Class on 2 Corinthians

Background on Corinth:

A powerful wealthy Roman City located on the Isthmus of Corinth which separates the Greek mainland from the Peloponnesian Peninsula and the Ionian and Aegean Seas. The isthmus is less than 4 miles long. People would drag their boats across the isthmus rather than sail around the Peloponnesian Peninsula.

Because of its unique location, Corinth has been a natural center of wealth, trade and communication.

Destroyed by the Romans 146 BC

Rebuilt by Rome as a Roman city by Julius Caesar after 44 BC

Known as a “sinful” city (but perhaps that is exaggerated by some Christians)

More pagan influence in Corinth than in any other city where Paul planted a church. Idol worship, wealth, prostitution.

Paul spent more time in Corinth (1.5 years + AD 50-51) than any other city other than Ephesus.

From names used in 1 and 2 Corinthians we learn that the city was largely composed of Romans, freed slaves, as well as some Jews and others from Eastern Mediterranean.

He wrote 1 Corinthians (AD 55) in response to a letter from the Corinthian Christians about many problems in the church.

Divisiveness/factions based on leadership style (I follow Cephas, I follow Apollos, I follow Paul)

Sexual immorality among members tolerated

Involvement in pagan worship allowed

Lawsuits among believers.

Chaos in worship, including the Lord’s Supper and use of charismatic gifts in worship.

Doubts about the resurrection of the dead!

Background to 2 Corinthians:

Paul visited a second time in AD 56 to address problems. It is known as the “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1), after which he wrote a “Severe Letter” (almost certainly NOT 1 Corinthians) Paul was not well received. In the meantime, other disciples, probably Greek-speaking Jews came to Corinth, claiming to be “super-apostles,” spreading Judaizing influence (ministers of the “written code/letter” 2 Cor 3:6, and undermining Paul’s authority.

Because of the “Severe Letter” the Corinthians had repented, in part (2 Cor 7:8-13). For example, they had disfellowshipped one who had been having sexual immorality with another believer, but these super-apostles were raising fresh issues for the church, and this is why he wrote 2 Corinthians, prior to his third and final visit to them in AD 57/58, at which time he wrote Romans.

Purpose of 2 Corinthians:

1. To defend his apostleship and authority over the church in Corinth.

2. To oppose the worldly leadership of the super-apostles who said that Paul was too weak, too poor, too humble, not a good enough speaker, etc…

3. To defend and explain Paul’s New Covenant ministry

Much of what is in 2 Corinthians can be explained by this background.

For example, it explains why Paul boasts of his weakness, not his strengths.

It is why he stresses his and Christ’s suffering so much.

Outline of 2 Corinthians:

1:1-2:13 Introduction and defense of Paul’s apostolic ministry

2:14-7:4 Paul explains his ministry of the New Covenant.

7:5-9:15 Titus brings news from Corinth and Paul’s response. Collection for the Jerusalem Church.

10:1-13:14 Paul defends his ministry and prepares the Corinthians for his 3rd visit.

The text:

2 Cor 1:1-7 Greeting and comfort.

Comfort 9 times.

The point here: I, Paul, who have suffered more greatly than any of you in Corinth have been greatly comforted (v. 3-4) by God. If I can be comforted, surely you can as well, so I bring the comfort of God to you.

Suffering ↔ Comfort Comfort: A sense of safety and that all is OK.

Where does Paul get his comfort? V. 3-4 From God!

Q: Have you suffered for the name Jesus? (I hope so)

The more you suffer, the more you can comfort those who go through suffering.

(v. 6 “our distress it is for your comfort”)

The result of this comfort? v. 6 patient endurance of suffering.

suffering → comfort → suffering → comfort

Paul surely has Isaiah 40:1 in mind: “Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.

Where do you get your comfort?

2 Cor 1:8-11 Context for Paul’s comfort/suffering Paul: FYI, I have undergone GREAT suffering quite recently. (He will summarize and categorize these in 2 Cor 11:21-29.

If we look at the chronology of 2 Corinthians and Acts, this very likely is a reference to the charges of destroying the idol business in Ephesus when Paul said publicly, “man-made gods are not gods at all.” (Acts 19:26). This started a riot and got Paul kicked out of Ephesus (Acts 19), but Paul is implying that Luke tones down somewhat the level of risk to Paul.

v. 8 I despaired of life. I thought I was a goner.

v. 9 But now I am happy about this because it taught me to rely more on God.

v. 9 Why did he feel confident despite the threat to his life? “Because of God who raises the dead.”

Q: Do you want to learn to rely on God?

What does this passage suggest is the best way to learn this?

Many of us have been rescued from the jaws of death by Jesus!

v. 10 On who/what have you set your hope?

2 Cor 1:12-2:4 Paul explains his plans.

I will describe the situation briefly, as Paul does not need to explain himself to us, but to the Corinthians.

He had told him that he would visit them twice, but, because he decided the visit would be too painful for them and for Paul, he chose to delay his visit and come only once (which happened soon after 2 Corinthians, as recorded in Acts). His critics accused him of being fickle (a bit like political opponents accusing one another of flip-flopping on issues)

But now, because there is evidence that the church had begun its repentance (2 Cor 7:8-13), he is planning on coming and 2 Corinthians is written to prepare for that 3-month final visit.

2 Cor 2:5-11 Restore the offender.

Paul advises that the person who had been disfellowshipped earlier (likely but not definitely the person Paul advised to disfellowship for having an incestuous sexual relationship in 1 Cor 5, or possibly another person mentioned in the “severe letter”) be accepted back into the fellowship due to his repentance. This will be referred to again in 2 Cor 7.

v. This is not about a personal vendetta, but because the person offended and hurt the local church in Corinth.

The purpose of disfellowship is to remove something very valuable to any believer, the fellowship with the saints, with the intent of helping them to come to their senses, so that they can repent and be restored to the faith.

All church discipline should be redemptive.

This would only work if the person really valued the Christian fellowship. Only in a close-knit Christian community.

When someone returns, they should be treated as the Father does the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) , not with reserve and with keeping people in the dog house.

v. 7 It is time to forgive and comfort the one who has repented.

v. 8 Reaffirm your love for him.

v. 11 Otherwise Satan would have an opportunity to use this situation against the person.

Remember the Bible talk we did recently: Satan’s Schemes.

Satan is a deceiver and a tempter, but in this case, he is the accuser.

Paul: 2 Cor 2:11 We are well aware of Satan’s schemes. We use discernment to limit his ability to deceive (by speaking the truth in love), accuse (by always having mercy and a desire to forgive at the forefront) and tempt (by urging people to avoid possibly sinful situations).

“You can never change. Church discipline is designed to be a temporary thing, with the expectation of renewed love and fellowship upon repentance.

Church discipline should be extremely rare, and, when enforced, the entire tone of the discipline and the subsequent receiving back should be love.

2 Cor 2:14-17 This passage begins Paul’s principal argument in 2 Corinthians: The Ministry of Reconciliation. Paul’s defense of his New Covenant ministry.

It is connected with the previous material, as Paul will often remind them of his suffering and God’s comfort and deliverance from suffering.

Paul will talk a lot about power in weakness. Therefore, he begins by describing God’s triumphal procession.

Paul’s suffering is part of his “triumphal procession.”

This is not AT ALL like a Roman triumphal procession—celebrating our strength and the defeat of our enemies. Au contraire!!!!

Consider the context. He had just talked about “beyond our ability to endure.” And “despairing of life.”

Also, we, as Christians, may be in the “triumphal procession,” but we are the slaves at the back of the procession. (1 Corinthians 4:9 “God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena.”

There is deep irony here. Our procession is truly a triumphal one, with Jesus at the head of the triumphal procession, but we are like suffering servants at the back of this triumphal procession!

What produces the triumph here? It is us spreading the “aroma of Christ.”

Scholars note that in at least one famous procession (that of Scipuis Africanus) the slaves at the back of the triumphal procession were forced to carry burning incense!

Anything that leads to the spreading of the aroma of Christ.

Illustration: In Accra, Ghana, the church marched through the streets, making a lot of noise, inviting people, spreading news of Christ, etc…

What is this aroma? Us!!!! (hopefully) We are that aroma.

v. 15 We are a pleasing aroma—a reference to the Levitical burnt offering and grain offering of the Old Testament, which are a “pleasing aroma” to God (Leviticus 1:17 Lev 2:2, for example)

So… We are the aroma of Christ to God and to the world.

When you walk into a room, what aroma are you spreading?

What do people see? What do you smell like?

Do you smell like Christ? (humility, suffering, mercy, purity, love, patience,…)

v. 16 To some (the majority), yours will be the aroma of death!

v. 16 To others (a small proportion of the total) you will be the aroma of life!

What I have been looking for, it is now here. Smell is closely connected with our memory and emotions!

v. 16 Who is adequate? A rhetorical question. The answer is no-one!

(but in 2 Cor 3:6 he gives a different answer. In Christ, we are sufficient/competent. “Our competence comes from God.”

But (v. 17) those super-apostles thing that they are adequate. That is the problem!

v. 17 We are not like those “super apostles.” It definitely is not about money or self-gain, self-gratification or self-praise.

Our happiness comes from spreading the aroma of Christ through suffering, humility…

Discussion Questions:

How has God comforted you?

How will you learn to rely on God? (trials?)

How have/will you spread the aroma of Christ?

**Class #2**

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Do we need a letter of reference like “some people?” (his opponents accuse him of being self-commended) These “some people” are the peddlers of the Word of God—they are the super-apostles who came to Corinth. For us—they are the ones who have lots of letters after their name, who are called “reverend” or “pastor” or… but who do not suffer with Christ for the gospel.

Paul: You are my letter.

Us: The people we have led to Christ are our letter of recommendation—not to God but to others. Like Jesus said (Matthew 7) by their fruits you will know them.

Their lives—changed by the work of the Holy Spirit—are Paul’s letter. (If time: Ezekiel 36:36-37 I will put a new heart and a new Spirit in you… a heart of flesh, not stone)

You are my letter—written on the tablets of human hearts (a reference to the tablets of stone of the Mosaic covenant)

Our ministry is of the Holy Spirit, not of the “letter” (again, a reference to Leviticus)

Q: Why does “the letter” kill? It is works salvation. More on that later. (2 Cor 3:7)

v. 4 We are confident…

There is irony here, because just a few verses ago 2 Cor 2:16 he had asked “who is competent/equal to the task? The answer to this rhetorical question was No one!!!

Now, 2 Cor 3: 4 he says we are confident. This theme will repeat itself several times. Remember this theme of confidence!!!

Paul: Help me out here: Are you confident or are you not confident?

So, we are confident, but where does our confidence come from?

Q: Are you confident in your ministry, in your life?

If so, where does such confidence come from?

2 Cor 3:5 …not because we are competent in ourselves. NOOO!!!

v. 5 “our competence comes from God.

v. 6 He as made us competent as ministers of the New Covenant.

How? By giving us the Holy Spirit.

The super-apostles’ problem: Their confidence was in their letters of recommendation. It was in the “letter” of the Law. It was in the ink. It was in their awesomeness and their strength. It was in their rhetorical skill, in their intellectual power, their skill at…

Paul: My confidence is in my weakness, not my strength. More to come on this.

Illustration: So many times I have been in a really tough spot, with a question I was asked or a crazy situation. Suddenly, I knew the answer, I said the perfect thing, I knew what had to be done.

This is CONFIDENCE, and it is in the Holy Spirit that lives in me.

This is what the entire section 2 Cor 2:14-7:1 is about. Paul’s confidence in the New Covenant in Christ, through the Holy Spirit!!!!

2 Cor 3:7-11 The ministry that brought death? What?

 The old covenant is “the ministry that brought death.” v. 9 that brought condemnation….

Why? Romans 7:13 It made sin utterly sinful.

It made us realize what great trouble we were in. Romans 5:20 It made sin “utterly sinful.”

v. 7 In case you were not sure: engraved in letters of stone (ie. the 10 commandments. Parallel to “the letter” in 3:6)

It brought about ceremonial cleanness.

But, it was glorious.

What does glorious/glory mean?

English: magnificent, wonderful, worthy of great praise.

Hebrew: Shining forth—emitting great light

And Moses’ ministry was truly glorious!!!! Literally!!!

He had to wear a veil. Exodus 34:29-35

When the temple was consecrated the priests came running out because of the glory of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:10 the glory of the Lord filled the temple)

But the ministry of Christ—the New Covenant is far more glorious. Why?

v. 9 It brings righteousness. Law of Moses did not—only outward cleanness.

v. 11 It lasts.

2 Cor 3:12-18

v. 12 Because we have this hope we are very bold.

What hope? The hope of glorification. The hope of a glorification like that of Moses, only greater.

Q: Would you say that you are very bold?

v. 14, 16 In Christ the veil is removed!!!! In Christ you can finally see.

Q: Can you remember when God removed the veil? You finally “got” it.

v. 16 This happens when we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism.

Illustration:

Have you ever gone hiking at night? Ever gone trail-running at night?

Illustration:

When I got glasses in the 4th grade, it is like a veil had been removed.

My experience: Studying the Bible, ask what the passage means, getting nonsense. The one day—a miracle!!!! The veil is removed.

Here is the main passage for today—the real take-home lesson:

2 Cor 3:16 Having the veil removed is not the goal. The goal is spiritual transformation. The goal is convergence. The goal is glorification!!!

[aside: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. This “freedom” is from slavery to the Law and to gaining perfection through the Law. See Galatians 5:1, 5-6)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate/reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

It is both. We contemplate, then we reflect, then we contemplate, then we reflect, then we contemplate, then we reflect.

Q: Is this happening in your life?

What is the key: Contemplating!!!

Get the vision: Transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

The goal of the Christian life is not just salvation. It is Transformation

Transformation into the “image” of Christ. Transformed to become like Christ.

Romans 8:29 We are predestined to be transformed into the image of Christ.

So, let us contemplate so that we can reflect.

Justification (veil removed) → Sanctification (a process) → Glorification (a culmination).

Summary Questions for lesson 2

Are you confident that God will use you to do great things?

Where does such confidence of lack thereof come from.

What can you do to more confidently reflect on the Lord Jesus?

**Class #3**

**2 Corinthians 4-5 The Power of Knowing**

2 Cor 4:1-6 We have this ministry of showing/reflecting the glory of Christ to the world.

Therefore, we do not lose heart.

Have you ever “lost heart”? Have you ever felt it was too hard? Have you ever contemplated packing it in, or seriously backing off on your Christian commitment?

Emma, Eve and I felt that a bit yesterday on campus.

Was Paul ever tempted to lose heart? Yes!

So, why did he not lose heart? Because he had this ministry of the gospel from God.

I am making a difference. Eternity is at stake. This is important!

So, what should we do?

 v. 2 Set forth the truth plainly.

Another group on campus did “spiritual readings.” (it was a prayer with them)

Another group on campus invited people to a race and a community service event

We are the Alpha Omega Christian club.

We are trying to make disciples of Christ.

 v. 2 Commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience.

Have you commended your life to people’s conscience. I have chosen the gospel. I have given my life to Christ. It is working.

v. 3 Will everyone listen? No. Their minds are still veiled.

v. 5 What is the content of this truth that we set forth plainly?

1. Jesus as Lord. Master, king, head honcho, Creator, We preach Jesus, not church.

2. Ourselves as servants for Jesus’ sake. How do we preach that?

We are here to serve. Is that you, or do you want to “have your needs met.”

“I am looking for a church that meets my needs.”

v. 6 We are reflecting the glory of Christ. (contemplate, reflect)

2 Cor 4:7-12

We are mere “jars of clay.” We are mortal humans.

This proves that all the power comes from God, not us!!!

v. 10 we “carry around in our body the death of Jesus.”

Our lives—changed by Christ—demonstrates what it means to die with Christ. Paul: (1 Corinthians 15:31) “I die daily.”

Our lifestyle of sacrifice in these “jars of clay.” for Christ demonstrates the life-giving nature of being a Christian.

v. 12 “Death (the death of Christ) is at work in us.” People can see this, and so life can be at work in them.

Because the death of Christ is working in us. That is why live is given to others.

Q: Is the death of Christ obviously working in you—based on how you live your life? Are you denying self and taking up your cross daily?

2 Cor 4:13-18

The ultimate result of the transformation done by Christ is this:

 v. 13 We speak.

Have you been speaking? To whom? About what?

If the veil has been lifted, then you ought to speak about Christ.

Why are we able to do this? v. 14 We KNOW (not we think, not we hope) that we will be raised.

Confidence. Much emphasis on this in 2 Cor 4,5!!!!

v. 16 So, we do not lose heart.

We do not lose our motivation and zeal. Have you lost heart?

We do not lose heart because:

1. v. 14 We know that God will raise us with Jesus.

 2. v. 15 God’s grace is reaching more and more people.

v. 16 Outwardly, it is not looking good!!! Young people may not recognize this, but trust me, we are wasting away on the outside.

v. 17 Has everyday life gotten you down at all lately? Health concerns, financial issues, things needing to be done…

v. 16 Are you being renewed every day? Many believers are not! It goes back to 2 Cor 3:18 Are you being transformed by contemplating the Lord’s glory?

How do we avoid losing heart?

v. 18 Fix our eyes on what is unseen.

We fix our eyes on the fact that God will raise us with Christ and present us to himself. (reference Hebrews 11:1 Faith is belief in things unseen)

2 Cor 5:1-10 And thus the title: The Power of Knowing

4:14 5:1 we know 5:5 guarantee 5:6 confident 5:6 know 5:7 we live by faith. 5:8 we are confident

4:7 jars of clay (fragility) 5:1 earthly tent (temporariness)

But Paul says we KNOW we have an eternal house in heaven. This is one of those “unseen” things is 2 Cor 4:18.

How confident are you in your future in heaven? Why do you believe that?

Have you ever doubted? (I have)

v. 2, 4 Meanwhile we groan. In our physical nature, we groan. We feel burdened.

Can you relate? We long for something better.

We are tired, we are in pain. It’s hard…

v. 4 We don’t want to be “unclothed.” (being dead but not having a home and an new, immortal, heavenly body)

v. 4 We want to be clothed with our future immortal bodies.

v. 5 We can be confident because the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing that we will have a new, resurrected body. (also 2 Cor 1:22 a seal)

v. 7 Can you confidently say that you live by faith, not by sight? Why?

v. 8 Can you confidently say that you are looking forward to your physical death?

v. 9 Because we are confident of our future—because we Know we have a building from God—so…we make it our goal to please him.

Is that your goal?

v. 10 is a transition verse. All of us will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

(wait a minute. Didn’t Jesus say I did not come to judge the world but to save it? Yes, but that applies to his life here on earth. He will judge!!!)

Discussion Questions:

1. Is the death of Christ at work in you? How?

2. Are you confident? Do you know?

3. Do you believe: Have you been speaking?

**Class #4 Ministers of Reconciliation**

2 Cor 5:11-15

It is odd that Paul talks about knowing, guaranteeing, confidence, but then he talks about fear.

We know that we will be clothed, but, in light of 2 Cor 5:10 we fear, not for ourselves, but for others. We do the fearing that they do not do.

So, what do we do about this?

v. 11 We try to persuade people. We do not just throw it out there. We appeal to their consciences (2 Cor 4:2).

To persuade is to try to get people to do something they do not currently want to do. This is intimidating. It requires conflict (but I, personally, am a conflict avoider)

Eternity is at stake here. You have to get it right with God!

Are you willing to face judgment not having been saved by Christ? You have to change your life. 2 Cor 6:2 Do it now. Now is the day of salvation!

Def: To cause someone to believe something through sustained effort. To convince someone of something they would not otherwise have believed.

Play-act:

Pretend you are talking to a religious person who has never truly repented and been baptized: How will you persuade this person.

Pretend you are talking to a typical person who is living a typical life, doing typical things, but not being particularly religious at all. How will you persuade this person?

Pretend you are talking to a typical blatant sinner who drinks, parties and sleeps around. How will you “persuade” this person?

v. 11-12 An aside Paul is using his authority to persuade the Corinthians, so he reminds them that he is not commending himself, like those super-apostles who take pride in “what is seen.” (their awesomeness, qualifications, letters of recommendation).

v. 11 What we are is plain to God and to people. What are we? Pursuaders of others—evangelizers.

v. 13 These super-apostles are accusing Paul of being “out of his mind.”

v. 13 Paul was so determined to be persuasive that some said he was “out of his mind.” He embraces the “out of his mind” description.

Sure, I am crazy. I am crazy for God! Paul is being quite ironic here.

Have you been so persuasive to people that some think you are a bit crazy—out of your mind? Are you just a bit scary to your family and friends?

Would anyone accuse you of this?

v. 14 Why was Paul “out of his mind?” Christ’s love!

He was crazy about God! People in love do crazy things!

Q: What does Christ’s love compel us to do in this context?

1. persuade people (v. 11)

2. commend ourselves to people’s consciences (2 Cor 4:2)

3. speak (2 Cor 4:13)

Q: Are you convinced that Christ died for you? Then you should be compelled to speak and to persuade.

Q: What is the evidence from God of his love for us that can compels us? (that he died) He died “for all.” (so much for Calvinism and limited atonement)

The expected result of our comprehending that Christ died for all?

v. 14 That all should die for him.

v. 15 That we no longer live principally to please ourselves, but for the sake of others.

Paul lays out two motivations for us to persuade people:

1. Out of fear of God—of their judgment.

2. Compelled out of love for God.

This is a fine-sounding thing, but it is the case in your life?

Do you live a compelled life—compelled by what God has done for you?

2 Cor 5:16-21

v. 16 What does it mean to “regard someone from a worldly point of view?”

…to consider them for what they can do in this world. Their wealth, riches, good looks, accomplishments, personal awesomeness….

…we do so no longer. We have stopped judging on worldly basis. No!

v. 17 If we are in Christ, the new creation has come.

Q: Are you “in Christ” (we are baptized into Christ) You are a new creation!!!

What is the nature of this new creation?

We become ministers!!

v. 18 According to this passage, who is a minister? Anyone who is in Christ!

In Christ implies 1. A new creation and 2. A minister of reconciliation.

Q: What does a “minister” do?

Def: To give aid or service to someone.

Q: (v. 18) What do we minister to people?

We offer reconciliation to those who are not yet reconciled.

You are a minister! No I am not, I am a lay person.

No! You are a full time minister. Your ministry? Reconciliation.

v. 19 What is our message? Reconciliation!!! We bring people who are estranged from God into a proper, justified relationship with him.

v. 19 We offer the opportunity for people to no longer have their sins held against them.

Have you been doing this? To whom?

v. 19 Why did God commit the message of reconciliation to us?

Would you have picked you? God picked you!

v. 18-19 ministers. v. 20 ambassadors.

v. 20 Q: What does an ambassador do?

We represent God to the world.

If we are ambassadors for Christ, how will we act?

Ambassadors are under a perpetual microscope.

The world is putting you under a microscope. They are holding you to a standard they would never apply to themselves!

Mr Ambassador: Ms. Ambassador: How are you doing at representing God?

Being an ambassador is a fantastic priviledge.

Being an ambassador is a very weighty responsibility.

Theresa of Avila (1512-1582) the Christian mystic said:

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

v. 21 This is one of the most significant scriptures in the Bible. It is deep theology.

What does it mean that “God made him who had no sin to be sin (or a sin offering) for us?

This is prefigured in Numbers 21:4-9

Why use a snake as the image to foreshadow Christ on the cross?

Answer: Because on the cross Christ became sin for us!

The result: We are righteous—we are justified—we are as if we had never sinned!

Q: How do you feel that Jesus has done this for you?

2 Cor 6:1-2

In view of all this: Now is the time of salvation. Now is the time to get your life right with God. Now is the time to make Jesus Lord, repent and be baptized into Christ!

What is the best time to be saved? Now!

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you been persuading people to give their life to God?

2. How is your ministry of reconciliation going?

3. Any ways you can become a better ambassador for Christ?

**Class #5 Godly Sorrow Leads to Repentance**

Review:

We have a glorious ministry. We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. We are confident, we do not lose heart, we know, we are guaranteed that our clay vessel, our tent will be replaced by an eternal home.

Therefore, we are very bold. Therefore we do not lose heart. Therefore we speak. Therefore, we appeal to everyone’s conscience, and try to persuade others.

In fact, we are so convinced other think we are “out of our minds” because Christ’s love compels us to take on this ministry of reconciliation.

Why? Because “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might can and will become the righteousness of God.

Conclusion: 2 Cor 6:2 “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

First, let’s cover 2 Cor 6:3-7:7 briefly for completeness

2 Cor 6:3-13 As before (2 Cor 1:13-17), and as after (2 Cor 10 &11), Paul is defending his ministry.

Unlike these super-apostles we are commended, not by letters of recommendation, but by hardships:

endurance, hardships, beatings, imprisonments, hard work, sleepless nights, beaten, sorrowful, poor

Have you experienced any of these?

Christ-like lives:

purity, patience, kindness, sincere love, honest speech

Are you characterized by these?

in spite of:

dishonor, bad report, labeled imposters, regarded as unknown

Has your life caused you to receive any of these?

Conclusion of this section: 6:11-13 Corinthians, open your hearts to us.

2 Cor 6:14-7:1

Because we are ministers of reconciliation.

Because we are ambassadors for Christ.

Because God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us…

v. 17 Come out from them. Do not be yoked with them. Separate yourselves from them…

In the context: (v. 16 “what agreement between the temple of God and idols? We are the temple of the living God.) do not be yoked with those who worship idols in their idolatrous ceremonies. Separate yourselves from the temple cults.

This is a principle, not a prescriptive commandment. It is a general principle for all our relationships with outsiders.

What are these potential “yoke” situations?

For us: Do not be too closely associated with those who will draw you naturally into their sinful behavior.

Yoke? Business partnerships, employment, dating and marriage.

The closer they tie you to unbelievers, the more cautious we should be.

2 Cor 7:1 Because we have these promises… Q: Which promises? The promises of this entire section.

… a glory that far outweighs them all.

…to be transformed into his likeness.

…to be clothed with our heavenly body.

…reconciliation.

Let us flee everything that contaminates our bodies and our spirits.

We will skip 2 Cor 7:2-7. Details of interest to the Corinthians only.

2 Cor 7:8-13 Godly Sorrow Leads to Repentance and brings salvation!

Paul had made the Corinthians sorry.

This may be by the letter we know of as 1 Corinthians, but commentators believe he is referring to a separate “painful letter” which is not extant.

Is Paul happy that he “caused them sorrow?” Yes and no.

Paul does not get a “rush” out of confronting people over their sin.

Are you a conflict avoider? Paul was not, but he was tempted to be.

Do you enjoy calling people out on their sin or other bad behavior? I hope not!

But… Paul was satisfied. He was glad he did it. Why? It had the desired effect.

v. 9 Their sorrow led them to repentance. Q: How do you think that Paul knew this? Because Titus had observed the qualities in v. 11.

A point: I believe that there are two kinds of repentance that are relevant to the Christian life:

1. The initial repentance from a life devoted to sin which is necessary in order to be saved (Acts 2:38, Luke 13:3 unless you repent you too will all perish)

2. The repentance with is a regular part of the life of a disciple of Christ. This repentance does not cause salvation, but it leads to a healthy Christian life.

Q: (a hard question) Which is Paul talking about (hint v. 10)

My answer: both (although v. 10 seems to say category #1), but he is talking to disciples, so mainly category #2.

Q: Paul describes both godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. What are the characteristics of worldly sorrow?

Guilt feelings

Shallow remorse

Shame

Lack of conviction

Lack of solid action

Sorry you got caught

Trying to avoid consequences.

Now, let’s go through the qualities of godly sorrow. Let us define each and talk about what it will look like if we are truly repenting of our sins.

Earnestness (diligence). Earnestness means being serious. Willing to do whatever it takes. No nonsense. No one needs to remind you.

For example, let us say that you lied or that you lost your temper, what would earnestness look like?

When we initiate a loan, we put down “earnest” money. I am serious. I am not backing down or backing out. I am in this to the end.

Eagerness to clear yourselves (desire to clear yourselves) Does this mean desire not to get in trouble? No!

It means eagerness to bring everything out into the light.

It means being an open book. Here is what I did. Here is why I did it. Not seeking to justify but to accept any potential blame.

Not telling half the story. Not trying to “spin” it in a favorable light, but putting yourself in the worst possible light.

People do not need to ask six questions to find out what REALLY happened.

Indignation (anger) Anger at what/who?

Alarm (fear) Fear about consequences, specifically related to to judgment by God.

Do you fear what your sin, if extrapolated, could do to you and to those you love?

Longing (deep longing) Desire/longing for what? (to be right with the one you offended)

Like home-sickness. If someone you loved left you, you would “long” to have them back.

Repentance involves a deep emotional desire to be right with God again.

Concern (zeal) Zealous about all of these other qualities.

Readiness to see justice done (justice) (willing to accept consequences)

Not avoiding or minimizing the negative consequences to you but instead embracing the consequences.

Example: Jan’s friend and the dresses.

Example: Harliem’s friend.

Example: The guy in Spokane I studied with who had committed murder. Guess what I told him?

If you have these qualities, then you can be absolutely assured that you are having godly grief and are achieving repentance.

Result: Acts 3:19 Your sins will be wiped out and times of refreshing will come.

Repentance is hard but it is very refreshing!

Discussion questions:

1. What has been in your life recently for which repentance is needed?

2. What have you done about this? Have you been earnest, come into the light, been angry at your sins, been fearful of possible consequences, been desirous to right with God and been willing to accept consequences for what you did?

**Class #6 2 Corinthians 8&9 Generosity**

Generosity: Unlike some other Christian traits (humility, purity, pacifism, sacrifice, etc.) the world in general sees generosity as a good thing. What are some positive results of generosity?

Can anyone share a story about someone who was particularly generous?

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

v. 1 And now…

Share the context: Paul is trying to raise money from the churches in Asia, Achaia (Greece) and Macedonia to help the church in Jerusalem which has become impoverished due to a draught and other difficulties there.

Who tends to be more generous, relatively wealthy people, or relatively poor people? Why do you think that is?

What do you think Paul means that the Macedonians gave “beyond their ability?” (this almost seems to be an oxymoron)

v. 3-4 They pleaded for the opportunity to give. Is this normal? How would you describe these Macedonians. “entirely on their own.” “urgently”

v. 5 They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to us.

What does this mean? (not sure myself: maybe gave first to the local church needs, or maybe it is their lordship in general)

v. 7 God’s command to us: “Excel in the grace of giving.”

A question for you: Do you “excel in the grace of giving?”

2 Corinthians 8:8-9

In what ways did Jesus “make himself poor.”?

Phil 2:6 Who being, in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Jesus’ generosity was not principally in the area of money, but in giving of himself.

What are some other kinds of generosity other than monetary generosity?

We imitate Jesus by making ourselves poor.

Americans find this to be a foreign language!!!

I once heard a “lesson” about a “modern tithe,” which was 5%, and this in nearly the wealthiest nation in the world.

How might we imitate him?

2 Corinthians 8:10-15

What principle is Paul using/explaining here? What is the key word here? (equality). How should we apply this in the church?

If some are giving generously, but others are holding back, it will negatively influence those who are naturally generous—they will be tempted to have an attitude!

So, when you are generous, you make it easier for others to be generous. Your generosity is multiplied!!!

[2 Cor 8:16-24 A section on being above reproach in handling matters related to money.

v. 21 This is a great Christian principle.

Isn’t it good enough to do what is right in the eyes of God? Since God is the only proper judge, why do we have to appease human sensibilities?

What are some possible situations in which we may have to do what is right in the eyes of people that God may not really care about? (voting, following human-made rules, keeping our home clean and our yard taken care of, avoiding the appearance of evil, even when no evil is there,

Why is that important?

So that we can win people to Christ!

2 Cor 9:1-5 details about the special contribution. We will skip this.

2 Cor 9:6-9

The principles of generosity here?

1. v. 6 More generosity results in more blessings.

Do you believe this? Do you REALLY believe this? Any examples?

In Christianity, giving is not voluntary, but, unlike in Judaism, the amount is voluntary.

I really prefer this, because when we give out our own volition, it is far more satisfying!!! But…

2. Giving out or reluctance is possibly worse than not giving at all.

Do you agree with this? Isn’t it better to do what is right, even if your heart is not there yet?

v. 7 God loves a cheerful giver.

Q: Can I “cheerfully” give $5/week? No!!!

It has to include sacrifice or I, as a Christian, cannot give cheerfully.

2 Cor 9:10-15

v. 10-11 Enriched “in every way.” What are some ways that God might “enrich” us if we are generous with our money?

Generosity breeds generosity. I have learned this principle.

I have, more than once, spent money I literally did not have to travel to other countries to teach the Bible.

Without fail, within less than a week, an unexpected check comes in.

v. 12-15 Q: What are some of the other possible fruits of our generosity?

Discussion Questions:

1. Share an example of generosity that you have seen—not necessarily related to money.

2. In what area of being generous would you like to grow (It can be in the area of money!)

**Class #7 When I am weak, then I am strong**

2 Cor 10:3-6. Our weapons are not those of the world.

The world’s weapons:

Intimidation

Withholding of affection

Threats

Outbursts of anger

Emotional manipulation.

Exercising power of the stronger over the weaker.

Politics

What are some of the “weapons” that Christians have at their disposal

Truth

Honesty

Sincerity

Open rebuke

Rational argument

Being right

Humility

How do we “take captive every thought?”

By exposing the truth. When we see false arguments and misinformation, we gently and firmly point out the truth. We shed light on the situation.

By asking good questions: Why did you say that? What was your intention?

Tonight’s topic: Boasting in weakness. Theme passage 2 Cor 12:9-10

Background: Some Jewish Christians have been undermining Paul’s leadership over the Corinthian church. From 2 Cor 11:5 there were some Jewish Christians who had taken to calling themselves “super apostles.” They have been saying that Paul is not a very good public speaker. They are boasting in their strength.

But Paul says this:

2 Cor 10:17 “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” What does that mean?

Share the blessings you have received from God, but be extremely careful to give the credit to God, not to self.

BTW, I am one personally tempted to boast, to my shame.

God has been able to use us to help the poor, to save marriages, to rescue wounded and hurting college students, to provide a safe place for single moms,…

Essentially, this is to share our testimony.

1 Cor 11:21a-28

Paul is “boasting” in order to defend his ministry against those super-apostles who are undermining his authority in Corinth.

1 Cor 12:11 …to show that I am not in the least inferior to these “super apostles.”

Is it OK to “boast” about your church?

The purpose in giving out this list: to show that the things he has to boast in are his “weaknesses”

What is the biggest “weakness” you have experienced in your walk with Christ?

1 Cor 11:30-32 Why is Paul boasting in his weakness? Is this something the world does? Is this something you do?

1 Cor 12:1-7a This section is surprising. Q: Who is this “man in Christ” (v. 2)

Answer: It is Paul.

Paul is trying to come across humble here—to not focus on himself, but because of the efforts of the “super-apostles” he is forced to defend himself.

Aside: “the third heaven” is heaven.

“heaven” #1 is the air and the sky.

“heaven” #2 is the firmament, the sun, the moon and the stars. It is the universe beyond the earth and the sky.

“heaven” #3 is what we call heaven. It is the spiritual realm where God and his heavenly court resides.

1 Cor 12:7b-8 A key passage.

Aside: Scholars debate endlessly the nature of this “thorn.” Just last week I got a question from a person who was convinced it was epilepsy. The most common guess is that it was poor eyesight (Gal 6:11). Bottom line: we do not know because we do not need to know.

At first, it is hard to know why God did not help Paul out. Why not? See v. 9-10.

It was God’s opinion, that he could do more through Paul with his weakness than he could without it.

Are you willing to accept God’s will in such things?

Are you willing to remain single for life? Are you willing to have a physical or even a mental incapacity for the sake of Christ?

Do you have or have you had a “thorn in the flesh?” What is it?

2 Cor 12:9-10

The bottom line in all this: God’s power made perfect in weakness?

Perfect = telios = complete or mature or perfect

Then God’s glory is revealed. Then all glory goes to Him. Then people are attracted, not to you and not even to the church, but to God!

Paul boasted in his weaknesses:

I felt inadequate. I struggled with this sin. I felt like giving up. I was not a very good public speaker. I was a former persecutor of the church. But it happened anyway.

For you: What are your “strengths,” your gifts?

Aren’t you glad you have these? Has God used you through your gifts?

What are your weaknesses?

Are you one to boast in your weaknesses? Why? Why not?

Take-home lesson:

“When I am weak, then I am strong.” Can you relate with Paul on this?

2 Cor 12:10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You are crazy Paul!!!!

Is Paul serious, or is he using hyperbole—exaggerating?

Christianity is a really crazy religion:

Things go great, we say Amen! Praise the Lord.

Things go not so well—difficulty and even tragedy, and we say Amen! Praise the Lord!

But is that you?

Bottom line: Are you here to glorify yourself or to glorify God. God can do this through your strengths, and he will, but his preferred option is to use you in spite of your weaknesses.

Discussion Questions:

What are your strengths

What is the biggest “weaknesses” you have experienced in your walk with Christ?

How can God use you despite your weaknesses?

Epilogue:

2 Cor 13:5 Paul’s advice: “Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith: test yourselves.

Interesting.

Proposal for “tests” of our faith:

1. Romans 1:5 Obedience that comes from faith. Are you obedient? Def: A deep-felt and obvious, excuse-free commitment to obey all of God’s commands.

Can you have faith without obedience? No!

Can you have obedience without faith? Yes

2. 1 Thess 1:3 (and/or James 2:26) Works come from faith. Do you have abundant works, without which you cannot claim to have faith?

Can you have saving faith without works? No!

Can you have works without saving faith? Yes!

3. Gal 5:6 Faith expressing itself through love. Do you love in a way which can only exist through faith in Jesus? An unrivaled and unconditional love for others.

Can you have saving faith and not have this kind of love? No!

Can you have this kind of love without faith? No!

Conclusion: Consistently showing faith-produced love for others is the surest sign that we are “of the faith.”