

2 Corinthians

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Application:

1. What in your environment makes it difficult to be a Christian? What things make it easier?
2. What are some ways you are comforted by God?
3. In what ways do you comfort others?
4. Do you pray for others? Have you asked others to pray for you? Why or why not?

Next Week:
Our Life in Christ
2 Cor. 1:12-24

2 Corinthians is a book that will resonate with Christians today. It illustrates perfectly the suffering that Christians must endure and in doing so, shows us how God will comfort us and strengthen us through that suffering. This letter will help us to understand how ultimate victory in Christ can be found as we cling to our Savior in spite of false attacks, persecutions and worldly temptations.

The God of All Comfort, 1:3-7

As Paul opens this letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of the God of all comfort. In fact this section of Scriptures mentions comfort ten times. The word comfort (Greek; PARACLETE) means to come to the side of another to help closely. Written to those who were suffering for the sake of Christ, Paul mentions how the comfort he has received in Christ allows him to give comfort to other Christians who are struggling.

Many think that when God comforts us, our troubles should go away. But if that were always so, people would turn to God only out of a desire to be relieved of pain and not out of love to him. We must understand that being comforted can also mean receiving strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with our troubles. The more we suffer the more comfort God gives us.

Paul points out that the reason we are comforted is so we can comfort others as well. As people see us endure, they are encouraged to endure struggles themselves. As we endure trials, we are able to feel empathy for others and to know better how to assist them. When our times are difficult, we learn patience and grace that will show through in our character for the rest of our lives. Paul's difficulty encouraged the Corinthians and helps us today as well.

The Struggle of Ministry, 1:8-11

During Paul's missionary journeys, he often felt that he was under danger of death. The pressure he endured included physical trials as well as his great spiritual concern for the persecutions being felt by the new Christians he had just converted to Christ. His way of life caused him to place his hope and trust fully on God.

We are tempted to place our trust in our own skills and abilities when times are good and only place faith in God when we are unable to help ourselves. Paul knew, and we must as well, that victory in life can only be found by faith in Jesus Christ. The prayers of Christians in times of trouble give great comfort and power through the Lord. Paul was able to succeed in his mission because of God's grace and the Corinthians' prayers.

Application:

1. Why was Paul anxious to explain his actions? Why should we be sure that our actions don't give the wrong impression?
2. What are some ways that Christians live in "glass houses?"
3. What are some instances where it is better to be quiet than to speak up? Do you practice this well?
4. Who are some people that you have influenced in their Christian faith? Who has influenced you?

Next Week:
Finding Joy
in Sorrow
2 Cor. 2:1-17

Just as the Corinthians could trust God to keep his promises, they could trust Paul as God's representative to keep his word. He would still visit them, but at a better time after their problems were worked out. Paul recognized that his actions and words mattered. We also should remember that the words we say—even if they are true—have consequences. There are times when we should speak and there are times when we should be quiet. There are times we should be present in a situation and there are times it is best for us not to be around certain people. We have a great responsibility to our brethren not to be a stumbling block to their faith. There are times we can glory in our Christian liberty, yet that freedom may discourage others in their walk of faith. It is true that no man is an island, Romans 14:7.

Following The Example Of Jesus , 1:19-24

Paul reminds the Corinthians that he was serving Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therefore he could not be fickle in his actions because such conduct would reflect poorly on the God he served. Paul mentions two gifts God gives us when we obey the gospel: (1) a seal of ownership to show who our master is, and (2) the Holy Spirit, who guarantees that we belong to him and will receive all his benefits (Ephesians 1:13-14). This great comfort is a down payment that gives us a foretaste of how wonderful heaven will be for us. While these gifts do not impart supernatural abilities that are visible to us today, the wearing of the name of Christ and the assurance of our hope of salvation encourage us in our actions. But with the privilege of belonging to God comes the great responsibility of identifying ourselves as God's servants both in word and actions toward others.

Paul had neglected going to Corinth at that time because the Corinthians had not yet taken care of the problems covered in the Book of 1 Corinthians. Paul knew that his presence might cause more division but that his delaying in coming would continue to give the Corinthians time to make things right. Even though he was an Apostle, Paul considered the Corinthian brethren as fellow workers who stood alongside him in the faith. Therefore he was doing everything he could to encourage them, rather than trying to lord over them with his authority. If that meant delaying a visit to them; that is what he would do.

By putting God first, Paul had to delay seeing some of the people he really loved. Yet he was willing to delay his coming, if it meant the Corinthians would have opportunity to get things in order. Everything we do—every word we say—everywhere we go...should be for the glory of Jesus and the advancement of his people.

Application:

1. Why is there a need of discipline in every aspect of life? Why is it especially needed in the church?
2. Why do you think so many churches neglect to practice discipline toward wayward members?
3. Why is it so important that Christians be a forgiving people? Why is forgiveness so hard to do?
4. What is our reaction to the cross of Christ? How do we show it?

Next Week:
Transformed
Into His Likeness
2 Cor. 3:1-4:6

Forgiving the Repentant Offender, 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the man of 1 Corinthians 5 had repented of his sin. The discipline imposed on him had accomplished its purpose—the salvation of his soul. His hunger for fellowship with fellow Christians had brought him back to the faith. However, the practice of discipline on this man had consequences—the episode had brought great pain to this man and the church.

This man’s repentance had created an occasion where he needed to be forgiven and brought back into Christian fellowship. Among God’s people it is important that love be shown at every opportunity (2:5). But forgiveness can be very difficult for many people (2:5-7). Forgiveness was important in this situation (and in every situation today) because it puts a stop to Satan’s schemes (2:11).

The Fragrance of Christ, 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Paul used the image of the Roman spectacle to explain the world’s reaction to Christ. The Roman spectacle was a public event where a conquering general would parade through the streets of Rome with his vanquished foes behind him. The fallen king and his subjects would be chained behind the army and led to their execution. During this event a great amount of incense would be burned to create a cloudy effect and to fill the area with sweet smells. To the victorious Romans, this created an atmosphere that represented to them home, success and victory. However, to the defeated this smell represented defeat, failure and death. A Roman spectacle had occurred only a few years earlier of Paul’s writing when Claudius had returned from Brittan with its king and a few of its subjects (AD 51).

In Paul’s mind, the cross was similar to the reactions to the Roman spectacle. To those of the faith, it represents eternal life and freedom. Nothing is sweeter than the cross of Christ to the Christian. However, to those who reject the cross, it is little more than a foolish symbol of suspicion and slavery. The change is not in the cross, but in the heart of those who perceive the cross.

Paul’s experience for the cross of Christ was foolishness to some, but he saw its power. Therefore he preached not out of selfishness but through his selflessness. While there were some of his day who preached out of a love of money, prestige or selfishness, Paul was willing to be made a ‘spectacle’ and endure terrible things for the cross.

Today we are called to be present at the spectacle of the cross. Our reaction to the sacrifice of Jesus shows where our faith lies. If we see the crucifixion of the Savior as an inconvenience to our lives, we will be destroyed by our selfishness. As we see the cross’s beauty and change our lives to conform to Jesus’ example, we will experience the amazing victory of Christ. The point of the lesson is that nothing is more important in this world than a soul. The saving of a soul is worth the pain of discipline, the forgiving of someone who hurt us and the experience of being ridiculed for our faith. The joys of heaven will be worth it all.

Application:

1. How do you judge the faithfulness of others? What standard should be employed to determine if someone is a Christian?
2. What is the purpose today of the Old Testament?
3. How do many Christians veil (hide) the light of Christ in their lives?
4. Why do you think that so many people want to add or change the commands of God?

Next Week:
Treasures in Jars
of Clay
2 Cor. 4:7-5:11

Testament vaguely (as through a veil) we see clearly in the New Testament. We see glimpses of Jesus in the Old Testament but see his ministry and sacrifice clearly in the New Testament. We see God's plan for saving mankind somewhat in Old Testament prophecy but see clearly in the New Testament that Jesus is the answer to sin. Therefore those who still claim to be under the Old Law are living life under the veil of confusion and misunderstanding. Those who clearly see the difference in the Old and New Law see the liberty we now have in life. As we follow the New Law we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. A correct understanding of the relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament is a key to understanding the scriptures and their application to us today.

Pertaining to Paul's point in this passage, the Corinthians are being reminded to remember the source of their salvation. The Corinthian's salvation did not rely on letters of recommendation or the pettiness of teachers concerning who was more eloquent or respected. Through the gospel, Paul and his Corinthian brethren had experienced something even greater than Moses had seen. For now God's Spirit lived within them through their obedience to the gospel. Moses had been blessed to stand near to God but now Christians have God living in them! Therefore when people meet us, they ought to see the glory of God shining within us (v. 9-11, 18). We should glow brighter, so to speak, than Moses did after he came down from the mountain. In other words people should be able to see Jesus in us. This is the point that Paul is making in this passage. The Corinthians should be a sort of letter of recommendation to everyone they meet concerning their faith, because their life should look like Jesus. Sadly, many Christians today veil the glory of Christ's light by not living the way they should live, Matthew 5:14-16.

The Light of the Gospel, 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Paul continues by reminding the Corinthians that the gloriousness of the gospel is all that we need. In his missionary work Paul did not have to stoop down to using deceit or craftiness to preach the gospel of Christ. Neither did Paul have to worry about the rejection that he may feel from those who refused to obey the gospel. The gloriousness of the good news of Christ stands on its own merits. It needs no modification or commendation from men. The Corinthians should have known the veracity of Paul and his ministry because they could clearly see Christ in his actions and speech.

This light of Christianity shines in the darkness. While many religious groups point to men who have founded churches or have written creeds, it is Jesus Christ alone who has brought light into this dark world. This light exposes the short comings of Moses' Law and of the ways of men. Exposure to Christ shows us where we need to change and where we need to go. All we need is Christ—nothing more and nothing less.

Application:

1. How are we like a jar of clay? Why did Paul use this analogy?
2. In what ways do you keep the world's influences from crushing your faith?
3. Why is it important for us to speak out concerning our faith even in times of difficulty?
4. Why do you think Paul called our earthly body a tent but our heavenly body a house?

Next Week:
The Ministry of Reconciliation
2 Cor. 5:12-6:10

Eternal Renewal, 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

In verse thirteen, Paul quotes David in Psalm 116. "I believed, therefore I spoke." In that psalm David is recounting how difficult his life had been. Because of his faith, David still continued to speak of his trust in God. Paul reminds us that since Christ has been raised and we will rise from the dead as well, we too can continue to trust in God.

Paul had faced sufferings, trials, and distress as he preached the gospel. But he knew that one day all of that would be over and he would obtain God's rest and rewards. As we face great troubles, it's easy to focus on the pain rather than on our ultimate goal. Just as athletes concentrate on the finish line and ignore their discomfort, we too must focus on the reward for our faith and the joy that lasts forever. No matter what happens to us in this life, we have assurance of the life to come, where all suffering ends and sorrow and pain will flee away.

While our outward body is wasting away, our inner person is renewed daily by our relationship with Christ. No disease, persecution or problem can overcome God's grace if we will only remain faithful! The light affliction we face will seem as nothing as we focus on the exceeding reward we have in Christ Jesus. Instead of focusing on the things that are seen, we must lift up our eyes by faith and see the unseen. That is, we recognize this world is temporary but the things of the spirit are eternal.

It is easy to lose heart and quit. We all have faced problems in our relationships or in our work that have caused us to want to think about laying down our tools and walking away. Rather than giving up when persecutions wore him down, Paul concentrated on focusing on the working of God within him. Don't let fatigue, pain or criticism force you off the job. Renew your commitment to serving Christ each day regardless of the obstacles that stand in your way. Your weaknesses allow the power of Christ to strengthen you moment by moment.

Our Heavenly Dwelling, 2 Corinthians 5:1-11

Paul contrasts our earthly bodies (earthly tent) and our future resurrection bodies (a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands). Paul clearly states that our present bodies make us groan, but when we die we will not be spirits without bodies (be found naked). We will have new bodies that will be perfect for everlasting life.

Paul wrote as he did because the church at Corinth was in the heart of Greek culture, and many believers had difficulty with the concept of bodily resurrection. Greeks did not believe in a bodily resurrection. Most saw the afterlife as something that happened only to the soul, with the real person imprisoned in a physical body. They believed that at death the soul is released—there's no immortality for the body, and the soul enters an eternal state. But the bible teaches that the body and soul are not permanently separated. Paul describes our resurrected bodies in more detail in 1 Corinthians 15:46-58. The Bible does not tell us everything about our resurrected bodies, but we know they will be perfect, without sickness, disease or pain.

Application:

1. Why are carnal people more attracted to teachers with the “bells and whistles?”
2. What are some examples of a wrong motive someone may have who teaches the gospel?
3. In what ways are we all ambassadors of Christ?
4. Why are so many tempted to put off obeying the gospel?

**Next Week:
Be Separate
From The World
2 Cor. 6:11-7:4**

Paul’s Message in Ministry, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

In Christ we are a new creature. Christians are not reformed, reeducated or rehabilitated—we are recreated or born again. Our obedience to the gospel necessitates our putting away of our sinful, selfish habits. Our conversion is not a matter of turning over a new leaf, it is instead a new beginning, a new life. Those who belong to God are now a part of his “army of reconciliation.” In other words, just as Christ gave himself for us, we also give of ourselves to communicate his message of love to those who are lost.

Paul refers to himself as an ambassador. That is, one who is chosen by a head of state to communicate a message directly. That message is that Christ bore our sins on the cross so that we may be made free from sin. Paul, along with the apostles, was a direct ambassador of Christ in that he was inspired by the Spirit and enabled to do the works of an apostle. In a different sense, we are also ambassadors of righteousness in that we proclaim Christ’s message of reconciliation to this dark world lost in sin. While our words and thoughts are not directly inspired by God in the way Paul’s were, we direct people to follow God’s Word, the Bible.

Paul’s Mission in Ministry, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Since Christ has given himself for us, we have an obligation to work with him in communicating the gospel. Those who do not live according to the gospel and teach others have received the message in vain. This task cannot be put off to a more convenient time but should instead be done “today.” Since we have no promise of tomorrow, we live to our highest priorities. Now is the day of salvation. It is terribly sad to contemplate how each second that passes represents thousands in this world’s population of several billion who have passed on to eternity without taking opportunity to obey the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul was certain that he lived in such a way that would not place a discredited. Paul had shown his drive in getting out the good news of the stumbling block in anyone’s path so that his ministry would be gospel by the sufferings he endured (v. 4-5), and by the godly choices he made as well (v. 6-7) Life caused many things to happen that seemed ironic and unexplainable, but still he persisted in faithful living and preaching (v. 8-10). Paul’s ministry lacked some of the sparkle and oratory skill of the false teachers of his day. But the motives from which he preached, the message he conveyed and the never wavering mission of his ministry revealed the authenticity of his work. Today, we need to focus on our motives, our message and our mission as well.

Application:

1. Why had the Corinthians become “close-hearted?” What are some things that can callous us spiritually?
2. What is wrong with yoking together an ox and a donkey? What is the spiritual application of this concept?
3. What are some examples of being unequally yoked with unbelievers?
4. What are some ways you have grown in purity? What does it mean to grow in purity?

Next Week:
Joy Over
Reconciliation
2 Cor. 7:5-16

concerned with unclean foods. Under the Covenant of Christ, we are concerned with unclean thoughts and influences. Since God dwells among us, we must be separate from the world. God is our father and we are his sons and daughters. Therefore we must live up to the family name.

The allusion of being unequally yoked in this case is a classic example of the wisdom found in Scripture. An ox is loyal, strong and eager to please his owner. A donkey on the other hand is independent minded and easily distracted. While it is strong, it requires a different level of care from its owner. While it is possible to plow a field with two donkeys or with two oxen, a mixture of the two will result in frustration for all involved. So it is true with the binding of a Christian and a non-Christian. The joining of the two must, by definition, end in frustration.

While the concept of separateness from the world is plain in this passage, the proper application of this Scripture is more difficult to determine. Just how separate does God expect the Christian to be from this world? Is it wrong for a Christian to marry a pagan? Is it wrong to work for a company that sells alcohol? Is it wrong to belong to an association that endorses ungodly behavior? The answer depends on the degree, significance, purpose and level of self-identification involved in one person’s relationship with another. While many of these questions are matters of personal application, the concept is clear. We must beware of any association that might significantly form an individual’s identity. The Christian cannot be involved in any activity or relationship where his loyalty to God is put in subservience. We must live in the world so that we can provide the salt and light of our influence, but we must be separate so that our hearts are not captured by the allure of paganism.

Pursuing Holiness, 2 Corinthians 7:1-4

Having promises as children of God, we have an obligation to cleanse ourselves from the world’s filthiness. By definition, a Christian is someone who is called out from the world. We have an obligation to grow in our dedication and purity to God. Purifying ourselves is a twofold action: turning away from sin and turning toward God. Christians are to have nothing to do with paganism. We must be more pure in our thoughts and actions year by year and week by week—there must be growth! Paul pleads with the Corinthians that they open up their thoughts and affections toward him. The Apostle desired to be loved by the Corinthians as much as he loved them. This was not some ploy by Paul so that he may gain power over them, instead it was a desire to help the Corinthian brethren to appreciate the value of the message Paul preached and to increase their purity and love for the gospel.

Application:

1. Why do you think the Corinthian's repentance refreshed Paul so much?
2. How would you define the Biblical concept of repentance?
3. Why is repentance necessary for a sinner to be saved? Why is it so hard to do?
4. Why is it important that all Christians live in a way that makes the job of our church leadership easier?

Next Week:
Christian
Generosity
2 Cor. 8

practice it at a later time. He will change whatever needs to be changed so that he will be different.

Notice in verse ten of this passage repentance leads to salvation. It is significant that the apostles always indicated repentance as being "toward" or "unto" salvation. Peter said God had granted the Gentiles repentance "unto life;" In Mark repentance was "unto remission of sins" (1:4); and in Acts 20:21 "both to Jews and to Greeks repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" constituted a part of Paul's message. Of the steps of the plan of salvation-faith, repentance, confession and baptism, all are said to be "unto" or "toward" salvation, God, Christ, remission of sins; but in baptism is it declared that it is "in Christ."

It is good to take a step back and see some basic lessons that can be learned from this passage. First of all, we see that all who sin need to repent. Non-Christians and Christians alike will be lost if they continue to sin without repentance. These Corinthians had been saved earlier but still were in danger of losing their salvation. Otherwise, their repentance would not have been "unto salvation." This fact is devastating for those who believe in "Once Saved; Always Saved." Secondly, sorrow is not repentance. Repentance is an action. It is a change from sinful actions to godly actions. We must show fruits worthy of repentance, Matthew 3:9. Thirdly, in many ways repentance is the keystone of our salvation. While we are joined to Christ with the act of baptism, our belief, confession and baptism are rendered ineffective without true repentance in our hearts.

The Joy of Christian Living, 2 Corinthians 7:13-16

Paul reinforced the changed behavior of the Corinthians by telling them what joy their obedience and reconciliation had brought. He reassured them that they had lived up to all things he had boasted to Titus concerning them. Paul and Titus were very pleased concerning the Corinthians' respect towards God and their Christian leaders.

It's clear in this passage how the actions of members of the church contribute to the wellbeing and happiness of the church leaders. Just as the Corinthian's change from sinfulness to repentance refreshed Paul and Titus so also each of us as members of a local congregation have an obligation to make the work of our leaders easier, Hebrews 13:17. Instead of creating problems due to our selfishness and opinions, we should strive to keep the unity of the church in peace. We need to live godly and peacefully so that the leaders of the church can focus on important things like evangelism, caring for the hurting and prayer. Our righteous living not only helps the church, it also pleases God.

Application:

1. Why do you think so many people are uncomfortable when we discuss giving at church?
2. Why did Paul compare the Corinthian's giving to the Macedonian's giving?
3. Communism is a social system where money is taken from the rich and redistributed to the poor. How is Christianity different than that?
4. Why is it important that Christian leaders be clear is what is done with church money?

Next Week:
Christian Giving
2 Cor. 9

certain percentage or amount shows only the willingness to begrudgingly obey a command. To go beyond in our giving shows a true level of thankfulness and sincerity in our religion. Paul uses the example of Jesus to remind us what true spiritual giving looks like. Jesus gave up the riches of heaven in order to supply our need. As he lived in poverty on this earth, he gave us an example of true Christian sacrifice.

Christianity is not a form of communism where the rich are robbed in order to provide to the poor. Rather it is each person helping those who are in need, in recognition that this is the lifestyle to which Jesus calls us and that we ourselves may one day be in need. The poor are not to always expect a handout from the rich Christian. Even the poor are commanded to work and to give, 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

These Corinthians seemed to have started well in their giving but had begun to slack off in it. The reason for this is the same reason so many Christians today don't give as they should—they did not give properly because of worldliness. When trouble strikes a congregation of the Lord's church, oftentimes the first clue is in the declining offering. The Corinthians were not told a percentage or an amount they were to give to God in order to be pleasing to him. The intention and willingness to give from the heart was far more important, Mark 12:43-44. There is no room in the kingdom for a selfish Christian. In verse fifteen, Paul quotes from Exodus 16:18 where those who gathered manna in the wilderness learned the importance of possessions. Everyone there had opportunity to get enough to eat, but those who hoarded more than they needed were soon confronted with vile and rotten food. When we hoard possessions on this earth, we will find it difficult to present a clean heart to God.

Accountability, 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Paul fully explains who will take the monetary gift from the Corinthians to the church in Jerusalem. He lists Titus, Luke, himself and probably another brother who had been chosen by the Corinthians themselves. As an apostle, Paul probably could have been trusted to handle the transport of the money by himself. But he recognized that persons in authority need to live above all questionable activities. As Christians we must live in a spirit of openness and above reproach. There is no area of human behavior more likely to give occasion of slander than the handling of public funds. For Paul (and church leaders today) to place themselves above reproach in the manner is wise and necessary in matters of church business. Both our spirit of giving and our manner of collecting need to be done in a way that pleases God with the sincerity and clarity of our heart. God is glorified when we give the right way.

Application:

1. Does having a car wash for missions reflect the pattern for giving we have in the Bible? Why or why not?
2. How does the farmer principle (You reap what you sow) apply to our giving?
3. What is the “Philanthropist’s Epitaph” and what does it mean?
4. What are some reasons why we should give God a first fruit offering?

**Next Week:
Paul’s Ministry
2 Cor. 10 & 11**

We must understand that God enriches us so that we can give. His grace abounds in us and we are given sufficiency so that we can return to him a portion of our blessings. As Matthew 6:33 reminds us, when we seek the Lord and his kingdom first, everything else will take care of itself. In verse nine we see one of Paul’s favorite Old Testament quotations (it appears twelve times in Romans, twice in 1 Corinthians and twice in 2 Corinthians). From Psalm 112:9, it’s been called the philanthropist’s epitaph. “He disperses abroad, he gives to the poor and his righteousness lasts forever.” Those who give will be considered righteous for their good actions.

Why We Should Give, 2 Corinthians 9:12-15

God is deeply concerned about how we give. It is not enough to turn over a portion of our wealth to holy uses. Our giving must be done in a way and with an attitude that pleases God. Why should the Christian give freely to the church? First of all, we give because it supplies for the needs of the saints. The church is the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9) and is here on earth to do the work of God. Spending money on our own selfish desires while neglecting the work of the church is a sorry state for the Christian to be in. Secondly, the Christian gives because it shows our thanks to God. God owns the world and everything in it, Psalm 50:10-12. God has entrusted us with some of the possessions of this earth so that we can show our appreciation to him as we give freely. Thirdly, our giving is a proof of our faith. We all belong to God and our money is really God’s money, 1 Chronicles 29:14. As stewards of God’s creation, we are accountable for how we handle it. Ananias and Sapphira were rejected by God because of their selfishness in giving while the poor widow was acceptable to God due to her faith. Notice that these two were not judged on the amount they gave, but on the attitude with which they gave. Our giving and attitude are a measure of the faith we have in God. Fourth, our giving causes others to be thankful for us. People show great love toward those who help them when they are in need. We must remember that the day may very well come when we are ourselves in need. The practical application of the Corinthian’s faith led them to help their brethren. Fifth, our giving is a reflection of Christ’s gift to us. Christ did not have to sacrifice his place in heaven and die on the cross. He willingly gave himself for us. When we are true disciples we will look like Jesus in our giving as well. It is inconsistent to receive Christ’s sacrifice for us and then turn away from those in need. When we do not place a first fruit offering in the collection plate, we show that we do not fully understand the faith to which we have been called in Jesus.

Application:

1. Why do you think some people are more attracted to “show time religion” instead of the simple gospel?
2. Why do you think it is so important for the church to remain pure from the teachings of man?
3. Why do you think the Corinthians were attracted to these eloquent false teachers instead of being attracted to Paul? What does that say of our judging of preachers today?
4. Why do you think Paul was willing to endure so much for the sake of Christ? How does our heart relate to his in service?

Next Week:
**Paul’s Thorn in
the Flesh**
2 Corinthians 12

than God. Paul desired to help the church recognize the beauty of the simple gospel. While a carnal mind may be swayed by eloquence and appearance, Paul desired to help these Corinthians develop a spiritual mindset that would hunger instead after the words of God.

While these false teachers might denigrate Paul’s abilities and power, Paul could freely claim that he was an eminent apostle, 11:5. Paul had the same authority as Peter, John or any of the twelve. Paul’s God given role of authority allowed him to rule and tell the brethren what to do. Yet because of his humility, he had not asserted that authority with the Corinthians. Instead he was gentle with them so that they could grow. In fact Paul had accepted support from the brethren in Macedonia so that the Corinthians (who were much wealthier by the way) could hear the gospel freely without charge. Paul did not want to be a burden in any way on the Corinthian church. Yet now they were turning their back on the apostle who had sacrificed so much for them. Instead of being thankful for Paul’s sacrifice they were looking for a “bigger name” to lead them so that their reputation may be enhanced.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that his conduct was much different than the way these false teachers had acted. These selfish men were always boasting of themselves. They claimed a high level of righteousness but were instead using the Corinthian’s faith for selfish gain. However, Paul reminded them that their end was coming and in that end all of their unrighteous deeds would be exposed. The Corinthians needed to come back to the simple beauty of the gospel.

Paul’s Defense of the Church, 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Paul could line up his deeds for the sake of Christ with anyone. While these false teachers could brag on their eloquence or their appearance, Paul rested on his recent history to display his devotion for Christ. While his humility caused him to be hesitant in doing so, Paul mentioned how he was of pure Jewish stock, how he outworked everyone and suffered more greatly than anyone else. He had been beaten by the Jews and the Romans. He had endured shipwrecks, prison, robberies and false brethren. Absolutely no one could compare biographies of suffering with him. Yet on top of all these things, Paul says his daily concern was for the churches, 11:28. No one out worked Paul.

While these false teachers had tried to swoop in behind Paul and get selfish gains from his work, Paul continually showed his love and devotion for the people of God. Paul was willing to sacrifice his comfort, reputation and even his life for the church. His concern was for these young Christians who needed guidance to grow in the faith.

Application:

1. Why do you think there is a temptation for us to focus on personal testimonies rather than plain gospel preaching?
2. What do the Scriptures teach about what paradise looks and feels like?
3. What are some “thorns in the flesh” you deal with today?
4. How do you deal with those who misread your intentions? What can we do to show that our intentions are pure when we serve God?

Next Week:
A Heart For
Ministry
2 Corinthians 13

Paul’s Thorn In The Flesh, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

To keep Paul from becoming conceited by his experience in the third heaven, Paul was given a thorn in the flesh that greatly humbled him. We do not know what this thorn was. Many people today (and those in early church history) believe that it was very poor eyesight (Galatians 4:13-15). Others believe it may have been some form of disfigurement, malaria, epilepsy or a host of other ailments. This thorn was a hindrance to Paul’s ministry. Perhaps we are not told the specific nature of the thorn so that we can more closely relate to Paul’s struggle. Each of us in a way has our own thorn in the flesh. Paul prayed three times for his ailment to be removed. But God had a better solution for him. Human weakness provides the ideal opportunity for the display of divine power. Paul had to learn that God’s grace was sufficient. Paul was a very self-sufficient man, so this thorn kept him humble and reminded him of his constant need for contact with God and benefited others around him as they saw God at work in his life. That is why Paul reveled in the insults, sufferings and persecutions that he endured for the sake of the gospel. For in his weakness, the power of God was visible.

Paul’s Concern For Them, 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Paul’s humility and great love for the Corinthians had led him to treat the Corinthian brethren in a kind and noble way. He had the power of an apostle which was evident in the signs and miracles that he could do. The only thing that Paul had not required of the Corinthians was a salary as their preacher. Now these false teachers, who unlike Paul were eager for material gain, were accusing Paul of being underhanded and selfish. They claimed that there must be some way that Paul was gaining materially from them. Somehow by not asking for money personally, the apostle was being accused of stealing from them! Paul reminded them that he was humble and selfless. His teachings and work had been open before them. His greatest fear for the Corinthians was that the gospel had not taken root in their lives. He was fearful that upon his return he would find them looking like the culture around them, engaging in jealousies, factions and arrogance in the church. He was also afraid that the brethren would not have repented from the impurity and sexual sin that had been tolerated earlier. Paul had a servant’s heart in his work with the church at Corinth. While he deserved great honor and appreciation from the Corinthians, he was willing to continue to work with them through their thanklessness and immaturity. The reason Paul was able to do this was his heavenly perspective. He recognized that glory must go to God and not to himself.

Application:

1. Why do you think Paul had so much patience with the Corinthians? Are we patient enough? Are we too patient?
2. How can we test ourselves to see if we are in the faith? What standard do we test ourselves against?
3. How would you explain the command to “greet one another with a holy kiss” to someone today?
4. What are three lessons you learned from our study of 2 Corinthians? How can you apply these lessons to your life?

4) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

This command has caused great confusion in the church over the centuries. Some believe that it is a specific command that must be followed. Those who so believe, however, are inconsistent in the way they carry out this command. Notice that this was a cultural practice of the day, not a specific Christian practice that was instituted in the church, Luke 7:45, Mark 14:44. Notice also where this command for a holy kiss occurs in the book. Each time the holy kiss is mentioned, it is at the conclusion of the book: Romans 15:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, 1 Peter 5:14. The placement of the command shows that the emphasis is on the ‘holiness’ of the kiss rather than the actual application of the kiss. In fact, that is what Paul is doing here. He is taking an existing tradition of kissing and reminding the brethren to keep it holy. In our culture it might be akin to hugging. It is good to hug one another in church, but great care needs to be taken so that the practice does not look sensuous or lead to sin. Paul is commanding the Corinthians to show holy and continual love to one another. Paul then closes the book with “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

An Overview of Second Corinthians

Second Corinthians has three major themes: Paul’s love for the brethren, Paul’s true apostleship and the importance of giving.

Chapter One: The God of All Comfort

Chapter Two: Discipline Works (1 Corinthians 5)

Chapter Three: We Are Epistles of Christ, Old Law Abolished

Chapter Four: The Gospel, In Earthen Vessels, Is Not Hidden

Chapter Five: Walking By Faith, Temporally And Eternally

Chapter Six: Do Not Be Unequally Yoked, Purity Of Life

Chapter Seven: Their Reaction To The First Letter

Chapter Eight: The Importance Of Giving

Chapter Nine: God Loves A Cheerful Giver

Chapter Ten: The Folly Of Comparing Ourselves

Chapter Eleven: Paul’s Sufferings For The Cause

Chapter Twelve: Paul Was A True Apostle

Chapter Thirteen: Examine Yourselves