk to the Corinthian church about *the ministry for the saints*—helping poor Jerusalem Christians (v.1-2)?

A *saint* is a holy person. Christians are called *saints* because we are holy people of God and set apart for God.

Achaia was in Southern Greece. A year before, when the Corinthian Christians began to generously give financial support to help the poor Jerusalem Christians, their eagerness had affected and stirred up a desire in the hearts of Macedonian Christians to do the same.

Why did Paul send the representatives to the Corinthian church to administer the collection of financial giving (v.3-5)?

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to continue to be a blessing for the Macedonian Christians, especially about being a good example of helping Jerusalem Christians generously and sacrificially. Even though, the Corinthian Christians were still dealing with some problems in their church, Paul admonished them to handle all things properly, wisely, and with faith in God. That is how a church can continue to be a blessing that brings a great impact to the community.

Paul was very confident of the Corinthian Christians in their preparation for the financial gift. He sent the representatives to help them get it ready as a willing and generous gift for the Jerusalem Christians.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

What illustration taken from agriculture did Paul use to explain generous financial giving (v.6)?

Here, Paul used the illustration of sowing and reaping in agriculture to explain the work of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is the *spiritual field*. Everything we do in God's kingdom, including helping our brothers and sisters who are poor, will not be in vain.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

What is a principle of giving financially (v.7)?

Why does God love a cheerful giver?

None of us will be able to give ourselves to help others perfectly. However, Jesus has given himself to us perfectly. He sacrificed his glory and riches to come down to this world. He sacrificed himself to die for the punishment of our sin as our substitute. He continues to give and share himself with us because we are in union with him. One day, when he returns, he will share all things he has with us. He will share his heaven with us.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:16-17).

The crucial difference between Christianity and other religions is that when we help others, it is not for getting something in return for ourselves, such as God’s blessing, a good status before God, or a credit toward entering heaven. Because of our union with Christ, we already have all things in him. We are God’s children and heaven is our home. We help others because we love Christ, who has given himself to us. We help others to demonstrate our love for Christ and to share with them what God has given us. We are called to imitate Christ in every way. When we give generously, we imitate God’s generous gift to us by giving his Son, and Christ’s generous gift to us by giving himself. We reflect God’s glory by becoming more and more like him.

What is God able to do to us as we engage in the work of his kingdom (v.8)?

Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9 that describes a righteous person as one who gives generously to the poor.

What else will God do to us as we engage in the work of his kingdom (v.10-11)?

What will it produce ultimately (v.11-12)?

As God’s children, our purpose in life is to glorify and enjoy him forever. All the things we are able to do for the work of God’s kingdom are made possible by God himself. He gives us his grace. He supplies, equips, and guides us. As we experience God’s *surpassing grace*—generous grace—in our lives, our hearts will be filled with thanksgiving to him. And as we enjoy him more in our personal and loving relationship with him, we will glorify him more in our lives (v.13-14).

How did Paul end his appeal about giving generously (v.15)?

What is God’s *inexpressible gift* for us (v.15)?

Think much about God’s *inexpressible gift* for you. What is your proper response to him?

Lesson 10 – Spiritual Warfare

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

In chapters 10 through 13, Paul wrote about false apostles and false teachers who came to corrupt the Corinthian church, including to influence the Corinthian Christians to be against Paul, who was their church founder and a true apostle. Paul began by defending his ministry and identity as an apostle of Christ in chapter 10. He pleaded with the Corinthian Christians in humility by *the meekness and gentleness of Christ* to listen to him (v.1).

What does “walking according to the flesh” mean (v.2)?

As God’s people, we are in constant spiritual warfare against our enemies: the devil, the world, and the flesh—our sinful nature and its sinful desires. We do not engage in our spiritual warfare *according to the flesh*—according to our corrupted or worldly methods, standards, or life-views (v.3). Ephesians 6:10-20 teaches us about our spiritual armor with the word of God as our sword.

What do our spiritual weapons have and what are they able to do (v.4)?

The spiritual *strongholds* are the centers of the demonic oppositions to God, his work, and his people.

What should we attempt to destroy in our spiritual warfare (v.5)?

We should also attempt to “take every thought captive to obey Christ,” meaning we attempt to teach people the word of God, so that their thoughts, ideas, desires, and decisions would be conformed to the word of God and would submit to Christ.

Paul was ready to punish any Corinthian Christians who would join the false teachers and oppose Christ. He wanted them as a church to have a complete obedience to Christ (v.6).

Read 2 Corinthians 10:7-18

Some of the Corinthian Christians had weaknesses of not looking at the hearts of people, but rather looking at the surface or external of things. That was why they were attracted to the false teachers, who seemed to be more skillful in oral communication than Paul. Paul wanted them to see that he was truly an apostle of Christ, unlike the false teachers. As an apostle of Christ, Paul had been given authority by Christ himself to build up his church and not to destroy it. Paul would not be ashamed to use his authority for the building-up of the Corinthian church. On the contrary, the false teachers’ goal was to destroy the church of Christ (v.7-8).

What did Paul not want the Corinthian Christians to misunderstand (v.9-11)?

Paul did not intend to compare himself with the false teachers, but wanted the Corinthian Christians to see things clearly with biblical wisdom and perspective, and not with worldly wisdom and perspective. They would find that the false teachers were not of Christ and had no understanding of the word of God (v.12).

Paul and his mission team were sent by God to Corinth to share the gospel of Christ and to plant the Corinthian church. If Paul wanted to boast, he would boast only in God and what God accomplished through him (v.13-14).

What did Paul hope for the Corinthian Christians (v.15)?

Paul wanted to go to share the gospel and plant churches in other areas. However, the problems in the Corinthian church really needed his care (v.16).

Verse 17 is a quote from Jeremiah 9:24. Boasting is only proper when we acknowledge the greatness of God and give all the glory to him (v.17-18).

Why is seeking praise and recognition for ourselves bad and sinful?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-6

Paul used an illustration of marriage to describe that the Corinthian church is engaged to Christ. He did not want the Corinthian Christians to become spiritually unfaithful to Christ by following the false teachers and having “an affair” with them. Paul was afraid that they would be deceived and led astray from Christ by the false teachers (v.1-3).

How can we protect our devotion to Christ from being led astray by the devil’s cunning (v.3)?

False teachers essentially have a different gospel, a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different god, though they may use the same terms (v.4).

Are there any contemporary gospels that are different than the true gospel?

The false teachers might have been well trained in Greek oratory skills, while Paul acknowledged that he was “unskilled in speaking.” These false teachers were called “super-apostles.” They seemed to teach and speak with great oratory skills and were able to convince some of the Corinthian Christians to follow them. On the contrary, what was important for Paul was that he taught the word of God clearly to the Corinthian Christians, and that they would follow Christ faithfully (v.5-6).

Studying and understanding the word of God is very important in the Christian life. Comparing teachings or sermons of any speakers with the word of God is necessary, so that we may not be led astray by the devil’s cunning. How do we help one another in this spiritual warfare?

Lesson 11 – Suffering in Missions

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1—11:6 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:7-15

In previous lessons, we have begun to learn how Paul defended his ministry and identity as an apostle of Christ to Corinthian Christians who doubted him. He also tried to enlighten them of the devil's cunning and the false teachers' cunning who tried to corrupt them. He continued to address this matter through chapter 13.

Paul explained that when he preached the gospel to the Corinthians, ministered to them, and planted the Corinthian church, he was financially supported by other churches. He did not want to burden the Corinthians to support his living. Paul ministered to them with a great sacrifice, because of his love for them, that they might know Christ and grow in him. Unlike Paul, the false teachers and apostles took advantage of the Corinthians (v.7-12).

What is a characteristic of false teachers and apostles (v.13)?

Whom do they get that characteristic from and what will be the end of their lives (v.14-15)?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

The false teachers influenced some of the Corinthian Christians demanding that Paul prove his credibility. We can see that Paul was reluctant to boast in himself, but would rather boast in the Lord. He did not want to enter into a boasting contest with the false teachers. However, for the sake of the Corinthian Christians, he would prove his credibility to them. He approached this carefully and humbly, asking them to consider him as a fool when he boasted confidently. Paul admonished them not to see themselves as wise, when in fact they let themselves be enslaved, devoured, and taken advantage of by the false teachers. To do such things to them, Paul said he was "too weak for that" (v.16-21).

How did Paul express his credibility (v.22)?

These false teachers were Jews who believed in Judaism. They believed in the Mosaic law, but rejected Jesus Christ as the promised Savior and did not believe in him. They might have questioned Paul's heritage as a Jew, who was born in Tarsus, in the Roman province of Cilicia (present-day Turkey).

How did Paul suffer as a servant of Christ (v.23-24)?

According to the Jewish law, 40 lashes was the maximum punishment that can be given to a person. To avoid miscounting and breaking the law, they would reduce the whipping by one.

What else did Paul experience as a servant and a missionary of Christ (v.25-27)?

Suffering is normal and is expected in missions. Many missions in restricted-access countries are dangerous. Many Christian missionaries experience suffering in many parts of the world. However, the gospel is worth any prices that God may ask us to pay. Jesus came to suffer and die for us, so that we can have a new life in him. It is expected for us as his followers to suffer for the sake of his gospel. When we suffer in missions, we need to trust in the sovereignty of God. As Jesus trusted in the sovereignty of God while bearing our cross, so we must trust in God as we engage in missions with him.

What other kind of suffering did Paul need to endure as a church planter (v.28)?

Paul worried if the new believers were negatively influenced, or if the new churches experienced problems. Paul had expressed how concerned he was about the problems and conflicts in the Corinthian church. He was concerned for the weak new believers. If they were led astray by false teachers, Paul was angry (v.28-29). Unlike the false teachers who boasted in their self-accomplishments, Paul would boast of the things that show his weaknesses. Paul would boast in the greatness of Christ manifested through Paul's weaknesses, sufferings, and failures. Paul also experienced Christ saving him from the authority at Damascus, Syria, who was influenced by his Jewish opponents to seize him (v.30-33).

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Paul had listed his weaknesses and sufferings to prove his credibility as an apostle of Christ. He added his "boasting" with a special vision of heaven from Christ (v.1).

What special vision and revelation did Paul experience (v.2-5)?

The third heaven (v.2) refers to *the paradise* (v.3), which is the place for God's people to dwell with God. Paul could boast in his special vision and revelation, but he would rather refrain from it, because he did not want people to think about him more than they should. Paul's point was that he wanted people simply to see him as a servant and an apostle of Christ. Paul also expressed that Christ wanted him to be humble and not to boast in the special revelation he had from Christ (v.6-7).

How did Christ keep Paul humble (v.7)?

Paul never explained what the "thorn" was. Several possibilities have been proposed. Regardless, Paul pleaded three times to Christ to remove the thorn (v.8).

What was Christ's answer to Paul and how did Paul conclude his "boasting" (v.9-10)?

In all our sufferings for the sake of the gospel, Christ's power is always at work. His power is made perfect in our weaknesses. Christ will accomplish his purpose to bring people from all nations to him, while at the same time he uses and equips us, teaches us to be humble, sanctifies us, and allows us to see great accomplishment in the gospel ministry—the manifestation of his power through our weaknesses. For when we are weak, then we are strong in him.

Lesson 12 – A Commitment to Shepherd Christ’s People

Read 2 Corinthians 11:7—12:10 for review.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-13

Paul did not want to boast about his credibility as an apostle of Christ, but he did it for the sake of the Corinthian Christians. They should have been able to commend Paul before the false teachers, because he was their church founder. They should have been able to see that Paul was not inferior to the false teachers—“super apostles” (v.11).

What did Paul do among the Corinthian Christians that indicated his true apostleship (v.12)?

Miraculous signs and wonders accompanied the work of apostles of Christ. Paul mentioned this as his credibility because the Corinthian Christians placed too much value on external matters. What Paul actually wanted them to be able to see was his love for them, his suffering for the gospel, and the manifestation of Christ’s power through his weaknesses. Paul had done many things and sacrificed greatly for them, including not asking them to support him financially. Paul made and sold tents to support his living. If he was in need, other churches would support him. He did not want to be a burden for the Corinthian Christians. These were the things about Paul’s work and apostleship that he hoped they were able to understand; however, many of the Corinthian Christians were still spiritually immature (v.12-13).

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-21

How did Paul express his plan to visit the Corinthian Christians again for the third time (v.14-15)?

The false teachers who opposed Paul might have influenced the Corinthian Christians that Paul would “get the better of them by deceit”—not asking money from them directly, but through the people he sent. Paul asked them if any of his representatives took advantage of them and were not acting as faithful servants of God (v.16-18).

What did Paul re-emphasize to them about the purpose of his ministry among them (v.19)?

What was Paul’s worry to see when he visited them again (v.20-21)?

Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

There were many problems in the Corinthian church. Paul admonished that a proper establishment of a case was to have at least two or three witnesses (v.1).

What was Paul’s warning to disobedient church members (v.2)?

How did Paul express that he would not be intimidated, but be courageous in disciplining disobedient church members (v.3-4)?

What did Paul ask them to do to think whether or not they were true Christians (v.5)?

How do you know that you are a true Christians?

Those who knew that they were true Christians would also know that Paul was a true Christian and an apostle of Christ (v.6). In Romans 12:9-21, Paul wrote about marks of a true Christian.

Paul prayed that they would do the right thing as Christians, just as Paul, who *could not do anything against the truth, but only for the truth*—the truth of God including his word (v.7-8).

What did Paul ask God in his prayer for the Corinthian Christians (v.9)?

What did Paul hope not to do when he visited the Corinthian Christians (v.10)?

What was Paul's last advice and blessing for the Corinthian Christians (v.11-14)?

Verse 14 is a Trinitarian benediction. The work and the unity of the Triune God mark the church as a covenant community of believers. As one body, we are united in the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Planting a church and disciplining new believers take a big commitment and sacrifice. Those who undertake such a commitment and sacrifice receive special care and grace from Christ—our Great Shepherd. In a special way, Christ shepherds those who shepherd his people.

As a covenant community of believers, let us shine the light of Christ in this world. Let us live in peace, share one another's burden, and comfort and build up one another. May the glory of Christ be manifested in and through us, and may many people be drawn to him as a result.

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