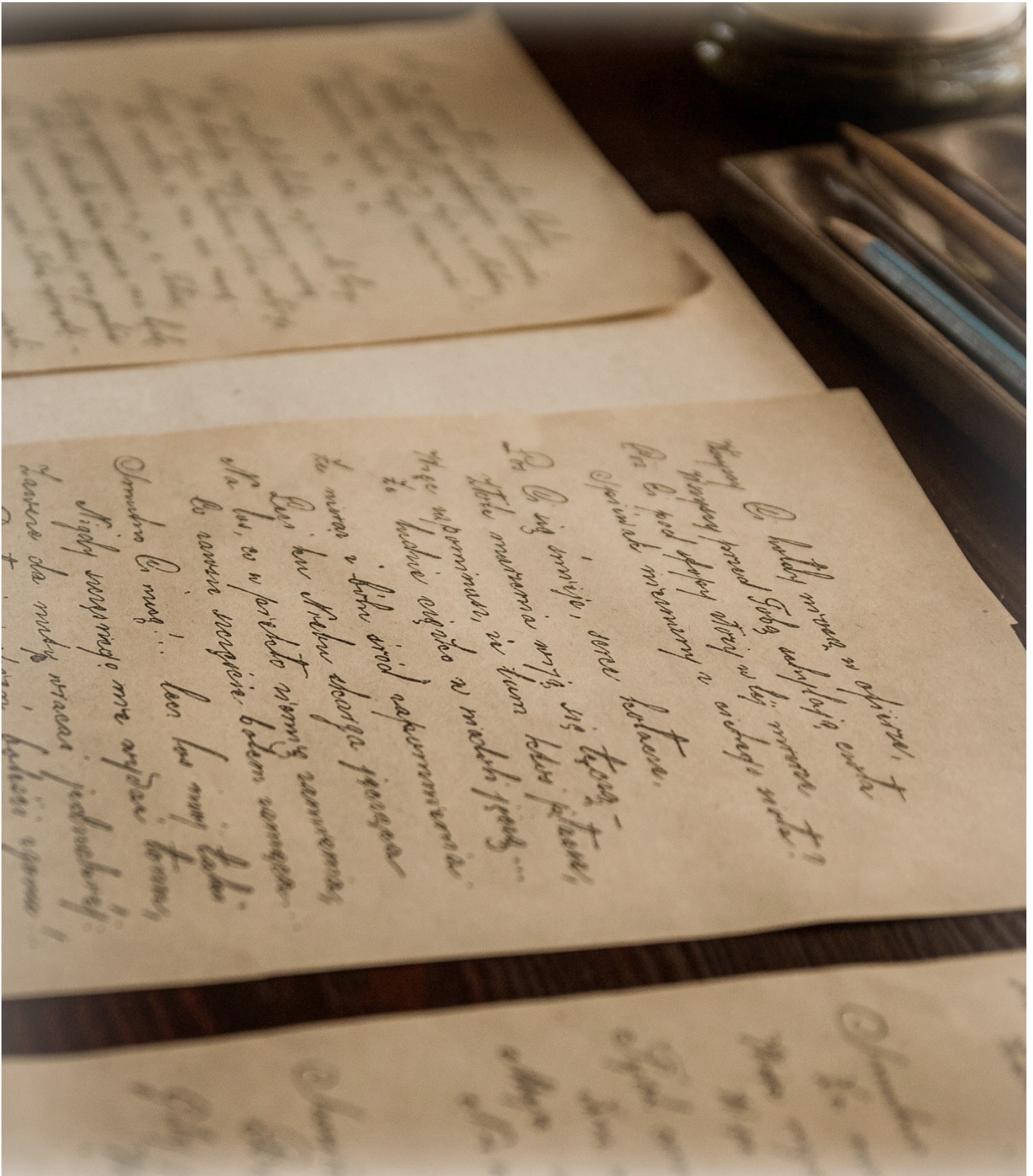


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Christian Education Programme. Studies on Second Corinthians.

Name:

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Lesson 01

– Overview of 2 Corinthians: The Letter of an Open Heart

Objectives:

To appreciate what the epistle of 2 Corinthians is broadly about.

To be encouraged in the walk, work, and witness for God as an assembly AND as an individual.

Text:

2 Corinthians

See also:

1 Corinthians

Acts 18:1-18

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 6:11 (ESV)

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open.

Introduction

The Author

That Paul is the author of the letter is starkly obvious and virtually denied by no one. An extremely personal letter with typical Pauline references and digressions.

The City

Corinth was a centrally important city in the Province of Achaia in Greece (see **Figure 1**).

a. City of Commerce

This city of commerce was situated on a narrow strip of land between the Adriatic and Aegean Seas with two ports, Lechaeon on the northwest and Cenchrea on the east. A tramway between the two allowed ships to be moved across, thus avoiding & shortening the dangerous voyage around the south of Greece. Its trading significance gave it a large, mixed population of Jews, Greeks and Orientals (1 Cor. 10:32), between 100,000 and 700,000.

b. City of Culture

It was also a city of culture, with a large stadium for the biannual



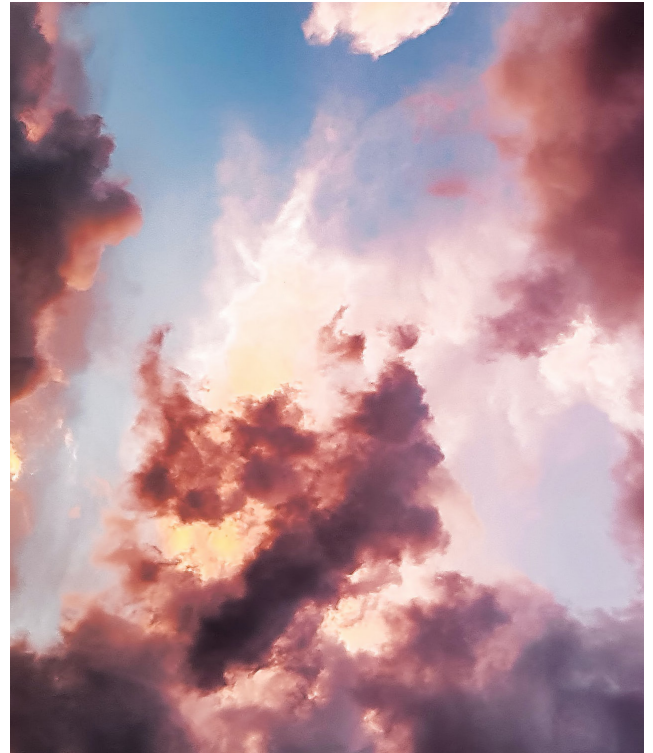
Figure 1: Map of Ancient Greece (taken from <https://bibleatlas.org/corinth.htm>)

Isthmian Games (1 Cor. 9:24-27) and took considerable pride in its learning and sophistication. (1 Cor. 1:20-23)

c. City of Corruption

Yet it was a city of corruption. The Temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love) supposedly housed 1,000 prostitutes, and Aristophanes coined the verb 'to corinthianise' to describe grossly immoral behaviour.

*If ever a Corinthian was shown on the stage
in a Greek play, he was shown drunk'*
- William Barclay



Thus, the believers in Corinth were saved from an immoral background (1 Cor. 6:9-11), lived in a culture where idol feasts were common (1 Cor. 10), and some of whom had even been victims of demonic possession (1 Cor. 12:2).

Corinth was the “Sin City of Greece.” Paul’s letter to the Romans was written from here, and Rom. 1:18-32 is a graphic and devastating description of the depths to which man & woman without God have fallen.

The Date

Written around AD 55-56. Probably written less than a year after 1 Corinthians.

Overview

Addressee

The saints in Corinth and Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1) fell into two distinct groups:

a. The MAJORITY (‘the many’, 2 Cor. 2:6) who valued Paul and respected his authority (2 Cor. 1:7, 11-14; 2:6; 5:11-12; 7:4, 7, 11, 13-16)

b. The MINORITY (‘some’, 2 Cor. 10:2) who opposed the apostle (2 Cor. 10:2, 10,12; 11:4, 13-15; 12:21; 13:2)

Background

Paul had various reports sent to him in which he heard about the dissension and errors in the assembly at Corinth resulting from rebellion against his apostolic authority. See **Figure 2** for the possible sequence of events leading to the letter of 2 Corinthians.

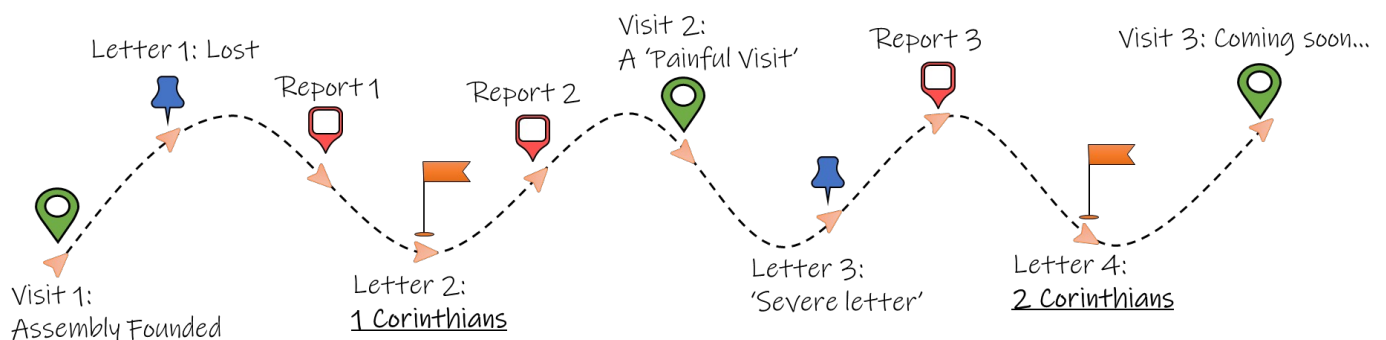


Figure 2: Timeline of Events

Paul had a deep care for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:3; 11:28), which can be seen in his very prolonged dealings with them. It is hard to tease out the precise details, but the possible sequence of events, as shown in **Figure 2**, can be further explained as follows:

Visit 1: The assembly at Corinth is founded (Acts 18); Paul departs for Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19)

Letter 1: A lost letter urging separation from evil (1 Cor. 5:9)

Report 1: Paul received reports about divisions in the Church (1 Cor. 1:11), along with requests for specific teaching to certain questions (1 Cor. 7:1; 16:17)

Letter 2: 1st Corinthians. Paul's response to the reports.

Timothy and Erastus are sent to Corinth (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10)

Report 2: More reports come to Paul telling of the crisis at Corinth, with a party in the assembly disputing Paul's authority (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:13-15)

Visit 2: A painful visit (2 Cor. 2:1) – a hasty trip to Corinth to deal with the trouble [the next visit is the 3rd – 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1]

Letter 3: A lost, severe letter

written with 'many tears' (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:8-12) to address the personal attacks on Paul

Report 3: More reports come to Paul, from Titus, that the worst was over (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:4-16)

Letter 4: 2nd Corinthians. Combines thankfulness (2 Cor. 1:7; 9:1-2) and warning (2 Cor. 12:20-13:10) to prepare the assembly for Paul's visit

Visit 3: The prospective visit (2 Cor. 13:1-3)

Construction

There are three main sections in the letter. Please see **Figure 3** for the breakdown.

'We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open' (6:11. ESV)

EXPLANATION of Paul's Gospel Ministry			EXHORTATION to Generosity		VINDICATION of Paul's Apostolic Authority		
Ch 1:1-2	Ch 1:3-2:13	Ch 2:14-7:16	Ch 8	Ch 9	Ch 10:1-12:13	Ch 12:14-13:10	Ch 13:11-14
Prologue	Purpose in problems (1:3-11) Design in delay (1:12-24) Rebuke of rebellion (2:1-13)	The Christian servant is... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a fragrance of Christ (2:15) a minister of the new covenant (3:6) a slave for Jesus' sake (4:5) ambitious to please God (5:9) an ambassador for Christ (5:20) a minister of God (6:4) 	Christ the <u>model</u> <i>"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (8:9)</i> <i>"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (9:15)</i>	Christ the <u>motive</u>	Paul's <u>authority</u> (10:8), <u>labour</u> (10:15-16), <u>message</u> (11:4), <u>conduct</u> (11:7), <u>sufferings</u> (11:23), <u>experiences</u> (12:1), <u>miracles</u> (12:12) <i>"Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?" (10:7)</i> <i>"For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles" (11:5)</i> <i>"In nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles" (12:11)</i>	Paul's third visit "This will be the third time I am coming to you" (13:1) ↓ Would Paul come in gladness or sadness , using sharpness (13:10)?	Epilogue
Past Misunderstandings			Present Ministry		Prospective Visit		
The servant and his service: <i>motives, method, ministry</i>			The servant and the saints		The servant and the scoundrels: <i>false apostles</i>		

Figure 3: Chart of 2 Corinthians

i. **Chapter 1 to 7** is all about Paul's service – the consolation of Christian service.

ii. **Chapter 8 to 9** is about Paul's plan (mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:1-4) to collect an offering for the poor Judean saints – an exhortation for Christian giving.

iii. **Chapter 10 to 13** is about Paul's genuine apostolic authority and his intended 3rd visit.

Scattered throughout the letter, then hugely focused on the final few chapters (10-13), are glimpses of the various attacks on Paul. There were attacks on: **his person** (10:1, 10; 11:6) [*unimpressive*], **his teaching** (10:12-18) [*unspectacular*], **his character** (1:15-17; 12:16-19) [*unreliable*]. Paul was also accused of many things and had to answer certain aspects of these accusations, as written in the letter. Some are listed as follows:

Fickleness (1:17, 18, 23)	Pride (5:12)	Unsophisticated speech (10:10; 11:6)	Living by the standards of the world (10:2)	Unsound Mind (5:13; 11:16-19; 12:6)	Illegitimate apostleship (11:5; 12:12)
Boastfulness (10:8)	Undignified conduct in working to support himself (11:7)	Obscurity (4:3)	Dishonesty (7:2; 12:16-19)	Embezzlement (8:20-23)	Weakness (10:1, 10)

Notice the following distinctives in the letter:

a) Repetition of words.

- Comfort/ Consolation [*paraklesis, parakaleo*] – 29x
- Minister/ Ministry [*diakonia/diakoneo/diakonos*] – 20x
- Glory [*doxa*] – 19x
- Grace/ gift [*charis*] – 18x
- Affliction/ suffering [*thlipsis, synoche, pathema*] – 15x
- Sorrow [*humas*] – 12x
- Flesh [*sarx/sarkinos*] – 12x
- Commend [*sunistao/sustatikos*] – 11x
- Gospel [*evangelion*] – 8x



b) Contrasts of thoughts.

Chapter	Contrasting themes
1	Comforting vs. Suffering
2	Punished offender vs. Triumph in Christ
3	Old Covenant vs. New Covenant
4	Affliction vs. Glory
5	Earthly house vs. Heavenly home
6	Recipients of grace vs. Living out holiness
7	Sorrow in repentance vs. Joy in confidence
8	Poverty vs. Riches
9	Sowing sparingly vs. Giving abundantly
10	Walking in the flesh vs. Warring in the Spirit
11	Humility in service vs. Boasting in infirmities
12	Weak vs. Strong
13	Coming of Paul vs. Coming of Christ

c) Development of ideas

Truths that Paul has brought out in 1st Corinthians are developed from different angles in 2nd Corinthians. As a result, doctrine in 1st Corinthians becomes practically applicable in 2nd Corinthians. See **Figure 4**.

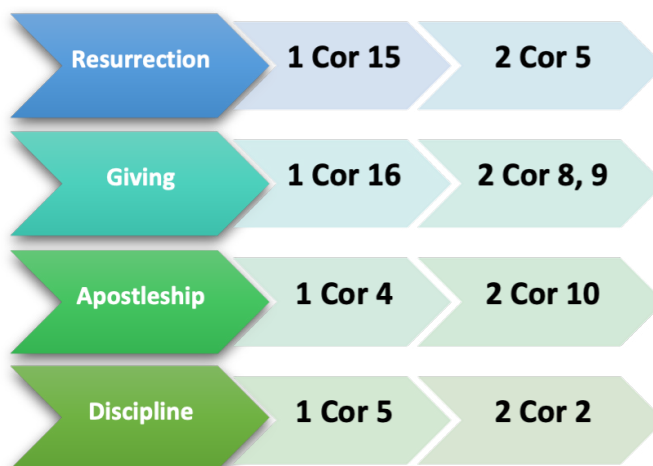


Figure 4: Some Themes in both 1 & 2 Corinthians

Quotes for Consideration

“In the first epistle (1 Cor), Paul is seen primarily as a teacher, but in the Second he occupies the role of a pastor. If you listen carefully, you will hear the heartbeat of one who really loved the people of God and gave himself for their welfare.”

W. Macdonald

“As in the book of Numbers we have the camp and the Levites, so in these two epistles instruction is given regarding the church and its order, and the minister and his ministry. He is spoken of as the minister of the new covenant, minister of God, and of Christ.”

J. M. Davies

“the most personal and least doctrinal of Paul’s epistles”.

R. Gromacki on the features of 2 Corinthians

“The Epistle discloses the touching state of the great apostle at this time. It was one of physical weakness, weariness, and pain. But his spiritual burdens were greater. These were two kinds – solicitude for the maintenance of the churches in grace as against the law-teachers, and anguish of heart over the distrust felt toward him by Jews and Jewish Christians. The chilling doctrines of the legalizers were accompanied by detraction, and by denial of his apostleship.”

Scofield Reference Bible

Discussion Questions

1. List down certain attributes, characteristics and attitudes of Paul and the believers in Corinth.

(Could split the group up to discover certain passages and share accordingly)

- a. What are some lessons we can learn from Paul's example?
- b. What are some lessons we can learn from the Corinthian believers?
- c. How are we to apply them to ourselves?

2. Consider listing down further themes and distinctives in the epistle.

- a. Take some time to highlight repeated words in the passages.
- b. If possible, write down a central theme of the passage for every chapter going forward in this study weekly.

3. As we embark on this study in 2nd Corinthians, list down the following:

[review at the end]

- a. One lesson to learn by the end of the study
- b. One application to do at the end of the study (this is a very practical book!)
- c. One verse to memorize by the end of the study

4. 2nd Corinthians has been chosen as the book to study in light of our assembly's 2022 theme to "**be encouraged**", especially as an assembly. So, take some time to discuss with your group how your CEP group can do something in the coming weeks to be an encouragement to others in the assembly.

5. Consider keeping a notebook or online journal to write down notes, thanksgivings, and prayer pointers weekly as you share and learn from one another within the CEP group. "**Comfort one another.**"

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D. for his notes and charts. |

Lesson 02

– Abounding Comfort

Objectives:

To know that all mercies come from the Father, and He is the source of all comfort.

To see that God works amid our suffering and trials for the comfort of His people.

To recognize the duty we have toward one another in the faith, that is, to comfort and console our brethren

Text:

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

See also:

Hebrews 4:16

Memory verses:

2 Cor. 1:3-5 (KJV)

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Lesson

Introduction to the Epistle

This second letter was written shortly after the first epistle to the Corinthian Church and was primarily meant for them and all the saints in Achaia. The church there had been affected (in a godly manner) by the first letter, and A. McShane notes that they were not just “humbled” by those words but also left in need of “comfort and cheer from their devoted father in the faith.” However, as is now, so was it then that not all were affected in that manner: in Chapter 12 vs. 20-21, we also see that stern warnings were needed for some believers (again).

This is a Pauline epistle, and the time of writing can be placed in the latter half of AD 57 (1st Corinthians having been completed a few months prior). The impetus for writing this second letter was a report from Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7), which report filled the apostle with gladness.

Salutation (vs.1-2)

The apostle names (some) of those who join with him in greeting the Church and sets out his position, i.e., that he is an apostle and that this was by “the will of God.” We should also note that he does not start with this claim in all his letters; it seems there were specific issues in this Church that were closely linked with his authority, and Paul would later have to defend this claim (in the closing chapters).

Source of comfort (vs.3)

The next verse sets the tone for the remainder of the portion from verses 3 to 11. Before we delve deeper into how we are comforted and how to comfort others, we need to know that ultimately, it is God’s mercies and comfort at work. He is the fount and source, and we are but vessels and channels of His Comfort (as the remaining verses will show). His mercies and help are also given in a timely manner: Hebrews 4:16.



Experience of His comfort (vs.4-5)

Verse 4 reminds us that God who draws alongside us and comforts us, as He did for the apostle, so that he, in turn, can comfort others. Doubtless, Paul faced many difficulties and trials, but his experience was that God's provision was always enough. If the sufferings abounded, then the consolations, and his cup would always run over: Psalm 23:5.

The child of God would also be reminded that the sufferings Paul speaks of here are "of Christ." There are moments when we do suffer, but they may not be in accordance with His Will.

The outworking of comfort (vs.6-7)

The apostle recognises that God had a plan for all that he goes through, and it was for His people, i.e., that the Corinthians would benefit, whether through his sufferings or comfort. It could also be that part of why the Corinthians needed comfort then was because of the chastisement in the first epistle. Whatever it may be, both they and the apostle needed comfort. In verse 7, Paul does not distinguish himself from them but tells and reassures them that they are partakers of the sufferings and will also be of the consolation: there is a commonality between him and them.

The recount of the afflictions (vs.8-11)

Here, Paul reminds them of what happened in Asia to him and those with him. It seems that the Church was aware, so there was no need to recount or detail. Paul later says that they also helped by praying and with their gift (vs. 11). However, it does appear that the believers were not told how serious it was, to the extent that Paul and his companions even despaired of life. So great was the tribulation and trouble that Paul likens it to resurrection. Given how tough Paul was and his faith, it is difficult to imagine what could have happened. However, we know that God preserved him through all that, and He will continue to preserve us. We also see how having been brought to the brink, they were made to trust in God and not in themselves. It is also comforting to know that for all that they had done and gone through, the prayers of the Corinthian Church were heard and accepted by God.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it was needful for Paul to state his position as an apostle by God's will at the beginning of the chapter? In the Church at work today, do titles, positions, or ranks (elders, deacons, CEP leaders) help when it comes to admonishing or correcting the saints?

2. Are there still apostles today?
Can someone be an apostle by God's will?

3. How did the Lord comfort those sad, grieving, or distressed? What can we learn from His example?

4. When was a time or times
when you were comforted by God?

Life Application

1. What are some of the challenges you might or have faced when attempting to comfort others who are going through some difficult times?

2. Some may say that there is no point in comforting those who refuse to help themselves. If we meet someone who seems intent to keep "wallowing in sorrow," what should our response be?

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Lesson 03

– The Forgiveness of the Saints

Objectives:

To know how to restore those who have fallen and practice forgiveness in the Church.

To have a heart of tender mercy and compassion one for another.

Text:

2 Corinthians 1:12 - 2:17

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 2:10 (KJV)

To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Lesson

The confidence of the apostle (1:12-14)

In this next portion, Paul reminds the readers at Corinth that he had always acted in good faith and with a clear conscience in all his dealings with them. It seems the apostle had to write this as the Church was disappointed that Paul could not come to them as he earlier mentioned (see 1 Cor. 16: 5-6 and 2 Cor. 1:15-16). It is also important in our relationships one with another and in our service to Him that we, as God's children, can say that our consciences are clear and do not condemn us. Rom 2:15 tells us that conscience can be a "voice" outside of direct revelation and convict men. Paul was also telling the believers there that they could mutually rejoice in each other. This also had the effect of assurance, i.e., that his inability to visit them was not an indictment of their spirituality.

Purpose of the visit and reasons for the delay (1:15-24)

In vs. 15-16, Paul talks again of the original plan to visit. By this time, it was clear that that plan was not carried out, and the apostle had to say that it was not because he said it flippantly or that it was made in the flesh (vs. 17). There would have been some who would accuse Paul of these things, but interestingly, Paul explains and pins his conduct on how God works by saying that as God is true, so was he and his plans sincere.

Of all the reminders we can take from this, the believer is to recall that his or her words ought to be few and seasoned with salt (Eccl. 5:2; Col 4:6). We must let our yes be yes, and no be no (Matt. 5:37). Further, we are also to note that our character ought to mirror His, so that as He is in this world, so are we to be (1 John 4:17).

We are then told why the visit did not take place. In vs. 23, Paul states that it was to spare them. This seems to be speaking of the judgment he would have to inflict upon the unrepentant should he have visited them. It could be that the Corinthian Church had not fully purged themselves yet (2 Cor. 7:11), and this delay or change in plans allowed for those in that state to turn around and avoid the rod. It also seemed that not all in the Church were of the same mind when it came to the issue of discipline (of an errant believer), and this may be another reason why Paul deemed it best not to travel to them then.

The heart of the apostle (2:1-4)

Paul continues to elaborate on why the plans had to change, that it was to give those who needed time a chance to repent lest he had to wield the apostolic rod of discipline - which he could not dispense with at will - no matter his love and regard for the believers there. On top of that, such a visit would also cause them sorrow, and this, in turn, would grieve the apostle's own heart. He lays bare his heart in writing 2nd Corinthians; it was not to grieve them (though they should be), but if they read the letter for what it was, the apostle's love for them would be evident throughout.



The sinner to be restored (2:5-11)

We now come to the heart of chapter 2, which deals with that believer who was in everyone's mind (1 Cor. 5). Note how Paul deals with this matter.

First, there was no need to recount what was done. We likewise do well also to avoid needless and excessive speaking when it comes to the mistakes of others.

Next, Paul has the restoration of this person to fellowship in his heart. Some who hold the view that the man so mentioned in 1 Cor. 5 had died, drawing support from the phrase "destruction of the flesh" in vs. 5 of that chapter (and by implication, this would mean that whomever Paul is referring to here is another believer with another offence). Yet the better view may be that the death of the person in 1 Cor. 5 would have resulted if not for the discipline imposed by the Church. Also, 1 Cor. 5:5 says that he was delivered "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" and did not necessarily imply death. When a brother or sister strays or falls, our immediate thoughts ought to be the purging and cleansing of the assembly and restoring those who have fallen.

Third, the apostle was concerned that that brother was not made to suffer excessively (vs. 6) and brought to the brink of breakdown and despair (vs. 7).

Fourth, Paul seems to be well aware of the mood of the assembly and how they viewed that man. They had taken the apostle's letter to heart and inflicted punishment (vs. 6), and from there, they had not forgiven him nor comforted him. Could this have been a case where the assembly there had "gone too far" in its zeal to purge and cleanse itself, such that they lost sight of the fact this was also a child of God who had, in a moment of folly, done something

heinous? Paul reminds them to “confirm” their love for such a one. There is a warning here to have all things in balance; where there is no discipline, sin thrives, but Satan obtains a foothold where there is justice without mercy and forgiveness.

The unrest in spirit (2:12-13)

We are not told why the apostle felt this way, i.e., that he had no rest in his spirit in the face of the door that was opened to him. However, vs. 13 indicates that it was closely linked to Paul not being able to find or meet up with Titus, who was to bring him updates on the Corinthians. It could be that having to write the first letter to the Church was something that deeply grieved his heart (see 2:4), and Paul was much affected by wondering how the assembly was doing, so much so that when he could not see Titus and receive his report, this caused much unrest.

The praise of God (2:14-17)

We are not immediately told what causes the apostle to break into praise in these last three verses, and in fact, they seem a bit out of sync with the tone of the preceding passages. The answer will be more apparent in the later chapters. Still, for now, it can be seen and taken that while Paul had no rest in his spirit, the key thing was that despite man’s weaknesses, God causes us to triumph and will work out His Will through us in all places (vs. 14) and Paul was in a position to recount that.

Vs. 15 and 16 remind us that not all men will appreciate the fragrance of the Lord, and as always, and ultimately, men and women will be divided into two categories with different destinies. It is not for us to fully comprehend what causes the heart of men to turn to the Savior – hence the cry “who is sufficient for these things?” - but all we can do is to faithfully bring his Word to those around us in sincerity and purity. God knows his own.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean when a believer is to be excommunicated from the assembly? Under what situations will this most serious of punishments be necessitated?
2. What does scripture say happens to
 - (a) individual believers and
 - (b) the assembly if assembly discipline is not carried out?
3. Is there a need to state the full details of what has happened that has led to a believer being excommunicated?

Life Application

1. How can we counsel, reach out and show love to someone who has been “put away” by the church? How does one decide/tell if the person is truly repentant? How do we live out the commandment of Ephesians 4:32?
2. How can we develop an attitude of praise even in the midst of difficult circumstances?

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Lesson 04

– The Minister that is Full of Glory

Objectives:

To learn how one becomes an “epistle of Christ.”

To see the contrast between the ministers of the old and new covenants

To appreciate the role of the Spirit in the new covenant and in producing our transformation

Text:

2 Corinthians 3

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 3:18 (NKJV)

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Lesson

Background

In early church times, there were some false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13) who introduced themselves as apostles (Rev. 2:2), cheated men everywhere, and peddled false knowledge (2 Cor. 2:17). And to prove the real apostleship of the apostles, the church had indeed written epistles and let the apostles deliver them to churches in other places (Acts 15:23-32). Therefore, it was a tradition to write epistles among the churches at that time (1 Cor. 16:3). The apostle Paul also introduced his fellow workers to churches everywhere (Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 8:22; Col. 4:7, etc.)

“Epistles” is a kind of proof and foundation, representing a close relationship.

However, since man often boasts in countenance (2 Cor. 5:12) and is not like God who looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7), man’s “epistle” is not entirely reliable.

Summary

Having just begun vindicating his ministry as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he needs no letter of accreditation, for they are his epistles of commendation. Through his ministry, in which he had written upon their hearts with the Spirit of the living God, they have become an epistle of Christ. He realises that God has made him sufficient as a minister of the new covenant, a ministry of the Spirit who gives life.

Paul then contrasts the new covenant with the old covenant to illustrate the glorious nature of his ministry. With Exodus 34:29-35 as his reference, he equates the glory of the old covenant with the glory on Moses’ face that was temporary. But if the old covenant, described as one of death and condemnation, had glory, then how much more glorious is the new covenant, a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness which is not passing away!

Paul then declares that those who listen only to the Old Testament still have a veil on their hearts. But when we turn to the Lord (whom Paul equates with the Spirit), the veil is taken away, and there is liberty. So, by beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, we are being transformed into the same glorious image by the Spirit of the Lord.

Outline

I. THE “ACCREDITED” NATURE OF PAUL’S MINISTRY (1-3)

A. Paul has no need for letters of commendation (1)

- He does not mean by his words to commend himself (v.1a)
- For Paul does not need, as might others, letters of recommendation (v.1b)

B. The Corinthians are Paul’s epistles of commendation (v.2-3)

- They are evidence of his handiwork, which all can know and read (v.2)
- They are an “epistle of Christ,” upon whose hearts Paul has written with the Spirit of the living God (v.3)

II. THE “GLORIOUS” NATURE OF PAUL’S MINISTRY (v.4-18)

A. His trust and sufficiency is from God (v.4-6)

1. His trust is not based upon confidence in himself but in Christ and the sufficiency that God provides (v.4-5)
2. God has made him sufficient as a minister of the new covenant (v.6)
 - a. A covenant of the Spirit, not of the letter
 - b. A covenant that gives life, not death

B. The glory of the new covenant (v.7-18)

1. In contrast with the Old Covenant, written and engraved on stones (v.7-11)
 - a. The ministry of death vs. the ministry of the Spirit (v.7-8)
 - b. The ministry of condemnation vs. the ministry of righteousness (v.9-10)
 - c. That which is passing away vs. that which remains (v.11)
2. In comparison with the Lawgiver, Moses (v.12-16)
 - a. With the more glorious nature of the new covenant, Paul could speak with great boldness (v.12)
 - b. With the reading of Moses (the Old Testament), however, a veil remains on the heart (v.12-15)
 - i. An allusion to the events of Exodus 34:29-35
 - ii. With the veil on Moses’ face, the children of Israel could not see that the glory of his face was fading (v.13)
 - iii. Israel’s inability to see then is like their inability today unless they come to Christ (v.14-15)
 - c. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed, just as Moses did when he returned to the presence of the Lord (v.16)
3. Summary explanation (v.17-18)
 - a. Paul explains that the Lord in verse 16 is the Spirit of the Lord, who provides liberty (v.17)
 - b. When we (like Moses) can behold with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord transforms us into the same image (v.18)

Conclusion

A. The proof of New Testament ministry

---- the church in Corinth (to whom we have been ministering).

B. The source of New Testament ministry

---- the Spirit, not the letter.

C. The nature of the ministry of the New Testament minister

---- giving life, spiritual, righteous.

D. The appearance of the ministry of the New Testament minister

---- surpassing and eternal glory.

E. The attitudes of the minister of the New Testament toward his ministry

---- having hope and using great boldness of speech.

F. The goal of the New Testament minister

---- help believers to be transformed into the image of the Lord.

1. We are a mirror, and the function of the mirror is the reflection of light. When we turn our hearts to the Lord and behold the Lord, men will see the Lord in us. If we focus our hearts on ourselves, men will see our “selves” in us.

2. The ultimate hope of Christians is “being transformed into the Lord’s image from glory to glory.” Therefore, we should often draw near to the Lord with an unveiled face so that the glory of the Lord will shine upon us, and we will increasingly transform ourselves into the image of the Lord through the Spirit of the Lord.

3. The way to “being transformed into the Lord’s image from glory to glory” lies in “beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face.” The more we see the Lord, the more we will be shone upon by the glory of the Lord, and the more we will manifest the glorious image of the Lord. The more we let the Spirit of the Lord work on us freely, the swifter our growth and transformation will be.



Discussion Questions

1. Who was Paul's "epistle of commendation"?
(v.1-2)
2. What writing instrument had Paul used to make the Corinthians an "epistle of Christ"?
And upon what had he written? (v.3)
3. Of what is the new covenant?
And what does it give? (v.6b)
4. What is said of the glory of the old covenant when compared with the glory of the new covenant? (v.10)
5. What remains on the heart when only the Old Testament is read? (v.14-15)
6. As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, what happens? (v.18)
7. If you were in Paul's situation, neglected or even mistreated, how would you face it and why?
 - Consider the "accredited" nature of Paul's ministry (v.1-3)
 - Consider the "glorious" nature of Paul's ministry (v.4-18)

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- Macdonald, W. (1995) Believer's Bible Commentary (A. Farstad, Ed.)

Lesson 05

– Do Not Lose Heart

Objectives:

To know that trials and discouragement are part of the Christian walk

To understand Paul's approach to discouragement

To learn practical ways of encouraging ourselves in the Lord

Text:

2 Corinthians 4:1 - 5:8

Memory verses:

2 Cor. 4:16 (NASB)

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day.

2 Cor. 4:7 (NASB)

But we have this treasure in earthen containers, so that the extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.

Lesson

Context: Discouragement and the saint

- i. Trials and tribulations are part of our walk on earth. (Acts 14:15, James 1:2-4)
- ii. Heroes of faith have gone through times of deep trials, including some who even had suicidal thoughts (1 Kings 19:4; Job 3:11, 26; Psalm 38:4, Jonah 4:3)
- iii. We can draw strength from God and His Word as we see how others have victory over discouragement.

Challenges Paul and his co-workers faced

- i. Paul suffered much for the gospel. Some of these trials are recorded for our encouragement (2 Cor. 11:24-28)
- ii. There are times they are pushed to their limits.
- Brothers and sisters, we don't want you to be ignorant about the suffering we experienced in the province of Asia. It was so extreme that it was beyond our ability to endure. We even wondered if we could go on living. 2 Cor. 1:8 (GOD'S WORD)

- iii. They have been pushed to the limit and yet were never defeated. (2 Cor. 4:8-10)
- iv. Yet he can say, "we do not lose heart," and encourages others to do the same. (2 Cor. 4:1)

Paul's approach: we do not lose heart

i. Trusting in the mercy and love of God

1. *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1)*
2. In the OT, God shows mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Deut. 7:9)
3. In the NT, God shows His rich mercy and great love to sinners because of the work of Christ. (Eph. 2:4)
4. We know that God shows mercy and love because He is good.
5. Regardless of the trial and situation, believers can trust in the love and mercy of God and know that He is good to them (Psalm 34:8)

ii. Knowing that it is not just about us

- 2 Cor. 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord...*
- Regardless of the situation, it is helpful to realize that it is not just “about me.”
- Focusing on ourselves, our trials, how people hurt us, etc. would narrow our perspective of the situation. (2 Cor. 4:11-15)
- God’s plan and purposes in our lives involve both us and others.

iii. Our Treasure in earthen vessels

- Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven being like a treasure (Matt. 13:44)
- Paul speaks of the same treasure in each believer, which is of great power
- This power allows believers to do “all things through Christ who strengthens” (Phil. 4:12-13)

iv. Daily renewal of the inner man

- 2 Cor. 4:16 *Therefore we do not lose heart, Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*
- Daily renewal is an important part of growth and resilience.
- Proper rest, nutrition, time out, and fitness are important to physical resilience.
- Prayer, reading the Bible, and spending time with God are important renewals.
- The Lord Himself takes time out. (Matt. 14:21-23)

v. Looking at things from another perspective – eternal vs. temporal

- 2 Cor. 4:18 *we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*
- Look at things from God’s perspective rather than man’s view.

Practical Application: David and the Psalms

i. David led a favoured yet tumultuous life.

- 1) God gave David a special testimonial. (Acts 13:22)
- 2) David’s life is marked by troubles, distress, despair, blessings, victories, and a special relationship with God.
- 3) Application of Paul’s lessons in Psalms.
 - a. David knows how to draw on the mercy and love of God. (Psalm 34:8; 13:1-6; 17:8)
 - b. David knows it is not just about him. God’s plans and purpose extend beyond him and his goals. (2 Sam. 7:18, 20)
 - c. David knows and testifies to the power of God. (Psalm 21:13; 29:1; 62:11)
 - d. David renews himself in the Lord. (Psalm 23:1-3; 51:10; 63:1)
 - e. Psalmists sought to seek things from God’s perspective. (Psalm 73; 119:15)

ii. Praise in the life of David and saints

- 1) Praise – is the weapon of choice for David in times of discouragement. (Psalm 34:1-6)
- 2) Paul and Silas praise God after being beaten and jailed. (Acts 16:22)

iii. Praising God in times of difficulties

- 1) Seeing reality from God’s perspective. (Psalm 84:4-6)
- 2) A new creation may praise the Lord. (Psalm 102:18)
 - a. God created man and woman. (Gen. 1:27)
 - b. One of the roles of the new creation is to praise God. (Psalm 102:18, 2 Cor. 5:17)
- 3) The sacrifice of praise – Heb. 13:15
 - a. Sacrifice is an important subset of offerings to God.
 - b. Sacrifice costs. (2 Sam. 24:24, Heb. 10:12)
 - c. Sacrifice of praise is something we can offer only on earth.
- 4) Gates of praise
 - a. Gates control entry, improve security and enhance the safety of the occupants.

- b. In the OT, priests and Levites offer thanksgiving and praise as well as guard the gates of the camp of the Lord. (2 Chron. 31:2)
- c. Praise plays a similar role in the heart of the saint. (Psalm 34:1-2; 100:4, Isaiah 60:18)

Action

1. Take time to praise God in your daily renewal.
2. Offer the sacrifice of praises in your difficult times.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some causes of discouragement, distress, and anxiety in our lives?

2. Apostle Paul and his team faced challenges against overwhelming odds and remained undefeated. Christians today face similar challenges in varying degrees. Share examples you see in yourself and other Christians who faced challenges and overcame them. What lessons can we learn from them?

The Challenges ^(NKJV)	The Outcome	The Lessons for us
▪ hard-pressed on every side ...	▪ yet not crushed ...	✓
▪ Perplexed ...	▪ but not in despair ...	✓
▪ Persecuted ...	▪ but not forsaken ...	✓
▪ struck down ...	▪ but not destroyed ...	✓

3. How does knowing God loves us and His mercy for us play a key role in overcoming disappointments and discouragement?

4. What is the “treasure in earthen vessels” that Christian possesses, and how can it help us during times of trials and discouragement?

5. In the Psalms we studied in CEP 2022 and other Psalms, what are some things that the Psalmist does to strengthen himself in the Lord?

6. Share with the group how you or someone you know strengthened yourself/ themselves in the Lord in the face of discouragement and disappointment.

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Lesson 06

– We Walk by Faith, Not by Sight

Objectives:

To learn about walking by faith, not by sight

Strengthening and encouraging ourselves in the Lord through meditation of the Word

Text:

2 Corinthians 5

Memory verses:

2 Cor. 5:7 (NASB)

for we walk by faith, not by sight

2 Cor. 5:17 (NASB)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Lesson

REFINING OUR FOCUS: TEMPORAL VS. ETERNAL

- i. Oxymoron? Looking at the unseen eternal and seeing the temporal (2 Cor 4:18)
- ii. The ageing process and groaning of our bodies (2 Cor 5:16)
- iii. Trust in God and see the reality in faith. God also gave us the Spirit as a guaranteed deposit
- iv. Paul's solution to the tension of human frailty and eternity (2 Cor 5:8-9)

WALKING BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT

i. The world view: Seeing is believing

- a. Seeing is believing?
- b. The belief that "I will believe it when I see it."
- c. The illusion of sight

ii. God says and man sees – A different economy of faith

The reality of God says...	The illusion of Man's seeing
<p>Gen 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.</p> <p>Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image</p> <p>Gen 1:28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply</p>	<p>Gen 3:5-6 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate.</p>
<p>John 1:50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."</p>	<p>John 4:48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."</p>

The reality of God says...	The illusion of Man's seeing
John 11:40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"	Mark 15:31-32 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.
Acts 15:7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.	John 20:25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

iii. Two main avenues of faith

- a. Gift of God.
 - i. It is the gift of God Eph. 2:8-9
 - ii. It is a fruit of the Spirit Gal. 5:22-23
- b. Hearing the word.
 - i. By hearing the Word of God. Rom. 10:17

ii. Technical aspects of Seeing vs. Hearing

- a. Seeing - the perception of persistent surfaces.
- b. Hearing - the perception of mechanical events on volumes.
- c. Examples of seeing through hearing. Echolocation and other forms of hearing.

iii. Hearing and believing from the Biblical perspective

- a. Faith comes by hearing. Rom. 10:17
- b. Hearing of faith and not works. Gal. 3:2
- c. Connection of hearing and believing. Ex. 19:9, Gal. 3:2

iv. Hearing through study and meditation

- a. Study - 2 Tim. 2:15
- b. Hiding the word in our heart (memorising) - Psalm 119:11
- c. Reflecting - 2 Cor. 3:18; James 1:22-25; Psalm 119:14-16
- d. Ruminating - Psalm 1:2; 63:6, 77:12

A NEW CREATION AND A NEW MINISTRY

- i. In the Kingdom of God, our past does not define us.

We are a new creation, the old has passed away. (2 Cor. 5:17)
- ii. Being reconciled to God through Christ, we now have a ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18)
- iii. Ambassadors for Christ to plead and implore on Christ's behalf. (2 Cor. 5:20)
- iv. All Christians should be involved in "the ministry of reconciliation."
 - a. Some may "go" while others may "send." (Rom. 10:14-15)
 - b. Some may "preach" while others may "invite." (John 1:45-46)

MEDITATING ON GOD AND HIS WORD

- i. Meditation allows us to go beyond sight and opens us to the reality of God and His Word. To set our minds on things above. (Col. 3:1-2)
- ii. It is a discipline practiced by saints of old (Gen. 24:63, Jos. 1:8, Psalm 27:4, Psalm 63:6, Prov. 8:7, 1 Tim. 4:15, Phil. 4:8)
- iii. Christian meditation differs from Eastern meditation in its goals, focus and content.
- iv. Christian meditation places priority on filling one's mind with Scripture and dwelling on God and His character.
- v. It is often referred to as muttering, speaking, and pondering.
- vi. It involves studying (2 Tim. 2:15), hiding. (Psalm 119:11), and ruminating (Psalm 1:2; 63:6, 77:12).

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

- i. Discouragement can sometimes overwhelm us and prevent us from seeing things from the proper perspective. (Mark 16:6-15)
- ii. We need to set our sight and meditate on things unseen/ eternal.
- iii. The key is to "walk by faith and not by sight."

Discussion Questions

1. As we age and see what is happening around us, the earthly body groans. What are some of these things we groan about? How do you deal with it? (2 Cor. 5:2-4)
2. Discuss the challenges of looking at things not seen rather than things seen. How can this view affect our decisions, worldview, and walk as Christians?
3. We are reminded to walk by faith and not by sight. Discuss the challenges and how we can be more effective in this exercise?
4. Ministry of Reconciliation - to help others reconcile with God, we must first be reconciled with ourselves. Discuss how we can be reconciled with God ourselves.
5. In the ministry of reconciliation, some do the "going," some are involved in the "sending," others do the "preaching," while others do the "inviting." Discuss what roles you are or like to be involved in and how.
6. Discuss the practice of meditation and how we can meditate on God, His character, and the scriptures.

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- Wilmington's Guide to the Bible, Harold L. Wilmington, 2011
- Be Encouraged (2 Corinthians): God Can Turn Your Trials into Triumphs, Warren W. Wiersbe
- 2 Corinthians, The Second Letter to the Corinthians, William MacDonald, Emmaus

Lesson 07

– Blessings and Promises, Comfort and Joy

Objectives:

To understand what it means and learn to open our hearts wide to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

To learn how we can be a source of comfort and joy to those around us.

Text:

2 Corinthians 6-7

Memory verses:

2 Cor. 7:1-4 (ESV)

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

Lesson

Chapter 6 (Blessings and Promises)

As Paul concludes the explanation of his ministry, he begins by making appeals to the Corinthians to:

1. Not receive the grace of God in vain (v.1-2)
2. Remember his example and be assured of his love for them (v.3-10)
3. Open wide their hearts (v.11-13)
4. Be separate from the world (v.14-18)

1. Not receive the grace of God in vain (v.1-2)

With regard to salvation and/or sanctification: Paul, two verses earlier, called himself an ambassador for Christ, appealing on behalf of Christ for those still unsaved to be reconciled to God. Here at the start of chapter 6, he again appeals to them to not receive God's grace in vain, reminding them that "now is the day of salvation." In addition, Paul could also have been encouraging the Corinthians to make full use of the grace shown to them, to live in the power of Spirit rather than in the strength of the flesh (Gal. 3:3).

2. Remember his example and be assured of his love for them (v.3-10)

Paul's example (v.3-7):

Sufferings Endured	God's Blessings/Spiritual Graces Exhibited
v.4: Afflictions, hardships, and calamities v.5: Beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, and hunger	v.4: Great endurance v.6: Purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, and genuine love v.7: Truthful speech, power of God, and weapons of righteousness

Paul's ministry and its paradoxes (v.8-10):

- Honest yet called a liar (v.8)
- Known yet unknown (v.9a)
- Dying, yet he lives (v.9b)
- Sorrowful yet always rejoices (v.10a)
- Poor yet makes many rich (v.10b)
- Has nothing yet possesses everything (v.10c)

3. Open wide their hearts (v.11-13)

"Our heart is wide open... widen your hearts also".

As a father to his children, Paul loved the Corinthians and spoke freely and openly to them, asking them not to restrict their love for him. If this withholding of love was because they had divided hearts, he appeals to them (in the next section) to separate themselves from that which is contrary to God's will.

4. Be separate from the world (v.14-18)

(v.14a) "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (Deut. 22:10 and Matt. 11:29-30)

(v.14b - 16a) What possible fellowship can exist between these three groups?

- Light and darkness (v.14b)
- Christ and Satan (v.15)
- The true God and a false idol (v.16a)

(v.16b - 18) Promises of God to those who obey and are separate to Him

- He will live in them (v.16b)
- He will walk among them (v.16c-17)
- He will be a Father to them (v.18)

Chapter 7 (Comfort and Joy)

Filled with comfort... overflowing with joy” (v.4)

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS APPEALS (V.1-3)

Paul reminds us of our responsibilities in view of the promises of God:

- To cleanse ourselves from anything that defiles us, of the filthiness of the flesh (sinful actions) and the filthiness of the spirit (sinful attitudes)
- Bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (constantly grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 2 Pet. 3:18)

Paul again re-iterated his appeal in 6:11-13:

- Similar to his appeal for the Corinthians to open wide their hearts, he now appeals for them to make room in their hearts.
- He makes this request since he has never wronged them (v.2b) and he has them in his heart (v.3)

PAUL’S COMFORT AND JOY (V.4-16)

1. Comforted by the coming of Titus (v.4-6)
2. Comforted by the repentance of the Corinthians (v.7-12)
3. Joy in the joy of Titus (v.13-16)

1. Comforted by the coming of Titus (v.4-6)

Paul had left Ephesus and journeyed to Troas searching for Titus but did not find him there. He later crossed over to Macedonia but was still afflicted and without peace, inside (fear and anxiety) and outside (persecution from the enemy). “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” (v.6).

2. Comforted by the repentance of the Corinthians (v.7-12)

Paul had sent a ‘severe’/ ‘sorrowful’ letter to the Corinthians, which had a stern tone and pained him to write. He had initially regretted writing it, but the letter achieved its purpose, and the Corinthians repented, which made Paul rejoice. “Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation” was the experience of the Corinthians. They suffered temporary grief, which led them to the place of repentance and deliverance from sin, bondage, and affliction. The evidence of which was their eagerness to clear themselves (resolute action to clear themselves of any further guilt or blame), indignation (attitude towards themselves for having allowed sin to go on), fear (of the Lord), longing (to see evil corrected), zeal (for the glory of God) and punishment (of sin). In contrast, “worldly grief produces death.”

3. Joy in the joy of Titus (v.13-16)

Titus' spirit had been refreshed by the Corinthians (v.13b), they had lived up to the reputation which Paul had given them (v.14), and Titus grew in his love for them by the way they received him with fear and trembling (v.15). All of this increased Paul's joy and confidence in the Corinthians (v.16).

Discussion Questions

1. How can we use the tools/ spiritual graces listed in 6:6-7 to counter discouragement and when faced with suffering?
2. Are our hearts wide open? Do we love the way Paul loves, out of the overflow of His love from God? Do we long for the affection of fellow believers?
3. What should we do to receive the promise of having God as our Father who dwells among us? Have we done so, and in what ways should we do so?
4. What is the source of our comfort and joy? How can we be a source of comfort and joy to those around us in their times of discouragement?
5. "Godly grief" and "worldly grief": How do they look the same, and how are they different? Reflect on an instance of each in your own life.

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Lesson 08

– Excel in the Act of Grace

Objectives:

Learn about collections for needy saints and needy assemblies in other places, the grace of God in giving, stewardship in managing the church collections, systematic and regular giving, and reciprocity/sharing between believers and assemblies.

Text:

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 8:7 (ESV)

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

Lesson

Background

- 1 Cor. 16:1-4 (The Collection)
- Rom. 15:25-28 (The purpose of the Collection, the givers)

BACKGROUND OF THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM

The Collection for the impoverished saints in Jerusalem was first mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:1–4.

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

1 Cor. 16:1-4 (ESV)

At the church conference in Jerusalem (c. AD 46), it was agreed that Paul and Barnabas should continue the work of Gentile evangelization. In contrast, the leaders of the Jerusalem church concentrated on the Jewish mission (Gal. 2:9,10). The Jerusalem leaders added a special request that Barnabas and

Paul remember the poor brethren in Jerusalem, as was done in the famine relief by the church in Antioch and sent to the Jerusalem elders by Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:30). In Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, Paul said that this was, in fact, "the very thing he was eager to do."

Peter opened the door to the Gentiles, but it was mainly Paul and his fellow missionary workers who established Gentile churches in the regions of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Paul also systematically organized the relief fund for Jerusalem in the churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia ("the Collection"). Paul had given similar instructions about the Collection to the churches of Galatia. However, from the two Corinthian epistles, more details are known about the organizing of the Collection in Corinth than in the other contributing churches. Paul's instructions to the Corinthian Christians were that each householder among them would set aside a proportion of his income weekly for a year so that the church's contribution would have been ready to be taken to Jerusalem in the spring of the following year by the delegates appointed by the church for that purpose.

a. The political and economic situation at the time of the Collection

1st and 2nd Corinthians were written one year apart, around 15 years before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. Soon after the writing of 2nd Corinthians, Nero was instituted emperor at the age of 17 years, succeeding emperor Claudius. The Collection was organized in a time of political instability in Judea and Galilee preceding the Jewish rebellion, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Judaism had various religious and political groups, and the Jews were divided along with religious factions and political, ethnic, regional, and economic differences. The Roman emperors appointed procurators or governors to control the province of Judea, but their oppressive policies and corruption worsened the political tensions. In addition, the Jews suffered from high taxation both by the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders (the temple tax).

The Jerusalem church suffered persecution and deprivation. Famine struck Judea in the days of emperor Claudius as foretold by the prophet Agabus in Acts 11:28 and brought general hardship upon the people. In addition, there was a problem of Jewish false teachers or Judaizers within the church. They strove to roll back grace and divide the Gentile and Jewish believers by insisting that the Gentile believers must keep the Old Testament law of Moses. Paul, by the Spirit, foresaw this danger that would destroy the church and constantly warned the Gentile and Jewish believers of this pernicious threat (Acts 15:24, Galatians) so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved (Gal. 2:4-5).

The Collection by Paul to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem was around ten years before the escalation of the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans. The Collection (1 Cor. 16:1-4) would ease the suffering of

the poor and needy Jewish Christians (Acts 24:17, Rom. 15:25-26) during the difficult times before the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

b. Jewish Christians scattered by the coming war

God was preparing the church for the tumultuous times and war through the Collection before Jerusalem ceased to be the main centre of Christianity. Centres of Christianity will then be established in the Gentile cities. The Gentile churches would doubtless receive the Jewish Christians in the years when many Jewish refugees fled to seek refuge from the Roman Jewish war (Luke 21:20-24). The Collection was an important relief effort. Gentile churches would remember this act of grace and absorb fleeing Jewish believers, especially those who were poor and needed help and further excel in the act of grace to receive the Jewish Christians, providing the relief and care to build both Jew and Gentile believers into one family and household of God in Christ Jesus, fellow citizens of God's kingdom built together into a dwelling place for God, as Paul reminded Gentile brethren in:

Eph. 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens

with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

THE LASTING IMPACT OF THE COLLECTION AND ITS ADMINISTRATION IN HISTORICAL CHURCH PRACTICE

This important Collection was an act of grace on the part of the Gentile Christians to bring together the Gentile and Jewish believers. The Collection was to be accounted for and brought by the representatives of each contributing Gentile church accredited by letters from the churches. It was important to have representative witnesses to the Collection for administrative accountability so that there would be no false accusation that there was misappropriation. The witness and fellowship of these key delegates and leaders from the Gentile churches with the Jerusalem saints were important to meld Jewish and Gentile believers. The church of Christ must not only cross ethnic bounds but, more importantly, the Mosaic Law as one new man in Christ. It was no longer bound by the old Mosaic covenant but by the Lord Himself, Christ, the Word of God from the beginning, who established the new covenant by his body and blood. The Collection and its administration would have a lasting impact on the church and the fellowship and relationship between all churches established by the Apostles.

a. Consistency in giving and tension in the Corinthian church.

The tension in the relationship between several Corinthian saints and Paul most likely caused the lack of enthusiasm to continue in the Collection. Paul wrote to them in 2 Corinthians after the reconciliation following the severe letter he sent to them by Titus. He reminded

them that they would have been systematically setting money aside for the fund ever since they received his instructions and that they must continue to do so and complete what they had pledged to do. He recounted how he had been using their example to encourage the Macedonian churches. But now, the “good role model” was in danger of setting a bad example; hence he sent Titus back to Corinth with two companions to help the Corinthian church complete the gathering of its contributions (2 Cor. 8:16–24).

When Paul sent Titus and his companions to Corinth to look into this matter, he was in Macedonia helping the churches there to complete their share in the Collection. Those churches were facing hard economic times, but in their poverty and need, they insisted on fulfilling their ministry by making a significant contribution, and Paul was greatly moved (2 Cor. 8:1–5). Paul used this example to motivate the more affluent and wealthy Corinthians to give generously.

b. Love motivates our giving.

What motivates giving? Surely it must be love for the Lord and His body. For the Corinthians, Paul had to tangle with very fundamental issues. Paul had earlier written to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 13 concerning this love. “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful” **1 Cor. 13:3-5**. The contribution of the Corinthians must be motivated by their love for the Lord and the brethren and not envy, arrogance or resentfulness.

c. Systematic and regular giving.

1 Cor. 16:1

Now concerning the Collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Representatives from the Corinthian church would accompany the gift. Paul may also go along, although, at that time, he was still not sure if it was advisable. Paul instructed that the giving should be systematic every Sunday when the Assembly gathered to worship, and this was planned over around a year. He explicitly emphasized that he would not solicit a final top-up contribution when he came.

STEWARDSHIP, PERSONAL PLANNING AND BENEFITS OF GIVING

Giving is purposeful, regular, and weekly and should be planned in the assembly. Paul directed that each believer should personally set aside an amount each week according to their means (“as he may prosper”). The Collection is not haphazard but was purposeful. It was transparent and clear regarding its administration and purpose and organized, managed, and focused on accumulating an amount substantial enough to bring to Jerusalem as a gift from the Gentile churches. This was the same instruction Paul gave to the Galatian churches. The amount to set aside was as one may prosper. Our financial means may vary with the times, economic cycles, life stages, and age. Income provides housing, transport, expenses towards the care of children, education costs, utilities, healthcare, care of aged parents, and other household expenses and savings for a rainy day and retirement. We have a family and household

budget carefully apportioned or saved to provide for these. What Paul said is perfectly in line with stewardship and how money should be apportioned and set aside.

a. Stewardship

We are familiar with the word “stewardship.” Stewardship means a proper and systematic administration of finances so that there is proper accountability and use of money. We are also warned about scams. In the Christian world, be wary and do not be deceived by those who ask for one-off donations of your savings and large sums of money in exchange for “blessings” and “prosperity.” They may call on believers to donate or give pledges towards their special projects to support their “ministries,” but in fact, contributors are unwittingly funding their lavish programmes and lifestyles. Giving must be accompanied by accountability, responsibility, planning, budgeting, consistency, and regularity.

b. Reciprocity and sharing

2 Cor 8:13-15

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

The Collection was a work of reciprocity. From the Jews, the Gentiles received the Gospel. The Jewish Christians evangelized to the Gentiles at great cost, including persecution and Jewish alienation, to establish the Gentile churches. The Gentiles received the blessing of the gospel and salvation, and in turn, they should support when many Jewish Christians were in a time of great stress and need. When our abundance supplies the need of others, their ensuing abundance will also reciprocally supply our needs. God’s economy involves sharing and helping one another and praying for one

another, especially those in the household of God. The churches should not exist on their own and become their own peculiar closed group and community. The churches must be one. They are God's family, whether Jew or Gentile, in Judea or Galatia or Achaia or Macedonia. The churches in the body of Christ do not exist singly but interdependently. They are one household of God and must always share good things among themselves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Giving after believing and receiving Christ is about living Christ. It is about the grace of the Lord Jesus who must come into our way of life, our philosophy of living, and not every man for himself. The supreme example is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was rich, yet for our sake, He became poor so that we, by His poverty, might become rich.

Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. We are stewards of what we have on earth. We have but one life to become stewards, and our earthly life is the opportunity to excel as stewards of the Lord's grace, of His abundance and gifts to us, in compassionate deeds, time, talent, and money.

Discussion Questions

Begin by reading the 2 Cor. 8:1-15 as a group

1. An act of grace

The Macedonian Christians who willingly and voluntarily gave towards the relief of the saints in Jerusalem did this through “the grace of God that has been given (v.1),” and the contribution of the saints was an “act of grace (v.6,7)”.

Discuss the meaning of the word “grace”, giving, and our contributions being an act of grace.

2. Commitment to God

V.5 - they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Discuss how this can be connected to the phrase “see that you excel in this act of grace” in v.7 regarding the contribution towards the Collection.

3. Objective, plan, and frequency

A plan or personal system of weekly giving – outline examples of objectives and how one can personally budget a regular giving plan.

4. Accountability

Discuss accountability and clarity in the administration of Christian giving and collections. Discuss examples of emotive soliciting for gifts towards some cause or ministry of “servants of God or ministers” whose accountability to the money collected is unknown or unclear.

5. Benefits in giving

In v.10, Paul wrote that giving to the Collection benefits the Corinthians (ESV “this benefits you”). Recall the teaching of Jesus from the gospels regarding the benefits of giving.

As a group activity, contribute various Bible passages on what the Lord taught about giving. Discuss how giving in BAMK benefits us by supplying the needs of saints in other places.

6. Encouragement to give

Paul gave his view of giving (ESV his judgment) in 2 Cor. 8:8-15 and used reasons and illustrations to encourage the Corinthians to give. Share any further insights into this lesson.

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Lesson 09

– God’s Indescribable Gifts

Objectives:

To look at the godly Pattern and Principle of godly giving, and its glorious results (The Divine Ministry of Giving)

Text:

2 Cor. 8:16 - 9:15

See also:

Ps.112; Prov.11:24, 19:17, 22:9; and Isaiah 55:8-13

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 9:8 (NASB)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.

Lesson

Messengers (apostoloi) of Christ’s glory (8:16-24)

Messenger	1. Titus 16-17	2. Brother sent by the churches (v.18-19)	3. Brother sent by Paul and his team (v.22)
Key character	His earnest initiative	His evangelistic influence and zeal	His proven diligence
Result	A willing messenger	Approved and appointed	Confident messenger

Titus, Paul’s coworker, along with two “well-known” brothers, was sent with a united purpose to make sure that the “generous gift” from Achaia was ready. They were sent (8:23 messenger/apostoloi Gr. ἀπόστολοι) unto Christ’s glory. Apostoloi is the same word translated as ‘apostle.’

This table summarizes why & how the three brothers were chosen to be advanced messengers (vanguard). They were sincere, fervent, and dependable in the gospel & missions, in the churches & in “many things” (8:22).

Overall, they were accountable both before God and others (8:20-21). It was managed for the Lord’s personal glory (8:19), thus providing a reliable Pattern for the godly administration of large funds for us to model on even today. Even the selection & sending of reliable & trustworthy “postmen” need “years in the making,” like how the disciples followed Christ faithfully.

Finally, in v.24, Paul also resumes his boasting about the Corinthians, which started in 7:4, 7:14. The Corinthians’ zealous love was not presented to the other churches yet, which explains why the next section of the letter (9:1-5) is coming up. We’ll see that it is both in excess (superfluous) and needful.

Boasting about bounty - Their advanced mission (9:1-5)

Simple Timeline

One year ago		However, one year later	
Achaia/Corinth was zealous to give	Macedonians heard of Achaia's zeal and already gave freely Chapter 8:1-5	No news from Achaia yet	The big question: I wonder if their gift is <i>really</i> ready?

This simple timeline further illustrates the need for Paul to make sure that the Corinthians/Achaia were ready with their “generous gift.” If their gift was collected and ready to be sent, why have they not sent it yet? It was already one year overdue, especially in comparison to the Macedonians!

Neither was there any news or updates from them... could they possibly have forgotten, or were there other issues preventing them from fulfilling their “love pledge”? From the earlier part of the letter (2 Cor. 7), the greatest possible obstacle was already cleared up by Titus’ report of the Corinthians’ godly repentance (7:9-11). So what else could it be? This necessitated the advanced mission of the three brothers.

Here, Paul also shows his sensitivity and wisdom in handling this matter to continue in his confident boasting (mentioned again twice in 9:2, 3) about the Corinthians. Sometimes, it doesn’t hurt to check - after all, it was not just an issue of personal reputation, but it was a collective witness of Achaia to Paul and his team, to the Macedonians, as well as to the saints who were still waiting for their “generous gift.”

The Blessing (eulogy/praise) of God’s bounty (9:6-9)

A direct translation of vs, 6b is “one who sows in bounty, in bounty will also reap” the two Greek words for bounty (eulogia) are put side by side for a strong phonetic effect (imagine someone reading the letter out in Greek). The same literal device is used in 6a “the one who sows sparingly, sparingly will also reap.” Here, Paul goes into the principle or attitude God-produced giving should have, and it is willingly wonderful. Can we expect anything less from God?

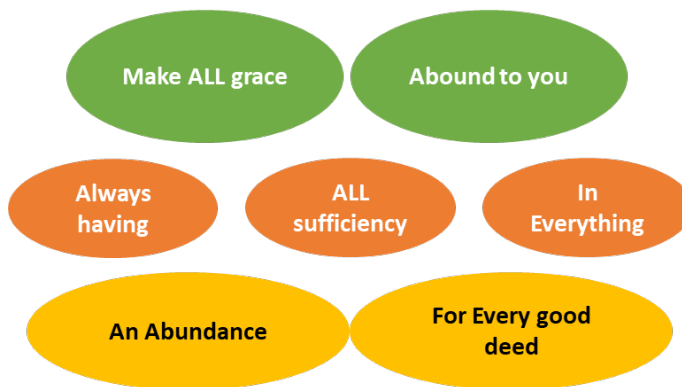
Eulogia is also used twice in v.5, translated as ‘bountiful gift’ or ‘generous gift,’ so it is used four times in two verses. Though now we usually use the word ‘eulogy’ only at wakes, the word comes from Greek and also means blessing, praise, or elegant speech. Indeed, God works in our hearts to give, resulting in praise & thanks to Him, as we’ll also see in the following part (v.10-15).

Thinking further, besides God’s grace enabling us to give freely & cheerfully (vs7-8), it should also be a heart abiding in the loving Christ and bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Indeed, we have already seen this in how the Macedonians gave, in faith & by grace.

Adding to & developing on God’s bounty, Paul follows with a bunch of superlative phrases in v.8:

- a. God is able to ...
- b. make **ALL** grace
- c. **Abound** to you
- d. **Always** having
- e. **ALL** sufficiency
- f. in **Everything**
- g. an **Abundance**
- h. for **Every** good deed

GOD IS ABLE TO ...



In the face of this ‘avalanche,’ how can we not praise Him & how can we not give? This is definitely worth our boast!

But as if these are not enough, in v.9, Paul also quotes from Psalm 112:9 to further garner support. This principle is not new; good deeds (giving) in God’s name result in fruits of righteousness that lasts forever!

Manifold thanks to God (9:10-15)

No.	Reason	Result	Verse
1	Divine supply for seed sowing	Increased harvest of righteousness	10
2	Achaia enriched	Thanks to God	11
3	Supplying the saint’s needs	Overflow of thanks to God	12
4	The free, practical ministry and fellowship of the Corinthians’ giving	Glory to God in relation to the gospel of Christ	13
5	God’s surpassing grace displayed	Prayer and deepened fellowship between the saints in Jerusalem and Achaia	14
6	God’s indescribable gift	Thanks to God	15

This table lists six reasons for thanks to God in this next part. Here, Paul further elaborates & concludes using the crop cycle, seen everywhere in those times. We see the same expression “furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater” in Isaiah 55:10. Just as God supplies seed & water from the sky, providing physical food to all, He also offers spiritual seeds for our righteous deeds.

Notice the superlatives again from v.11-15, pointing us repeatedly to God’s bountiful blessings!

Just as we considered from 9:1-5 that Paul’s boasting was not just a personal matter but concerned multiple people groups from diverse locations, “God’s seed supply” benefits the “needy saints,” the harvest of good works, the maturity of the givers, the gospel efforts, the prayer fellowship between the Jewish & Gentile believers & also glory & thanks to God Himself.

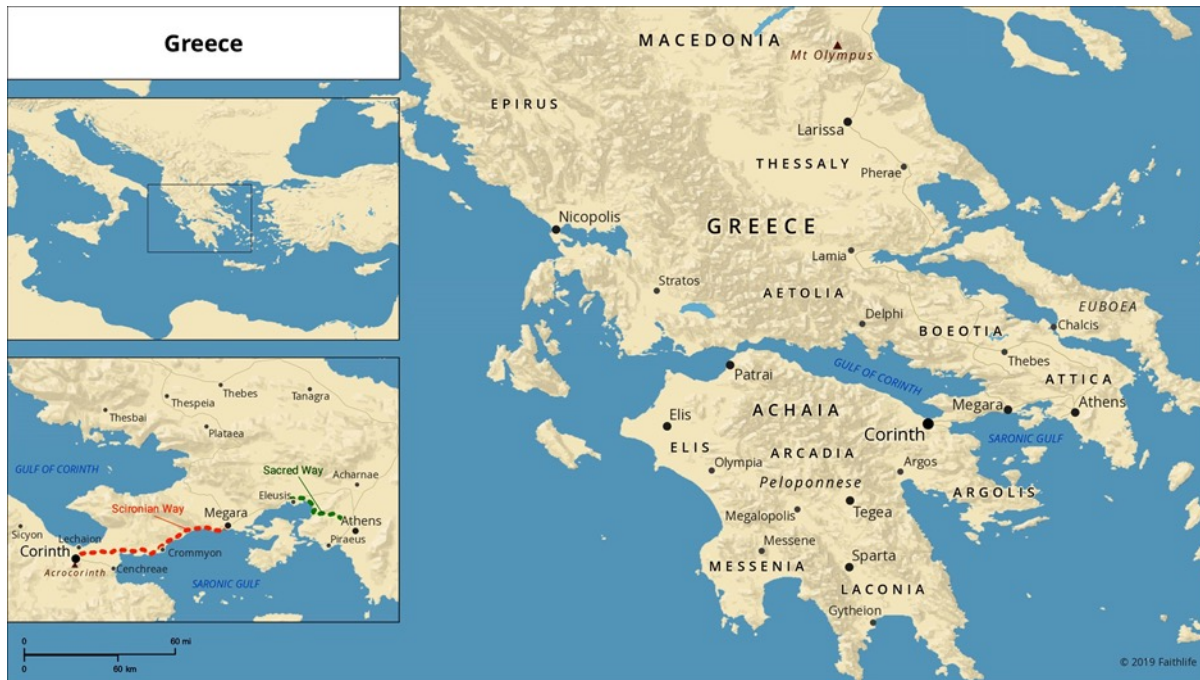
Everyone wins in God’s economy!

Notice how 8:16 also starts with Paul giving thanks to God for Titus’ concern for the Corinthians.

So, in summary, “God’s Indescribable Gifts” include

- a. the willing & sincere messenger Titus
- b. the other two messengers, equally sincere and trustworthy
- c. the zealous Corinthians
- d. the equally zealous Macedonians
- e. wisdom to Paul
- f. His righteous seed
- g. Jesus His Son (2 Cor. 8:9)
- h. The glorious results

May we be encouraged to continue giving to others in need by God’s grace!



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Discussion Questions

1. Contextual clue: Locate Corinth on the map.

How would this strategic location contribute to its affluence? Corinth was also famous for trade, commerce, and even crafts (e.g., Corinthian vases) from archaeological research. With this background, would the Corinthians be hindered by their own needs?

See above:

Map of ancient Greece with detail showing Sacred Way and Scironian Way.

2. From 2 Cor. 8:16-24,

What are some details mentioned about the three ‘apostoloi’ in terms of 1) character qualities and 2) service among the local believers? How was their selection important in glorifying God? How should we prepare to be sent like them?

3. From 9:1-5,

Why was it necessary for Paul to send the advanced party? What can we learn from Paul's handling of the "delayed gifts"?

4. From 9:6-9

As mentioned, v.9 is a quotation from Psalm 112:9. Read Psalm 112 to discover the context which Paul quotes from. Look specifically at Psalm 112:3, 6, 9 to find its repeated theme. What is the principle we see in Psalm 112:1? How is this related to our giving?

Also, look up Prov. 11:24, 19:17, 22:9 and compare with 2 Cor. 9:6.

5. From 9:10-15,

Look at the context of Isaiah 55:10 in Isaiah 55:8-13. What is the detailed picture there, and how is it related to the abundance & benefits described in 2 Cor. 9:6-15?

Do God's principles & how He operates change? How can this encourage us? Why is the ministry of giving so important?

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Lesson 10

– Spiritual Battles

Objectives:

In fighting spiritual battles, we need:

To defend in the spirit of meekness and gentleness.

To destroy strongholds and arguments using spiritual weapons instead of worldly weapons.

To measure up to God's standards rather than the world's standards to define your victories/achievements.

Text:

2 Cor. 10

Memory verses:

2 Cor. 4:3-5 (ESV)

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Lesson

INTRODUCTION

In writing 2 Corinthians, there are probably two groups of people within the Corinthian church that Paul had in mind.

- Chapters 1 to 9 were addressed mainly to the receptive majority, who responded favourably to Paul's exhortations and called for corrections and discipline.
- Chapters 10 to 13 were aimed at the rejecting minority who were dangerously influenced by false apostles, whose aim was to drive a wedge between Paul and his converts at Corinth.

Beginning from chapter 10 to the end of the letter, the thoughtful reader will detect an abrupt change of tone, a shift in the atmosphere where Paul sternly rebuked the rejecting minority and the false teachers of the Corinthian Church.

WHO WERE THE REJECTING MINORITY AND THE FALSE APOSTLES?

We do not know who the rejecting minority were except that they were Jews (2 Cor. 11:22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.*)

The false apostles were false teachers who exalted themselves and even claimed to be special apostles. Paul sarcastically referred to them as 'super-apostles' (2 Cor. 11:5 *Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles*). However, they appeared to be much more powerful and successful than Paul in their manner and authority. They attacked Paul and his companions, who influenced the Corinthian Christians, to gain prestige and power for themselves.

“As Paul went throughout the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, others would come behind him and try to steal away the new converts. Often they would claim that the gospel that Paul preached was inadequate somehow.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul warns against those who sought to add circumcision to the gospel and, in that context, he issues the following **anathema**: Gal. 1:6-9 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, **let him be accursed**. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, **let him be accursed**”.*
(www.gotquestions.org/super-apostles)

WHAT WERE THE FALSE APOSTLES/TEACHERS ACCUSING PAUL??

Paul’s life was not without critics, and some malicious men made numerous accusations against Paul to destroy his reputation.

Here in chapter 10, the accusations of these false teachers are stated and implied:

a. By exalting themselves and claiming to be special apostles with letters of recommendation, probably from Jerusalem (implying Paul had none), they claimed a special relationship to Christ that Paul lacked.

(10:7; see also 3:1; 11:13, 20,23)

b. They called Paul’s meekness “weakness.” Accusing him of boldness on paper only but, in person, he is cowardly and weak. (10:1, 9-11; see also 13:2-4)

c. They prided themselves and trusted in their worldly wisdom, implying and stating that Paul did not possess as much knowledge of Christ and God as them. (10:7; see also 11:5-6)

In summary, “It is clear that Paul has been accused of being a cowardly bully who is very good at writing domineering letters. They said that in person, he was a craven weakling, an ineffectual wimp. But had megalomaniac pretensions: a timid puppy who barked like a ‘bold’ rottweiler from behind the fence! ‘His letters are weighty and forceful,’ they said, ‘but in person he is unimpressive, and his speaking amounts to nothing (2 Cor. 10:10)” (Clements).

LET US LEARN FROM PAUL ON HOW HE DEFENDED SUCH ACCUSATIONS AND DESTROYED THEIR ARGUMENTS.

a. Paul defended in the spirit of meekness and gentleness (10:1-2)

- Paul’s enemies said that Paul is bold and impressive when he writes, but in person, he is weak and inconsequential.
- He answered his accusers with a meek and gentle spirit. It is in this spirit that Paul is making his appeal. He did not come across as bitter or resentful or vindictive. His manner of meekness should not be confused with weakness. It does not mean Paul was a push-over. On the contrary, he was showing strength under control.
- “To be meek towards others implies freedom from malice and a vengeful spirit.” (D.A. Carson)

b. Paul deployed spiritual weapons instead of worldly weapons to destroy strongholds and arguments (10:3-11)

- Paul says that the weapons of our spiritual warfare are not of the flesh.
- The world’s weapons that Paul repudiated were those devoid of the spirit. These weapons often may result in raised voices, clenched fists, and outbreaks of conflict. Those governed by the flesh would seek to employ fleshly weapons to get things done.
- Since our adversaries are spiritual, so, too, must our weapons be. The weapons that Paul was alluding to are truth, righteousness, faith, assurance of salvation, the Word of God, prayer, praise, etc.

- D.A. Carson elaborated:

“The contrast Paul is drawing must not be overlooked. He is not comparing, say, tanks, rifles, and missiles with prayer, fasting, and preaching. The fleshly or worldly side of the contrast depends on the interpretation of 2 Cor. 10:3-4a - worldly weapons in this context are the kinds of tools of the trade relished by the intruders: human ingenuity, rhetoric, showmanship, a certain splashiness and forwardness in spiritual pretensions, charm, powerful personal charisma. Such weapons they will not find in Paul’s arsenal, so they think him inferior, but Paul responds by openly disavowing such weapons. He would not want to defend himself on that score, for his weapons are entirely different. They are spiritual weapons, and they are divinely powerful (or powerful in God’s perspective or for his service).”

- There were instances where Paul did not shrink from using the divinely powerful weapon. For example, in Acts 13:9-11, Paul used his power to call the hand of the Lord to strike Elymas blind, and in Acts 16:18, how he commanded, in the name of Jesus Christ, the evil spirit to come out of the slave girl. There were many more incidences.
- But in this instance, his self-control was evident and in abundance. Paul did not want to use his divine power to destroy (unless their disobedience compelled him to do so) but to build up.
 - **10:8** *For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave **for building you up and not for destroying you**, I will not be ashamed.*
- However, towards the end of this letter, Paul warned both the guilty minority and the false teachers that he would exercise God-given spiritual power in judgment that does “not spare” unless they turn from their wicked ways. He hoped this would not be necessary.
 - **13:2** *I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, **I will not spare them.***
- The purpose of spiritual weapons with divine power is to destroy “strongholds” (10:4c-5).
 - In **10:5**, “strongholds” refer to “arguments” and “every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.”
 - Who is behind these thoughts? Who inspires them? See:
 - **Eph. 2:1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following **the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.***
 - **Acts 26:18** *to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from **the power of Satan** to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’*
- The outcome is “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,” i.e., Paul is saying that such spiritual weapon can “destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God.” (D.A. Carson).
 - Every arrogant claim, prideful thought, and argument used to rationalise sin and unbelief and delay repentance are taken over and transformed.

c. Paul referred to God’s standard of measure and not the world’s standards (10:12-18)

- The false teachers measured their accomplishments by their standards.
 - “Like so many who judge things according to the outward display of this world, Paul’s opponents interpreted meekness as weakness, forbearance as cowardice, and gentleness as indecision - or at least they had sought to induce the Corinthians to place this interpretation on Paul’s character.” (Dr Constable’s Notes on 2 Corinthians, 2017 Edition, p.101)

- 10:17 “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” See Jer. 9:23-24.
 - Paul pointed out that we should not boast in ourselves, in another, or against another – we should only boast in the LORD.
- Final verse, 10:18 *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*
 - It doesn’t matter how you brag about your accomplishments. It is what God says about us that matters that will endure.

CONCLUSION

- Paul’s desire was for the Corinthians Christians to grow in maturity. He wanted this for their sake, not his own. His ultimate desire for himself was to be approved by God Himself.
- Like Paul, our desire should be to aim to be approved by God rather than be applauded by the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Read 2 Cor. 10:1-2.

There will be occasions when we are wrongly accused. Sometimes these accusations come from within your circle of friends, including those you love the most, resulting in conflicts and causing much hurt and mistrust. In the case of Paul, it came from within the Corinthian Church.

How do you choose to respond when you are right?

What can you learn from Paul in disarming your opponents?

2. Read 2 Cor. 10:3-6.

Strongholds are anything that takes captive of your mind away from depending on God. They could also be cultural strongholds and can be associated with people who negatively influence you. In v.5, Paul mentioned that we “have the divine power to destroy [demolish] strongholds.”

- a. Give some examples of strongholds that affect believers, even you.
 - See also 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1 and 1 Cor. 15:33.
- b. What particular stronghold in your life needs to be destroyed?
 - How would you destroy it?

3. *Weapons such as deception, intimidation, manipulation, and hypocritical behaviour are not from the Spirit of God and are not acceptable weapons for you to use in spiritual warfare.*

- a. Do you recognise a current situation in your life where you are trying to fight a spiritual battle with worldly weapons?
 - How is that working for you?
- b. What should you avoid doing so as not to “wage a worldly war” against brothers and sisters in Christ?

4. Read 10:7-11.

“One of the most difficult lessons Christ’s disciples had to learn was that, in the kingdom of God, position and power were no evidence of authority. Jesus warned His followers not to pattern their leadership after the Gentiles who loved to “lord it over” others and act important (see Mark 10:35–45). We must follow that of Jesus Christ, who came as a servant and ministered to others. Paul followed that example”.

(Warren Wiersbe)

- a. All of us have spheres of authority for building up those in our sphere of influence. Do you handle your authority well?
- b. Do you need to learn graciousness and gentleness, or do you struggle to assert your God-given authority in your area of life? How can your group members pray for you?

5. Read 10:12-18.

“In His examination of the seven churches named in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus measured them far differently than they measured themselves. The church that thought it was poor, He considered to be rich; and the church that boasted of its wealth, He declared to be poor (Rev. 2:8–11; 3:14–22). In the Corinthian church, the Judaizers set up its standards and measured everybody by them.” (Warren Wiersbe)

Read Ephesians 4:12–16.

In today’s churches, most problems have been caused by people comparing each other. How should we use the measure described in this passage to improve our situation?

6. Review 2 Cor. 10:1-18.

Is there a verse or a phrase that stood out for you? Is it something that you are intrigued by, something that resonates with you, or just a thought you want to examine further? Share.

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Lesson 11

– Foolish Boasting (The Ministry of Services)

Objectives

- Display Paul’s concern for the Corinthians’ loyalty to Christ, assembly, and fellow believers.
- Define the marks of a faithful servant and a false servant.
- Describe how a faithful servant deals firmly with false apostles and their unrepentant followers, defending against their attacks on his character and committed ministry.

Text:

2 Cor. 11, 12:1-5

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 11:30 (ESV)

For if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Lesson

INTRODUCTION

The last three chapters, 11–13, showed the heart of a faithful servant regarding his care and concern for the Lord’s people, that they are not misled by the wrong teachings and philosophies of false apostles. Paul addressed some of the challenges raised against his authority. First, he tried to rid the Corinthians of the false apostles who had come to Corinth. Paul’s jealousy over the assembly was evident from his concern over their disloyalty to God’s work and workers. It gave him no choice but to warn the Lord’s people so that they might not be misled. He confronted the false apostles and revealed his purpose for calling the Corinthians back to loyalty. He expressed his desire that they would bear with some of his foolishness in defending himself for their sake and the gospel.

OUTLINE

Central Thought: Paul summarised his foolish speech on how he was weak in being persecuted, pouring his life out to suffer and pay the price of a faithful servant of the gospel. Paul identified the “super-apostles” as the

false apostles who opposed him (in actuality, they were opposing the Lord) and gave his assessment of their selfish motives (self-gain and power control) and wrong methods. Paul’s foolish speech boasted about his weaknesses in suffering for Christ’s sake and that his accomplishment was for Christ’s glory. The ministry of service must be led by loyal servants who are called and commissioned by the Lord. Their character and conduct can be challenged and proven faithful if they solely rely on the Lord and His Word. There is a great price to pay to serve the Lord with commitment against persecution, criticism, carnality, and false teaching.

a. His concern over the assembly (2 Cor. 11:1–6)

- **Supporting Thought:** Desiring to protect the assembly from error, Paul expressed concern about their disloyalty to Christ, the gospel, and the truth. He desired to keep the assembly pure, free from false teaching and worldly living (James 4:14). What a great contrast between his loving

attitude towards the Corinthians' spiritual well-being and his opponents' greed and self-glorification.

b. His assessment of the “Super-Apostles” (2 Cor. 11:7–9)

- **Supporting Thought:** The purpose was for Paul to address two accusations by the false apostles: that he was not a trained public speaker and had not accepted compensation from the Corinthians for his services. Paul explained why he was not an inferior public speaker; he'd chosen to approach his teaching differently. The core of his teaching ministry was to communicate the gospel's truth. He gave reasons for not accepting their support and why he preached free of charge— to not be a financial burden to them. He assessed those false apostles by talking about his pattern of ministry over and against their pattern of ministry.

c. His caution of the “Super-Apostles” (2 Cor. 11:10–15)

- **Supporting Thought:** Paul's concern was to rescue the Corinthians from the false teaching introduced by the false apostles. He was trying to eliminate their chances of being considered equals with him. He compared his actual pattern of ministry, as being after Christ, to the false pattern of the deceitful apostles, as being after Satan. Finally, he revealed his firm convictions concerning the outcome of his confrontation with those who challenged his authority.

i. What they could do (11:13):

The Judaizers deceived the church into accepting them as true apostles of Christ.

ii. How they could do it (11:14–15)

1. The root of their abilities (11:14):

Satan himself masqueraded as an angel of light.

2. The fruit of their abilities (11:15):

Satan similarly transformed his followers.

d. His care for God's people (2 Cor. 11:16–21)

- **Supporting Thought:** A record of distinguishing marks of true and false servants. It presents the great contrast between Paul, who lovingly and humbly served the Lord, and the false apostles, who deceptively abused the Corinthians. Someone in the assembly had mistaken Paul's refusal to accept money as indicating that he considered himself inferior to others. The “super-apostles” were well paid for their service, but Paul offered only free service. Paul used boasting to show his genuine service to the Lord and uncovered the true nature of his opponents' attacks. He adopted the argument of his opponents to show that they failed to prove themselves superior even when they set their standards.

e. His call from Christ (2 Cor. 12:1–5)

- **Supporting Thought:** Paul compared his unique experience of revelations to his opponents'. He shared that his supernatural vision took place 14 years before the writing of 2nd Corinthians. Paul felt it was needful for him to challenge the claims of the false apostles by sharing his extraordinary visions from the Lord, where he was caught up to the third heaven, which surpassed any of their claims.

4. Principles:

- a) The Lord's servants who lead and teach must be guided and guarded by the final authority of God's Word.
- b) The Bible emphasises the importance of loyalty to Christ, His assembly, and His workers.
- c) Beware of false teachings.
- d) The contrast between a faithful servant in his humility, truth, and love and a false servant in his pride, deception, and abuse.

5. Applications:

- a) We must obey Biblical teaching from God's Word by those rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).
- b) Loyalty to Christ, His assembly, and people, is non-negotiable (1 Cor. 16:22).
- c) A faithful servant of God is marked by how much he has suffered for Christ's sake, how concerned he is for God's people and the lost, how humble he is, and how accurately he handles the supernatural revelation found in God's Word.
- d) We must be watchful for false teaching, holding everything to the standard of God's Word (1 Tim. 6:3-4).
- e) The qualifications of a true teacher, preacher, or leader are more than ministry and skills, knowledge, and preparation; prayerful fellowship, a Spirit-filled life, and walking the talk are essential too.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of battle was Paul fighting in the argument of 2 Cor. 11:1–12:5?
2. What weapons did he use? How would you classify these weapons?
3. Compare and contrast legitimate boasting and foolish boasting, and give examples of each. When is it acceptable to defend one's ministry?
4. Describe Paul's concerns and challenges in this section of the letter. Then, how would you react and respond if he had spoken to you this way?
5. What does this passage say about authority within the assembly? How did Paul establish his authority and use it in this passage?
6. Discuss and share what Biblical principles we can gather from 2nd Corinthians to help us endure our faith and ministry. Then, reflect on Paul's "Fool's Speech" and its potential impact on the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:22–29).
7. What qualities of an excellent servant can we learn from Paul's life and leadership (Luke 22:25–26; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 4:1–5; Acts 20:29–30; 2 Cor. 4:10; 11:22–12:4)?

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- Second Corinthians by John MacArthur Jr.
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- 2nd Corinthians by John Heading

Lesson 12

– My Grace is Sufficient (The Ministry of Suffering and Sanctification)

Objectives

- Discover God’s purpose for Paul’s thorn in the flesh and His reason for not removing it.
- Discern the message and extreme measures Paul used to get the Corinthians back on board with the Lord’s mission and ministry.
- Discuss Paul’s visits to Corinth as a form of accountability and integrity in his ministry.
- Describe how God’s principle for discipline is always for restoration.
- Display the fivefold exhortation with a promise and a threefold benediction for believers to live in joy, unity, love, and peace.

Text:

2 Cor. 12:6 -13:14

Memory verse:

2 Cor. 12:9 (ESV)

But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Lesson

INTRODUCTION

God’s grace is sufficient for those who suffer for Christ’s sake; they grow in the grace of suffering. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to prepare for his upcoming visit and looked forward to a third visit. He longed to see them and renew the fellowship but realised that it might be a time of sadness. If they were prepared to listen to the instructions from God’s Word, it would be an opportunity for restoration and renewal. Otherwise, the visit would be a time of rebuke and discipline. Paul wanted them to repent of their sins, think rightly about him, and receive those who would accompany him.

OUTLINE

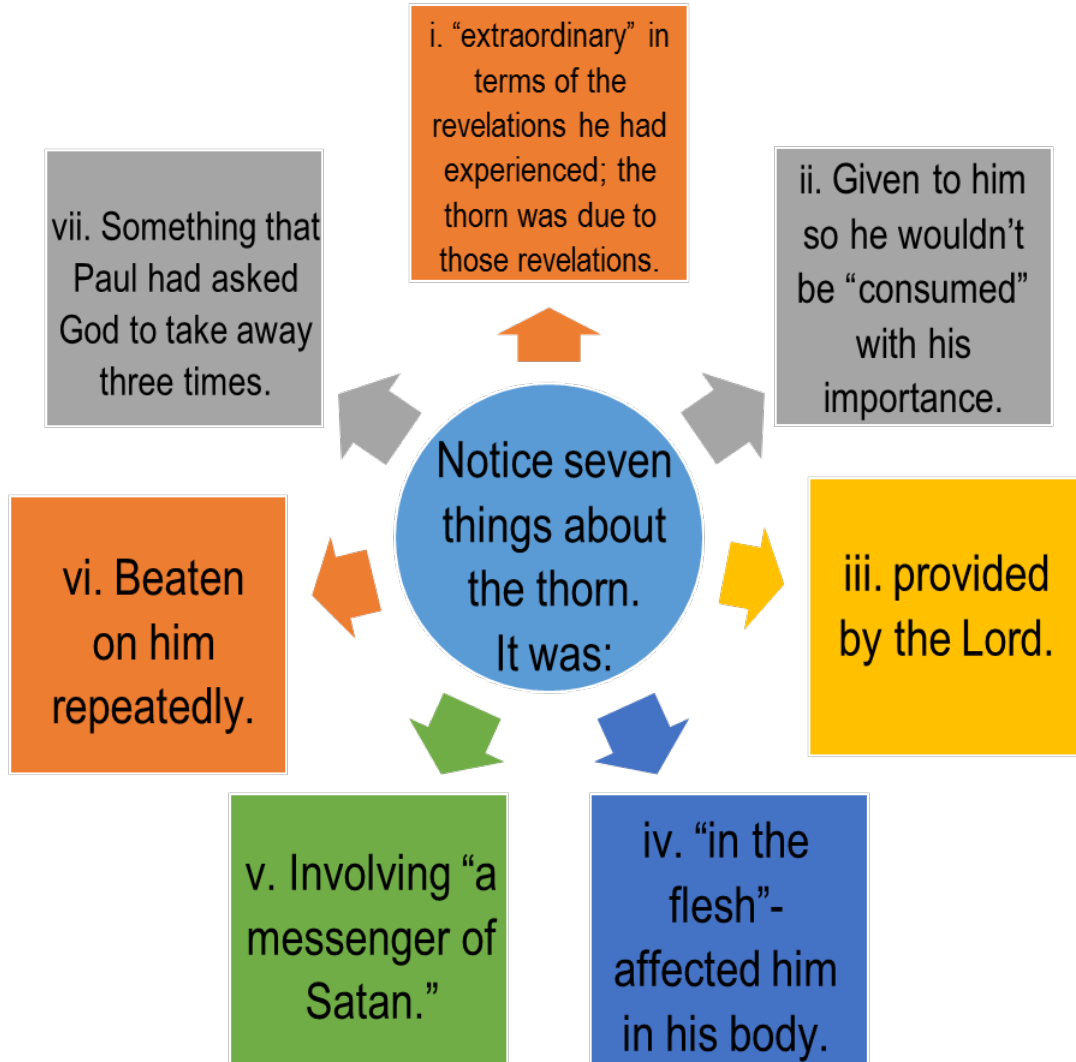
Central Thought: Paul closed this epistle by reminding the Corinthians that he intended to visit them soon for the third time. (Note: He had stayed in Corinth for 1.5 years during his first visit. Then he had received letters and visitors

from Corinth while in Ephesus and had travelled from Ephesus to visit them a second time. As he wrote 2nd Corinthians, he planned to visit again after Titus had prepared the way.) How would the visit go? It could be a time of joy and close fellowship, or it could be a time of rebuke and discipline. It was up to the Corinthians to decide.

a. His thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:6–10)

- **Supporting Thought:** To prevent Paul from boasting about God’s unique vision to him, God sent him a thorn in the flesh, referring to something painful and persistent. Endless suggestions have been made; three possible proposals are:
 - i. Paul had a physical ailment such as eye disease or speech impediment (Gal. 4:13–15);

- ii. His continued persecution from some opponents in the assemblies.
Perhaps conflict with false teachers.
- iii. He pointed to some troubling demonic activity, some severe temptation.
Paul gave God's reason for not removing his thorn in the flesh. Paul's focus was to embrace weakness so that the presence and power of Christ in his life allowed him to experience the sufficiency of God's grace for him. God's power was perfected in Paul's weakness to advance God's purposes.



b. His credentials (2 Cor. 12:11–13)

- **Supporting Thought:** A pointed conclusion where Paul closed his opponent's discussion by confronting the Corinthian assembly. He reminded the Corinthians that his previous miracles demonstrated that he was a true apostle; they had witnessed God's authorisation of his ministry. He hoped that writing against the false apostles might prevent a major conflict when he arrived. From Paul's perspective, he had not exploited the Corinthians or had questionable motives. Furthermore, he had never been a financial burden to them. He concluded by sarcastically asking them to understand his kindness toward them.

c. His care for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:14–18)

- **Supporting Thought:** The false apostles warned the Corinthians that Paul would drain their financial resources if he returned. On the contrary, Paul shared the good intentions that he would not take money from them so as not to be a burden

to the assembly. He hoped that this third visit would be a mutual blessing and desired their intimate, trusting fellowship in the Lord. He wanted to see the holiness, harmony, and happiness among the saints with him and others. He expressed his parental care with deep concern about their spiritual well-being. He also defended himself by saying that he and his co-workers did not take advantage of or exploit them but gave selfless service to the Lord's people and work. Therefore, there was no basis for them to question his motives.

d. His courage in dealing with sin (2 Cor. 12:19–21)

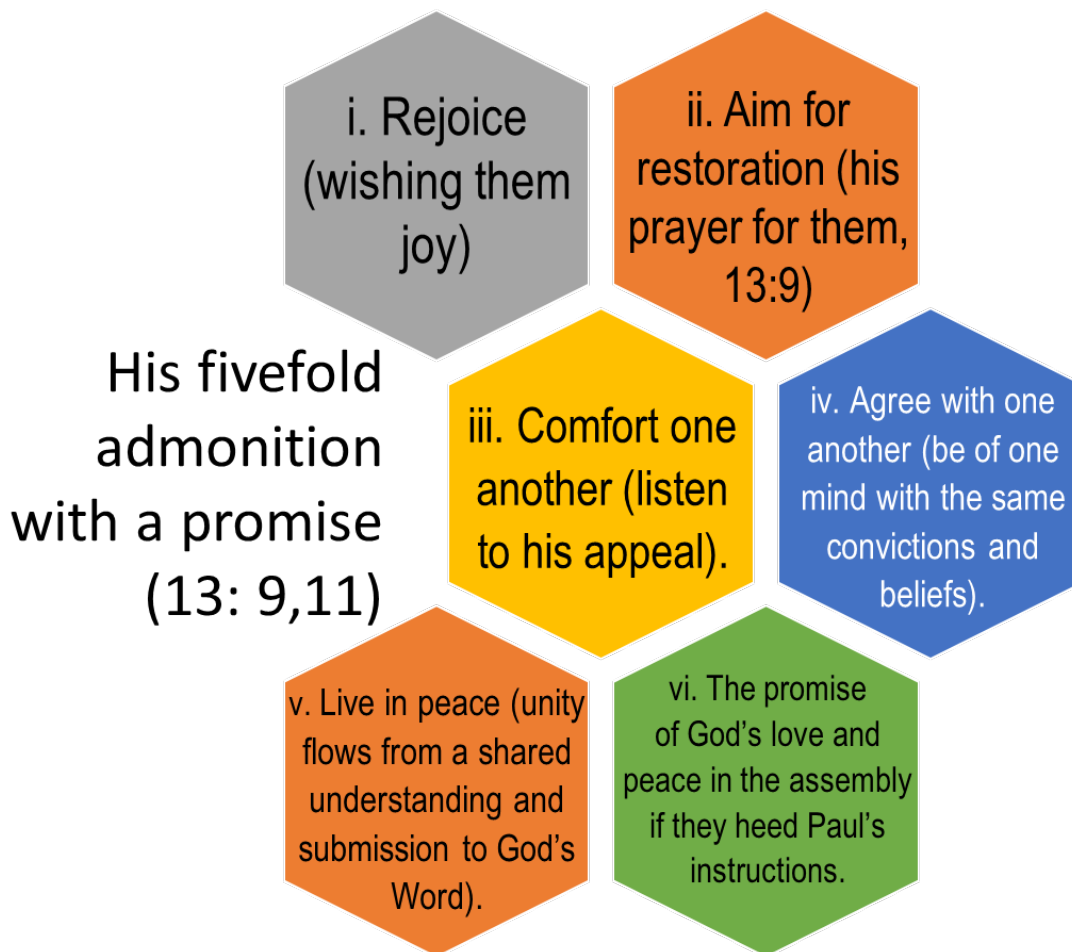
- **Supporting Thought:** Paul had spent much time boasting of himself to prove his loyalty and love for the Lord and His people in the preceding chapters. He made sure this boasting would not be misinterpreted. He demonstrated the concerns of a true spiritual leader with a servanthood ministry, unlike the false apostles who sought wealth, fame, and power. He had to defend against the enemies' attacks on his character and committed ministry. This section expresses Paul's courage with God's grace in dealing with sins (repentance), the world (faithfulness), himself (sacrifice), the ministry (honesty), the Lord (submission), and the assembly (edification). Upon his arrival, he was apprehensive that he would find the assembly still filled with pride, gossip, division, and disorder.

e. His counsel and caution (2 Cor. 13:1–10)

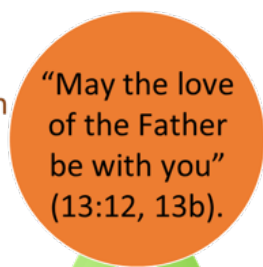
- **Supporting Thought:** Having raised the possibility that some in Corinth may not have repented of their sins before he arrived, Paul cautioned the assembly to take heed of the following:
 - i. Any accusation of a saint or servant must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (v.1; Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16).
 - ii. To administer church discipline on any guilty party, resulting in restoration (v.2).
 - iii. Those who challenged the Lord's authority as an apostle must be dealt with (v.3).
 - iv. Discipline would prove Christ's authority in his ministry. He emphasised that he would act as God's instrument on Christ's behalf and that the discipline would show God's power for the Corinthians' benefit unto repentance (v.4).
 - v. He challenged them to examine themselves to see whether they were truly born again Christians (v.5).
 - vi. He and his co-workers have demonstrated true saving faith in their lives (v.6).
 - vii. He prayed and hoped that the Corinthians would respond appropriately to his instructions based on God's truths (v.7–8).
 - viii. To pray for restoration and grow up in Christ (v.9).
 - ix. The Lord's authority for Paul was for building up and not tearing down, with the primary purpose of building up the assembly (v.10).

f. His closing greetings (2 Cor. 13:11–14)

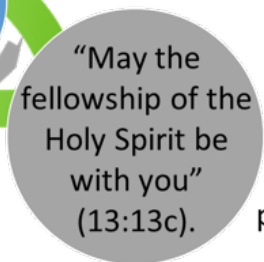
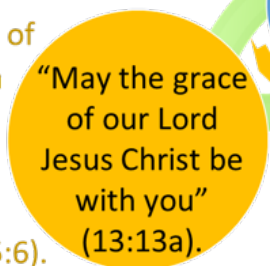
- Supporting Thought: Paul closed this letter with brief exhortations, encouragements, and exaltations - a call for unity, love, and peace among God’s people in a local assembly.



The love of God the Father caused Him to plan redemption and choose those who would be saved (Rom. 5:8–10).



Through the grace of Christ in dying as a sacrifice for sins, salvation was obtained for the redeemed (Rom. 5:6).



As a result of salvation, Christians are ushered into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit as He indwells them (Rom. 8:9) and places them into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

3) Principles

- a) The need to apply confrontation and accountability in dealing with sin.
- b) The principles of discipline (validation, warning, Christ-centeredness, striving for the truth) are always for repentance and restoration.
- c) To follow Paul's pattern of life and ministry after the Lord Jesus Christ.
- d) Not all professed believers are genuinely saved. They need to examine themselves to see if they are genuinely born-again. True faith is evidenced by the fruit of good works.
- e) To maintain unity, peace, and fellowship with one another in the assembly, every saint needs to grow up in the faith and mature in Christ.

4) Life Applications

- a) It is important to apply confrontation and spiritual accountability with wisdom and grace-filled encouragement to pull the ungodly back onto the right path in their fellowship with the Lord.
- b) The longer we delay confirming our attitudes and actions to our knowledge of scripture, the more we risk God's discipline on us.
- c) Following Paul's example of suffering and steadfastness is a path of truth, integrity, and authenticity so that we can advance God's cause in this world with the gospel of Christ.
- d) Be sure you are saved and obedient to God's Word.
- e) Deepen your walk with Christ and in your ministry.

Discussion Questions

1. How is 2 Cor. 12:9 a message of “sufficient” grace? (2 Cor. 3:4–6; 9:8).
How is knowing God’s grace sufficient to help us in times of suffering and other times of rejoicing? Why was sufficiency such an important message for the Corinthians and us today?
2. What practical lessons can we learn from Paul’s suffering?
How can we live out this truth in practical ways today?
3. Why did Paul give the Corinthians so many warnings?
Why had he not disciplined them earlier?
4. Discuss the accountability to which Paul challenged the Corinthians and consider its implications for your ministry.
5. Which of Paul’s final five exhortations do you most need to apply to your own life and relationships within the church?
6. What other insights and observations have you gained from studying the book of 2 Corinthians

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