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2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 1: Introduction, chapter 1

Introduction

1. Chronology/Geography

Paul in Ephesus: Paul's three year stay in Ephesus is cut short by the adherents of Diana (Ac 19; 1 Cor 16:9). Before he leaves, he writes 1 Corinthians.

Timothy: Sent to Macedonia with thoughts of continuing to Corinth (Ac 19:21-22; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10-11).

Titus: Sent to Corinth after or with 1 Corinthians (2 Cor 7:6, 13).

Paul: Intends to travel to northern Macedonia, then south to Corinth (2 Cor 16:5-6; Ac 20:1). This represents a change in announced plans (2 Cor 1:15-16; Ac 19:21).

Paul in Troas: Luke skips this part of Paul's third journey (Ac 20:1). A door of opportunity was opened (2 Cor 2:12), but when Titus did not meet Paul here (2 Cor 2:13), Paul's anxiety to hear news from Corinth drove him on to Macedonia.

Paul in Macedonia: Like Paul's first time in this area, this visit is attended by difficulties (2 Cor 7:5). Titus arrives from Corinth with good news (2 Cor 7:6, 13, 16). Titus immediately returns to Corinth with the second epistle; he commences preparation for the Jerusalem contribution (2 Cor 8:16-24; 9:3-5).

2. Themes in Second Corinthians

Paul's contrasting joy and distress: We get an inside look at the great apostle's frame of mind.

- ✧ He recalls the opposition in Asia – 1:8-11.
- ✧ He reflects upon personal ailments – 12:7-10 (also possibly 4:7, 16-5:4).
- ✧ He is relieved at the repentance of the Corinthians – 7:7-16.

Paul's defense of his integrity and apostolic credentials: Paul's work was threatened in Corinth, Galatia and elsewhere by a Judaizing faction which viciously attacked him personally.

- ✧ He affirms his honesty and sincerity – 1:12-14; 2:17; 4:2; 6:11; 7:2, etc.
- ✧ He answers charges about his change of travel plans (1:15ff); mishandling of finances (8:20-22), literary hypocrisy (10:1, 9-11), fleshly motives (10:2), lack of eloquence (11:6), refusal of support while with them (11:7-12), apostolic inferiority (12:11-12), deceit (12:14-18), inspiration (13:3).

✧ Paul is forced into substantiating himself, something he feels should be self-evident to the Corinthians (wasn't their very existence as a church proof enough? – 3:1-3). Conybeare and Howson note that “boast” and its derivatives occur 29 times in 2 Corinthians and only 26 other times in the rest of Paul's epistles (p. 440, footnote #1).

The contribution for the Jerusalem brethren: Paul had a strong sensitivity toward his brethren in Jerusalem; he had helped them before (Ac 11:27-30; cf. Gal 2:9-10). This collection, born of deeper motives than simple benevolence, will indirectly frame the latter years of Paul's life.

Chapter 1

Outline:

1. Greeting – 1:1-2
2. The apostle of affliction and the God of comfort – 1:3-11
3. Legitimate boasting – 1:12-14
4. An explanation of his changed plans – 1:15-2:1

Notes:

1. While God is a being of varied qualities, our circumstances cause us to focus on specific aspects which are pertinent at the moment.
2. Paul defines his suffering in the broader terms of how it might benefit others (1:6). This helps him endure it.
3. Suffering often obscures the compensating comfort offered by God. But Paul is confident that God will comfort the Corinthians as he has comforted Paul (1:7).
4. Regarding his change of plans, Paul affirms that his course of life is not dictated by whim, fear or personal interest (“according to the flesh” – 1:17). He is motivated by spiritual principle.

Read and Reflect:

1. How does Paul describe God in 1:3, 5 and 10?
2. What does Paul do with the comfort he receives from God (1:4)?
3. What was Paul's outlook on the danger in Ephesus (1:8-10)? What was his outlook now that he has been spared?
4. What role does prayer play in the scheme of things (1:11)?
5. What does Paul affirm about the nature of teaching done by him, Timothy and Silas?
6. What is the real reason Paul changed his plans in order to come to Corinth later (1:23-2:1)?

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LESSON 2: Chapter 2

Introduction: Paul further clarifies his purpose by writing instead of visiting. He wanted the Corinthians to handle the matter of discipline themselves so that his visit would be one of joy. He affirms the intensity of his love for them by describing his distress while at Troas.

Outline

1. The restoration of the incestuous man – 2 Cor 2:2-11
2. The fragrance of Christ – 2:12-17

Notes:

1. List the passages where the following emotional terms are found:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| a. Joy _____ | f. Tears _____ |
| b. Sorrow _____ | g. Grief _____ |
| c. Gladness _____ | h. Love _____ |
| d. Affliction _____ | i. Comfort _____ |
| e. Anguish _____ | |

2. The correction of the immoral man (1 Cor 5) is central to this section. Paul speaks of the connection between the Corinthians, the wayward brother and himself and how the actions of all three affected each other.
3. Now that the man has repented, Paul says the matter should be disposed of lest Satan continue to use it to his advantage (2:11).
4. Some scholars see a digression of thought beginning in 2:12 or 14 and running through 6:10 or 7:1. There does seem to be a thread of thought running through this section; Paul is intent on richly describing his authorized ministry in view of those who deny it. The conflict of emotions concerning the Corinthians, the danger in Ephesus and the open door passed by in Troas all combine to cause Paul to reflect upon his work.
 - A. The main imagery in 2:14ff. is that of the Roman triumphal procession in which the parade route was showered in flowers and perfumed with incense.
 - B. Paul sees himself as being led in the procession by the triumphant Christ (2:14). As he goes along he diffuses the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ among all men (2:15).

C. Ephesus has vividly reminded him that such a fragrance is “of death to death” (2:16). That is, some who hear are hardened because they resent the rule and word of Christ. The fragrance in Troas, however, was “of life to life” (2:16). These appreciated what they heard and received it gladly.

Read and Reflect:

1. What effect did the incestuous man have on the whole church (2:5)?
2. What danger does he now face after his repentance (2:7)?
3. What three purposes did Paul undertake in writing 1 Corinthians?
 - a. 2:3 –
 - b. 2:4 –
 - c. 2:9 –
4. How are we “not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices”?
5. As Paul reflects upon the stormy trials he has endured, how does he assess his strength (2:16)?
6. What knowledge helps keeps Paul’s integrity pure as he goes about his work (2:17)?

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LESSON 3: Chapter 3

Introduction: In this chapter Paul distances himself from his opposition by contrasting their respective points of reference. This treatment of the Law of Moses seems to indicate that the opposition was Judaistic in nature, and Paul speaks in no uncertain terms about the inferiority of the Law. This chapter is something of a synopsis of the book of Hebrews.

Outline:

1. Corinth: An epistle of commendation – 2 Cor 3:1-3
2. Ministers of the new covenant – 2 Cor 3:4-6
3. Contrasting the covenants – 2 Cor 3:7-18

Notes

1. Paul seems to respond to three tactics used by his opponents to gain the confidence of the Corinthians: a) an introductory letter of commendation, b) abundant self-praise, and c) a statement of approval by the Corinthian church itself (3:1).
2. The Corinthian church owed its very existence to Paul; he was their “father” through the gospel – 2 Cor 3:2; 1 Cor 4:14-15. How, then, could they listen to someone who taught a doctrine contrary to what they had received from him? The very act of doing so would invalidate their own identity as a church of Christ.
3. Paul again reflects on his dependence upon God – 3:4-5. This is not a statement of survival amid persecution but absolute dependence upon divine help to fulfill his apostolic purpose. He knows that no other message or scheme, especially something manmade, could possibly achieve what he is doing. The Corinthians ought to see this against the hollowness of the Judaizers.
4. Paul does not denigrate the Law of Moses; rather, he says it “was glorious” (3:7; see also 3:9, 10, 11). But he amplifies the glory of the new covenant by saying that its glory *excels* the glory of the Mosaic covenant. Again, this is similar to the message of Hebrews.
5. The Moses/veil analogy: Paul draws upon Moses’ use of a veil in Ex 34:29-35 to make a point about the spiritual blindness of the Jews.
 - a. Moses wore a veil after communing with God “*so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away*” (2 Cor 3:13). That is, the veil obscured the fading of the glory with which Moses’ face shone.
 - b. Paul then says that “*the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ*” (3:14). So long as Jews reject Christ as the Messiah,

they will remain blind to the true meaning of the Law. But all becomes clear – the eternal purpose of God, the nature of the church, the salvation of Gentiles, the suffering of the Savior, the purpose of the Law, etc. when Jesus is understood as the fulfillment.

6. 3:17-18 contain some difficulties. Remember that the Holy Spirit has been mentioned in 3:3 and 3:6. There Paul says the Spirit wrote the Corinthian church as “an epistle of Christ,” and the Spirit “gives life” via the new covenant. 3:17 identifies the Lord and the Spirit very closely, indicating that true liberty is found in the words of the Spirit which illuminate the Lord. Continuing the “veil” theme, Paul says that Christians are transformed into the glorious image of the Lord as there is no veil to obscure our vision.

Read and Reflect:

1. Is it true that the Law of Moses should have been written “on the heart” of the Jew? Or was it merely a law chiseled in stone to which thoughtless obedience could be rendered?
 - a. Paul said, “*The law is* _____ *...*” (Rom 7:14).
 - b. Proverbs says a wise man should do what with mercy and truth (3:3)?
 - c. How does Ezekiel describe an obedient heart (Ezk 36:25-27)?
2. How do you understand the phrase, “for the letter kills” (3:6)? Is this a criticism of “legalism,” of obedience to commands?
3. Read 3:7, 9 and describe the Law of Moses. How might these references be helpful in studying with someone who insists on justifying Christian practices or doctrine by relying on the Law of Moses?
4. What does Paul say “is/was passing away” (3:11, 13)? How is a similar argument made in Heb 8:13?
5. What two qualities mentioned in 3:4, 12 give Paul courage and strength?
6. What happens when one turns to the Lord (3:16)?

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LESSON 4: Chapter 4

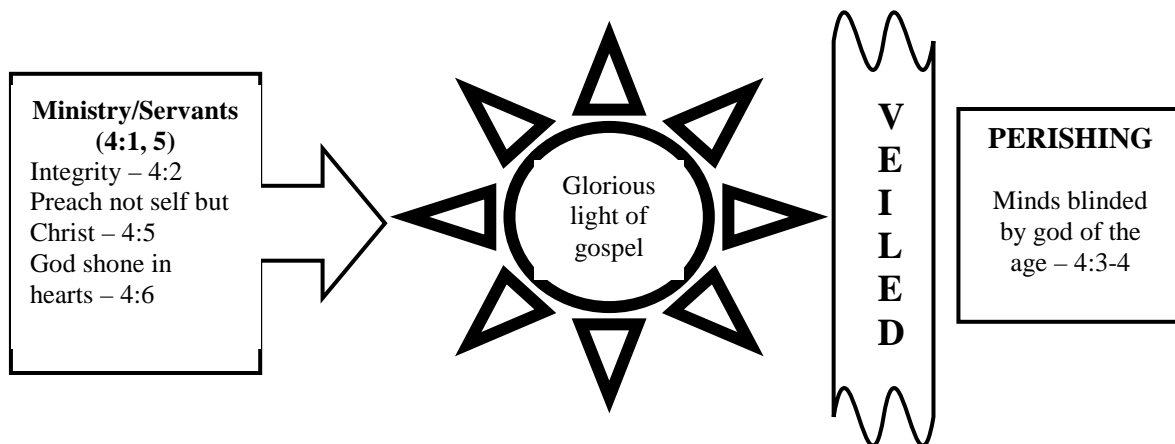
Introduction: Paul continues to speak of the glorious gospel, its veiling to unbelievers, and his ministry in regard to it. We are again allowed to peek into Paul's personal thoughts and feelings about God, himself, his life's purpose and others.

Outline:

- A. The gospel: both glorious and veiled – 2 Cor 4:1-6
- B. The human element in the scheme of God – 2 Cor 4:7-15
- C. Two Views: temporal and eternal – 2 Cor 4:16-18

Notes:

1. Paul, as he so often does in his epistles, further vindicates his character and motives in his preaching. It would be very tempting to take blame upon oneself or criticize one's approach when so much controversy is generated by his teaching. Paul understands these dynamics:



- A. Paul does not allow the lack of response to the gospel by many to deter him. He attributes such resistance to the proper source – Satan, “the god of this age.”
 - B. Note the moral courage that comes from consciousness of mercy received – 4:1.
2. Paul then contrasts the human elements with the divine in God's scheme:
 - A. Human:
 1. Earthen vessels – 4:7. Reminiscent of Adam's creation from dust, fragile pottery.
 2. Death/mortal flesh – 4:11. Actual or threatened death of Paul might have given some cause to deny his authenticity.

3. Conviction – 4:13. In spite of the consequences or the opposition, Paul, like David and other OT prophets, could not conscientiously do otherwise than speak out.
4. Faith – 4:14. An eternal view that accounts for future resurrection.
5. Selflessness – 4:15. Paul's self-sacrificial attitude springs from his desire to see grace abound to many and thanksgiving rebound unto God.

B. Divine:

1. Power – 4:7. Power to take such fragile, outclassed and overwhelmed men and “turn the world upside down.” Also, power to take martyrdom and from it provide life (4:12).
2. Promise – 4:14. Of resurrection, guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus, Himself.
3. Glory – 4:15. The ultimate purpose of redemption – the glorification of God.

C. Paul constantly reminds the Corinthians that he is sustained by God. This, mentioned in conjunction with his life-threatening trials, seems to be offered in contrast to those who boast and have confidence in themselves.

Read and Reflect:

1. Find the contrast to the following items:

- a. Outward man / _____.
- b. Perishing / _____.
- c. Light / _____.
- d. Momentary / _____.
- e. Affliction / _____.
- f. Seen / _____.
- g. Temporary / _____.

2. What phrase in 4:16 is repeated from earlier in the chapter?

3. What image should we keep in our minds to help us deal with the ailments, illnesses, limitations and decay of earthly life? How does such an outlook make us stronger than the average person?

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LESSON 5: Chapter 5

Introduction: Paul shares with the Corinthians and us his inner motivations as an apostle. He has a spiritual outlook which keeps his intentions pure and his zeal alive as he faces the hardships of his calling.

Outline:

1. Paul's desire to be with the Lord – 2 Cor 5:1-8
2. Paul's appearance before the judgment seat – 2 Cor 5:9-11
3. God's love that brings renewal and reconciliation – 2 Cor 5:12-21

Notes:

1. Paul continues his statement of confidence which began in 4:16. Recent events have given Paul reason to contemplate the destruction of his earthly tent – the body.
2. “We shall not be found naked” (5:3) refers to the resurrection, as Paul had previously discussed in 1 Cor 15. Heavenly existence is not to be “unclothed”; i.e., a disembodied spirit, but “further clothed” – in a spiritual, incorruptible body. Paul describes such a body as (5:1):
 - a) a building from God; b) a house not made with hands; c) eternal; d) in the heavens.
3. The “guarantee” or “down-payment” of the Spirit – 5:5. The coming and work of the Holy Spirit is spoken of in similar terms elsewhere:
 - a. Rom 8:23 – “And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits (*aparche*) of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”
 - b. 1 Cor 1:22 – “who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit (*arrabon*).” Vine: “Originally, ‘earnest-money’ deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed ... In general usage it came to denote ‘a pledge’ or ‘earnest’ of any sort; in the NT it is used only of that which is assured by God to believers; it is said of the Holy Spirit as the divine ‘pledge’ of all their future blessedness, 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; in Eph. 1:14, particularly of their eternal inheritance” (p. 190).
 - c. The only evidence of the Spirit's presence in our lives is the fruit He produces in us (Gal 5:22-23; cf. 2 Pet 1:5-11 for a similar list of characteristics). There is no need to mystify or literalize this concept. The Spirit “dwells” within us (Rom 8:9) and leads us (Rom 8:14) as we are motivated by and obedient to His revelation of God. As we are gradually transformed, we have in our very lives the guarantee or firstfruits of ultimate glory which God desires to share with us. We actually experience the beginning of this process in our earthly existence.

4. Paul's desire to be in the presence of Christ is complemented by the knowledge that he would have to answer for how he lived. Paul "knows" the terror of the Lord (5:11) as well as the hope of glory (4:17) from the same source – the Spirit's revelation. These two reactions are not contradictory; they both have their place in properly motivating us to wage our own battle with sin and persuade others to do the same.
5. There are three basic concepts developed in 2 Cor 5:12-21:
 - a. The sacrifice of Jesus – 5:14-15, 21. Since Jesus died for the benefit of all, then all who benefit should live for Him (cf. Gal 2:20).
 - b. The remaking of man, "a new creation" – 5:17. The sacrifice of Jesus enables a man to undergo a complete moral and spiritual transformation. It gives him new insight and objectives regarding his existence.
 - c. Reconciliation to God – 5:18-20. This is God's doing, not man's. God provided it in the most effective way possible – through the sacrificial death of His Son.
6. The role of Paul and the other apostles in this process of reconciliation:
 - a. The same God who provided reconciliation in Christ gave them the ministry of reconciliation – 5:18 (cf. 3:4-6, "ministers of the new covenant").
 - b. This ministry consists of the "word of reconciliation" (5:19), in which Paul "pleads," "implores" (5:20) and "persuades" (5:11). Opening people's minds to the truth is a product of mental persuasion, not force via threat or theatrics.
 - c. These truths provide a solid defense of Paul's apostleship to those who would defend him against detractors (5:12).

Read and Reflect:

1. What do you think about Paul's statement of our "groaning" in this body (5:2, 4)? What effect does this groaning have upon us?
2. What does Paul understand to be the opposite of "at home in the body" (5:6)? What does he prefer to this?
3. Contrast the motivations of 5:8 and 5:10-11 to do what is right. What other motivations can you think of to prepare ourselves for eternity?

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LESSON 6: Chapter 6

Introduction: In 2 Cor 6:1-10 Paul concludes the defense of his ministry by describing the outward dangers, inner convictions and contradictory reactions involved in it. Beginning in 6:11, he returns to the situation in Corinth from where he left off at 2:11.

Outline:

1. An urgent warning – 2 Cor 6:1-2
2. The life of an apostle in a nutshell – 2 Cor 6:3-10
3. Maintaining a holy relationship with God – 2 Cor 6:11-7:1

Notes:

1. Paul continues his heartfelt pleading of the Corinthians to be faithful. In 5:20 it was “be reconciled”; in 6:1 it is “not to receive the grace of God in vain.” Paul is concerned that the Corinthians are not completely and singularly devoted to Christ. He fears that if they continue to vacillate, the grace he preached to them will have been received in vain (see a similar concern for the Galatians – Gal 6:5:1-4).
2. A.T. Robertson notes on 2 Cor 6:3-10: “(Paul’s) whole career is full of paradox.” Note carefully the qualities/circumstances listed:
 - a. 6:4-7a – 18 qualities listed. The first ten highlight outward trials: patience (endurance), tribulations (afflictions), needs (hardships), distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, sleeplessness, fastings (hunger). Some of these are documented in Acts. The last eight qualities relate to Paul’s spiritual resources in dealing with these issues: purity, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, the word of truth, the power of God.
 - b. 6:7b-8a – Three qualities listed: armor (weapons) of righteousness, honor (glory) and dishonor, evil report and good report. While Paul uses appropriate weapons of a spiritual kingdom (see 10:3-4), dishonor and evil reports (“bad press,” “negative spin”) still dog him.
 - c. 6:8b-10 – Seven contrasts listed: deceivers/true; unknown/well known; dying/we live; chastened/not killed; sorrowful/always rejoicing; poor/making many rich/ having nothing/possessing all things. Paul had to live with such paradox that comes with service to Christ, and so must we.
3. Paul in 6:11-13 appeals to a free flow of affection from the Corinthians. He affirms the open and honest affection for them, but he says they are not reciprocating. He deliberately states the situation in an immature way: “Pay us back the affection we extend toward you” (6:13). Again, Paul disavows his responsibility for existing stress between them. This is why he has given the lengthy defense of his apostleship and integrity (2:12-6:10).

4. In 6:14-18 Paul attributes the Corinthians' wayward attitudes to their association with and influence by unbelievers. His instruction is similar to points made in 1 Cor 8-10. This passage is difficult in application and has given rise to much controversy. Consider:
- a. Paul had said in 1 Cor 5:10 that "keeping company with" worldly, evil people is unavoidable. We have to work with them, shop with them, live adjacent to them, etc.
 - b. The terminology used suggests more than casual association: fellowship, communion, accord, part, agreement (6:14-16).
 - c. The outcome of the association in 2 Cor 6 is characterized as uncleanness (6:17) and "filthiness of the flesh" (7:1). This suggests a participation in things sinful, not merely association as in marriage (1 Cor 7:12-14, where Paul declared the union to be "sanctified") or in having a social meal with an idolatrous neighbor (1 Cor 10:27).
 - d. Whatever this "unequal yoking" applies to, Paul commands *separation* in order to be faithful to God (2 Cor 6:17). If the unequal yoking applies to a believer married to an unbeliever, then Paul is commanding separation. Does this square with 1 Cor 7:12-13?

Read and Reflect:

1. How does Paul use the reference to Is 49:8 to motivate the Corinthians? What word expresses the urgency of our salvation?
2. How is it that people can see the same character and hear the same message but draw such drastically different conclusions?
3. What "promises" does Paul refer to in 2 Cor 7:1? In light of them, what should Christians "perfect"? Give two specific ways in which we can do this.
4. Which of the following scenarios do you think violates Paul's teaching in 2 Cor 6:14-16?
 - a. A Christian paying taxes to a government that does evil things.
 - b. A Christian in a business partnership in which he knows his partner is breaking the law.
 - c. A Christian receiving medical treatment at a denominationally operated hospital or clinic.
 - d. A Christian eating in a restaurant where alcohol is served.
 - e. A Christian attending a sporting event where other spectators are drunk.
 - f. A Christian playing sports at the local denomination's gymnasium.
 - g. A Christian donating to the United Way or other charity that contributes to denominations.
 - h. A Christian in the hospital receiving encouragement and prayer from a teacher of error.
 - i. A Christian who follows protocol and does not mention Jesus' name in a public prayer.
 - j. A Christian who attends a denominational worship in order to learn practices, doctrines.
 - k. A Christian who misses worship to attend a denominational worship service.

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 7: Chapter 7

Introduction: After noting the repentance of the incestuous brother in ch 2, Paul now returns to that situation and commends the Corinthians for their handling of the matter. In doing so, he seems to suggest that their behavior vindicates his claim of apostleship.

Outline:

1. Paul's joy in the Corinthians – 2 Cor 7:2-6
2. The correction of the incestuous affair – 2 Cor 7:7-12
3. The reception of Titus – 2 Cor 7:13-16

Notes:

1. Paul seeks to strengthen his bonds with the Corinthians in 7:2-3.
 - a. In 7:2a he again urges them to include him in their affections (cf. 6:12-13), as they are in his (7:3b).
 - b. In 7:2b Paul denies the accusations of his opponents, who may very well have used 1 Cor 5 as an example of “injury” (cf. 2 Cor 1:12; 2:17; 4:2; 5:11; 6:3).
2. Note the superlatives in 7:4: great, filled, exceedingly (overflow, flood). One can hear the relief in Paul's words, the overstatement which accompanies the release of tension.
3. In 7:5-6 Paul acknowledges that he did not initially find what he was looking for when he left Troas for Macedonia (2:13). Perhaps he assumed the worst when Titus was delayed.
4. 2 Cor 7:7-12 turns on Paul's use of “sorrow” (*metamelomai*) and “repentance” (*metanoia*). Paul acknowledges some degree of uncertainty as he had sent the epistle (see 2:4; 7:8b), but he rejoices at the news that the epistle has had the intended effect.
 - a. They were made sorry in a godly manner – 7:9.
 - b. Their sorrow led to repentance – 7:9.
 - c. Such sorrow and repentance lead to salvation, and salvation removes the sorrow of reprimand – 7:10. On the other hand, “sorrow of the world produces death.”
5. The Corinthians' reactions of true repentance, which Titus had witnessed – 7:11:
 - a. Diligence – There was an urgency to correct the problem.

- b. Clearing (apologia) – They changed and took a position consistent with godly principles.
 - c. Indignation – Self-directed because of their mistake.
 - d. Fear – For stirring up the wrath of an apostle (7:15b).
 - e. Vehement desire – This seems to refer to their feelings toward Paul, longing to see him and be in good stead with him (cf. 7:7b).
 - f. Zeal – Opposite of the complacency they had originally shown toward the situation.
 - g. Vindication – Their removal of the ground of rebuke by dealing responsibly with the offender, and perhaps with those who encouraged their lax course of action.
6. 7:12 – See the alternate reading in NASB: “but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you ...”. Paul speaks comparatively: his concern was less for the specific situation and more for the rekindling of congregational identity as they conformed to the will of God as expressed in the apostles.
7. Several of the “theme concepts” of 2 Cor are in 7:13-16: comfort, joy, integrity, boasting, confidence. The scenario seems to be:
- a. Titus had great anxiety regarding his mission of delivering and “enforcing” Paul’s epistle, in spite of the fact that Paul had boasted to him of his confidence in the Corinthians’ willingness to repent.
 - b. Titus and the epistle were received with “fear and trembling” by a majority of the Corinthians and the congregation immediately acted according to Paul’s directions.
 - c. Titus was relieved and refreshed by the attitude of the Corinthians and, even as he stands in Paul’s presence, he is deeply moved at the thought of their diligent repentance and obedience. Paul’s confident boasting has been proven justified, and the great apostle himself is relieved at the Corinthians’ responsiveness to Titus.

Read and Reflect:

1. Describe Paul’s turmoil in 2 Cor 7:5. Do we normally associate such an outlook with Paul?
2. What are other factors that make men sorrow over their mistakes but fall short of repentance?
3. How do these sentiments prepare a positive foundation for Titus’ next mission to Corinth? (Read ahead into chapters 8-9).

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 8: Chapter 8

Introduction: In chs 8-9 Paul turns to the subject of the Jerusalem contribution. In ch 8 he seeks to rekindle the Corinthians' flagging resolve to take part in the collection, and he affirms the integrity of the project, commending Titus and two unnamed brethren unto the assistance of the Corinthian church.

Outline:

1. The example of the Macedonians – 2 Cor 8:1-7
2. Using resources for the sake of others – 2 Cor 8:8-15
3. Administering the collection – 2 Cor 8:16-24

Notes:

1. Paul refers to the Corinthians' neighbors to the north, the Macedonians, as an example of generosity and readiness to give. In fact, it was not Paul who begged money from them; it was the Macedonians who begged to participate (8:4).
 - a. They did not beg to share of their abundance; rather, they were in deep poverty (8:2). Note the opposites: great affliction/abundance of joy; deep poverty/riches of liberality.
 - b. The secret to such sacrificial giving is the initial giving of self to God – 8:5. The truly submissive heart recognizes that everything – personal abilities, possessions, words – belong to God and are granted to do Him service.
2. 8:6 sounds as if Titus may have delivered 1 Corinthians. Titus had begun the collection at some time in the past, and Paul gave initial instructions of the collection in 1 Cor 16. Paul now urges Titus to renew the Corinthians' desire to participate in the collection.
3. A second main motivation for giving for the sake of others is the example of Christ – 8:8-9.
 - a. In 8:8 Paul stresses that the Corinthians' giving is not a matter of command but a question of love. Verses 10-11 indicate that the Corinthians had undertaken their participation voluntarily. The example of the Macedonians should rekindle that love if it was sincere.
 - b. The ultimate motivation for our giving to others, however, is a deep appreciation for what Jesus sacrificed on our behalf (8:9). Who can appreciate Jesus' forfeiture of heaven's glory, His humble earthly life and His torturous death, and then look indifferently upon the needs of others.
4. The Corinthians need to regain lost momentum and finish the project – 8:10-12. Perhaps the Corinthians had lost their momentum because of turmoil within the congregation. The fac-

tions, fighting and selfishness is apparent from 1 Corinthians. Such inner strife can sap any group of zeal and energy for outside work.

5. The objective of the contribution – 8:13-15. What is *not* being taught here is: 1) it is wrong to have an abundance, and 2) all Christians must have an equal amount of funds. What *is* being taught is that brethren should not be left lacking life's essentials when others have an abundance. Reference to the manna (8:15) had no bearing on personal belongings but suggested an equality of the necessities of life.
6. Paul takes great care in how this benevolent process is to be administered. He is well aware of the accusations that will likely arise from his enemies, and he takes all reasonable precautions to thwart them.
 - a. Titus is praised for his willingness to help the Corinthians – 8:16-17. Titus, like the Macedonians, went beyond Paul's expectations. He volunteered to return to Corinth, possibly buoyed by his earlier success among them (7:7, 13, 15).
 - b. The unnamed assistants – 8:18-22.

Brother #1: Evidently a well-known preacher/teacher who commanded respect in churches throughout the empire. He had been selected by churches participating in the contribution to accompany Paul with the gift to Jerusalem.

Brother #2: This brother had worked with the apostles and had gained their confidence by his diligent efforts. He has been strengthened in his enthusiasm by Paul's confidence in the Corinthians.

Read and Reflect:

1. What word in 8:1, 6 and 7 describes the collection for the Jerusalem saints? Explain.
2. Which is easier – to see a difficult project through to the end, or put it aside for a while and pick it up later? Explain.
3. What is God's basic standard in giving (8:12)? Can you cite another Biblical example of this?
4. Answer this observation: "I don't care what anybody else thinks; so long as I do what is right in God's eyes, nobody else matters."

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 9: Chapter 9

Introduction: Paul continues his thoughts on the Jerusalem contribution in ch 9. He instills a sense of urgency in completing the collection. He emphasizes the proper attitude behind such giving, and he points out the far-reaching benefits.

Outline:

1. Completing the contribution – 2 Cor 9:1-5
2. The giver and God – 2 Cor 9:6-9
3. The result of such giving – 2 Cor 9:10-15

Notes:

1. A complement – 9:1-2. Paul is a master motivator, criticizing when necessary but commending where appropriate (cf. 8:7, 24; 7:14, 16). Paul had used the Corinthians' early willingness as an example to the Macedonians, even as he did the reverse in 8:1-5.
2. 9:3-5a – Titus and the messengers were sent not only to assist in the collection; Paul says he was trying to spare himself and the Corinthians the embarrassment of his boasting having been proven false by their procrastination.
3. 9:5b – The completion of the collection before Paul's arrival would also insure that it was offered with thoughtful generosity, not just a quick snatch out of the moneybag because an apostle was there "to collect."
4. The attitude which validates benevolent giving – 9:6-7:
 - a. According to the purpose of the heart – Not thoughtless or impulsive.
 - b. Cheerful – Not with reluctance or remorse over what has been "lost." Perhaps we should see such offerings as an investment rather than expenditure.
 - c. Free – Without pressure from others or circumstances in general. It is the attitude which is of consequence in giving (cf. Phile 14). Even God does not set a "percentage" as in Mosaic Law, because that law was merely a "training ground" to teach ultimate spiritual service. Paul's words are in stark contrast to the "telethon" pressure or even pledged "tithing" practiced by many religious groups in order to wring money out of members.
5. Note the superlative terminology in 9:8-9: "all grace," "abound," "always," "all sufficiency," "in all things," "abundance," "every good work." These terms apply to the resources God will provide to those caring for the needy (cf. 8:14). There is no promise of abundance to spend upon selfish pursuits.

6. In the latter part of ch 9 Paul sees beyond the material needs to a higher principle.
 - a. God has liberally supplied the Corinthians with material resources; they give of those resources; God multiplies and increases what is offered unto the accomplishment of His purpose (the needs of the Jerusalem Christians are met).
 1. Material needs of the Jews are met – 9:12a.
 2. Thanksgiving is offered to God – 9:12b.
 3. God is glorified by the Jews for the obedience of the Gentiles – 9:13a.
 4. God is glorified by the Jews on account of the generous sharing of the Gentiles – 9:13b.
 5. Apart from some intellectual argument that may be resisted, this benevolent action of the Gentiles evokes deep appreciation and prayer from their Jewish brethren – 9:14.
 - b. 9:15 – In deep contemplation for how God is working through grace to reconcile Jew and Gentile, Paul breaks forth in his own personal thanksgiving. This explains why Paul was so intent on carrying out this mission when his first desire was to go to Rome and westward to Spain (Rom 15:22-28).

Read and Reflect:

1. What maxim does Paul use to encourage generous giving (9:6)? How does Paul apply this principle in Gal 6:7-9?
2. Can you think of any broader application(s) to the principle stated in 9:8-9?
3. It is a shame that this wonderful passage on benevolent sharing has been turned into a battleground over the church's support of social and secular enterprises. Those wishing to expand this involvement explain the word "all" at the end of 9:13 refers to *any person in need*, not merely Christians who may be destitute. How would you answer this argument?

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 10: Chapter 10

Introduction: From ch 10 through the end of the epistle Paul takes the fight directly to the opposing Judaistic party in Corinth. Paul is both humble and ferocious; he is sarcastic and sincere. His apostleship is vindicated as he exposes the pseudo-apostles as charlatans.

Outline:

1. The spiritual warfare – 2 Cor 10:1-6
2. Warnings against misjudgment – 2 Cor 10:7-11
3. Measuring by the proper standard – 2 Cor 10:12-18

Notes:

1. 10:1-2 – There are two charges against Paul: a) that he is weak and cowardly in person but bold and demanding from a distance, and b) that his motives are fleshly and self-interested. Probably, these two criticisms reflect the true nature of the critics.
 - a. Paul connects his own meekness and gentleness to that of Christ, who was similarly slandered (10:1). Paul would not “throw his weight around” to defend himself.
 - b. However, Paul does intend to exercise his full apostolic authority in defense of his apostleship. But he wants to do this to the least degree possible (10:2).
2. 10:3-6 is picturesque and describes spiritual warfare. While Paul lives in a fleshly body and lives in an unspiritual environment, he does not utilize the tactics of unenlightened man (10:3).
 - a. Using military imagery Paul says the weapons of the spiritual war are designed to:
 1. Pull down every argument, excuse, denial and rationale that is contrary to God (the words suggest siege warfare – 10:4b-5a).
 2. Make every thought captive unto Christ (Gk. *aichmalotos*, to be taken with a spear – 5b).
 3. Punish disobedience – 10:6.
 - b. Unto these ends the weapons supplied are “mighty in God” (10:4). God has well-equipped all of His servants to accomplish His goals.
3. Paul accuses either his opposition, the Corinthians, or both of superficial, inadequate judgments (10:7-11). The thought seems to be that just because a man claims something doesn’t necessarily make it so, regardless of how persuasive he may be.

- a. More than being just “Christ’s,” Paul claims apostolic authority. He can boast of this authority without shame; i.e., his boasts could withstand examination. But with heavy sarcasm he says he will not strongly boast lest he “scare” them, referring to criticism against his epistles (10:8-9).
 - b. Paul now specifies the slander against him: hypocrisy, cowardice, even physical shortcomings (10:10-11). These things undoubtedly hurt Paul (as they would any of us), but he knew they were designed to deliberately injure Paul’s influence.
4. Paul reveals the “gamesmanship” that his opponents engage in. They set themselves up as the standard of faith, then commend themselves when they measure up to their standard.
- a. Paul already stated his reluctance to judge himself – 1 Cor 4:3-5. But he here affirms that his work is within the scope of the commission conferred upon him by the Lord – 10:13-16.
 - b. God appointed Paul to his sphere of work, and his systematic execution of that charge brought him by natural course to Corinth – 10:13. Paul notes twice that his work in Corinth was “from scratch”; i.e., not “in other men’s labors” (cf. 10:15-16). This is a jab at the Judaizers who were hijacking Paul’s labors in Corinth and elsewhere.
 - c. Further, Paul’s God-appointed sphere of work extends even beyond the Corinthians to other virgin territory in the Empire – 10:16. If the apostolic claims of these charlatans (cf. 11:13) are legitimate, let them take on the apostolic hardships of expanding the borders of the kingdom.

Read and Reflect:

1. Can you think of a NT example of someone who tried to accomplish the will of God in some carnal fashion (cf. 2 Cor 10:3-4)? Can you think of an application in our own time?
2. How does Paul defend his consistency in 2 Cor 10:11? How should this standard affect our own behavior?
3. Consider Paul’s closing thought of 2 Cor 10:18:
 - a. With whose glory are we primarily concerned?
 - b. Do we commend ourselves or seek the commendation of others while overlooking the approval of God? Why do you think some may shy away from God’s approval?
 - c. Are we content with God’s approval when our accomplishments are not publicized?

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 11: Chapter 11

Introduction: Paul's sarcasm is heavy in chapter 11 as he chides the Corinthians, responds to personal attacks and gives evidence of his apostleship from his life experiences.

Outline:

1. Paul's indignant concern – 2 Cor 11:1-4
2. The accusation concerning support – 2 Cor 11:5-15
3. An expanded window of Paul's life – 2 Cor 11:16-33

Notes:

1. Paul responds to the charges of his opponents by “playing their own game”; i.e., by reviewing his credentials (“*those who commend themselves*” – 10:12). He calls this “folly” (11:1), but he asks the Corinthians to bear with him as he explains his motives.
 - a. He is jealous for them – 11:2. But it is a godly jealousy, not that they are a badge of his own honor but that they might be “a chaste virgin to Christ.”
 - b. Whatever the specifics taught by this group, it amounted to deceitful corruption of the simplicity of Christ – 11:3. This reminds Paul of the events in the garden of Eden.
 - c. In stinging criticism Paul asks the Corinthians to bear with him in his “folly” even as they had born with those who spouted false doctrine – 11:4.
2. Paul again alludes to criticism about his lack of oratorical skill and agrees with it – 11:6a. But he affirms his knowledge and defends his judgment in refusing support from the Corinthians.
 - a. 11:7 – How could someone seriously charge Paul with wrongdoing in exalting the Corinthians “free of charge”? This was a matter of personal liberty and a safeguard against false impressions (cf. 1 Cor 9). However, unscrupulous opponents will twist even the purest motives into something evil.
 - b. 11:8 – Paul may be referencing allegations of pilfering from the Jerusalem fund by referring to “robbery,” as if saying, “The only people I’ve ‘robbed from’ is the Macedonians – and that was to minister to you.”
 - c. 11:9 – Paul further shames the Corinthians for accepting this argument by reminding them that he was in financial need in their midst, a congregation of wealth, and was supplied by the poor Macedonians. Even in dire straits, Paul did not petition the brethren for help, and now his judgment is being vindicated.

- d. 11:10-11 – Paul defends this independence and his integrity, and he says that he will not allow anyone from Achaia to undermine it. Again, this is not for his “reputation” per se, but for the Corinthians and the cause of truth.
- 3. 11:12-15 makes it clear that the opposition was seeking apostolic status. They boast in themselves as equals to the apostles (11:12b), and they are styled “false apostles” (11:13a). Paul further says they were transforming themselves into apostles of Christ (11:13c), not truly such by divine appointment but taking on the appearance of what they were not.
- 4. 11:16-21 show Paul’s reluctance in the approach he is about to take. He knows it could be misconstrued and used against him, but it is a risk he is willing to take in order to contrast the life of a true apostle with that of these charlatans.
 - a. Paul sarcastically says the Corinthians ought to put up with his boasting since they so willingly endure to their own hurt the constant boasting of the false apostles – 11:18-20.
 - b. As is typical, the opposition is guilty of the very thing of which they accuse Paul, namely, using fleshly tactics (comp. 11:18 and 10:2).
 - c. Paul is accused of weakness (11:21a), but how much weaker could someone be than the Corinthians – 11:20? But Paul sarcastically says that if the opposition is bold enough to brag, then so is he. However, he proceeds to “brag” by reciting the instances of ministry that revealed his personal weakness.
- 5. In 11:22-33 Paul gives many details of his journeys that are omitted by Luke – which only heightens our curiosity. Even in his boasting Paul will glory in his weakness and infirmity, not his personal excellence (11:30). And were was personal gain in all this for Paul??

Read and Reflect:

- 1. How were the Corinthians intolerant of that which they should have accepted (2 Cor 11:7; cf. 12:13)? What did they accept when they should have been intolerant (2 Cor 11:20)? What does this say about human behavior?
- 2. How does Paul say Satan and his “ministers” practice deceit? Can you find an illustration of this in the Scriptures? How should this make us careful in our thinking today?
- 3. Read 2 Cor 11:22-33 and categorize the opposition/hardships Paul faced.

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 12: Chapter 12

Introduction: In the climax of Paul's self-defense, he reveals an astonishing episode from his past and an explanation for his physical infirmity. He again refers to his financial independence from the Corinthians, indicating that this issue was a significant criticism against him.

Outline:

1. The revelations and the thorn – 2 Cor 12:1-10
2. Paul's apostolic credentials – 2 Cor 12:11-13
3. Paul's deep and selfless concern – 2 Cor 12:14-21

Notes:

1. The nature of the visions/revelations:
 - a. Paul was unsure of the mechanics; he twice states that he doesn't know if it involved a transportation of his body or just his spirit (12:2-3).
 - b. Paul saw things in "the third heaven" and "Paradise" that were inexpressible and unlawful to repeat (12:2, 4). The revelations were "abundant" and Paul twice says they had the potential to stir up pride (12:7).
2. Paul refers to himself in the third person, thus making "two Pauls" (12:2-6):
 - a. The first Paul is the one who, by the grace of God, received unique revelations to equip him for the task to which he had been assigned. Of this Paul he would boast (12:5). Paul here views himself in terms of function.
 - b. The second Paul is the man, himself, and of his own merits he would boast nothing but his infirmities (12:5b, 6a, 9b, 10).
 - c. In 12:6 Paul seems to sarcastically refer to his critics. Paul could have truthfully said much more about himself, but he refrains lest anyone think of him more highly than his pathetic appearance (cf. 10:10).
3. Paul's humbling thorn – 12:7-10:
 - a. Its origin – The affliction was Satan's doing but it was allowed by God.
 - b. Its purpose – Twofold: 1) to keep Paul humble, and 2) to demonstrate the power of Christ in human weakness.

- c. Paul's reaction to it – Initial resistance followed by acceptance, then glorying in it.
4. Throughout this section on defending his legitimacy as an apostle, Paul has been very reluctant. He realizes the need to uphold his authority yet he fears that doing so would make him look worse. "I have become a fool" yet "you have compelled me." Actually, Paul should have been defended by the faithful in Corinth (cf. 5:12).
 5. Paul affirms his deep and selfless concern for the Corinthians. He again refers to himself as a "father" to them (12:14; cf. 1 Cor 4:15). Like a parent, his main concern is the welfare of his children; he is willing to "spend and be spent" for their sakes (12:15).
 6. But also like a parents sometimes, "*the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved*" (12:15). His generosity and goodness have been turned against him in malicious accusations.
 - a. He is accused of deceit (12:16), disguising his avarice by refusing support while among them and then soliciting it through his subordinates.
 - b. This charge is met by reference to Titus and his companion who likely took the first epistle from Ephesus (12:17-18). Did Titus do for Paul what Paul would not do for himself – ask for money?
 7. Paul's only concern is for their spiritual well-being. His second visit and first preserved epistle had not entirely cured their spiritual ills.
 - a. Note the personal viciousness of his opponents – 12:20.
 - b. Paul does not want to come to Corinth and confront a large group of impenitent sinners (12:21; cf. 1:23; 2:3), but he will if he has to.

Read and Reflect:

1. How many times does Paul ask the Lord to remove his thorn? What is the Lord's answer, and how does Paul respond to it? How might Paul's attitude inspire us?
2. What does Paul say the Corinthians had seen (2 Cor 12:12)? How could they be swayed to follow imposters in view of this?
3. What "wrong" does Paul ask forgiveness of in 2 Cor 12:13? What does he mean by this?

2 CORINTHIANS

LESSON 13: Chapter 13

Introduction: Paul closes the epistle with a solemn promise not to spare the guilty if they have not repented by the time he comes. He challenges them to examine themselves and states his hope that they can correct their own problems without the exercise of apostolic authority.

Outline:

1. Examine yourselves – 2 Cor 13:1-6
2. Paul's humility – 2 Cor 13:7-10
3. Closing wishes – 2 Cor 13:11-14

Notes:

1. How many times had Paul been to Corinth?
 - A. 13:1-2, along with 12:14, seem to indicate that Paul had been there twice before though Luke's record in Acts stipulates only one previous visit.
 - B. Paul's documentation of his trials for the gospel, however, reminds us that Luke did not intend to be exhaustive (cf. 2 Cor 11:24-27). Various scholars differ on this question:
 1. Conybeare and Howson argue for a second visit to Corinth while Paul was residing in Ephesus.
 2. McKnight suggests that Paul left Corinth and returned during his 18+ months there, thus making "two" previous visits.
 3. Others favoring two previous visits: Lipscomb and Shepherd (Gospel Advocate Commentary), Plummer, Lightfoot, Alford, Vincent, Tenney. Those favoring one visit: Farrar (Pulpit Commentary), Barnes, Ramsey.
2. 13:3 – Paul says that he will oblige those who seek proof of his apostleship by not sparing those who have sinned and not repented (cf. 12:20-21). He again equates his station with that of Christ, accepting personal weakness while giving way to the power of God (13:4; cf. 10:1).
3. 13:5-6 – Paul suggests that they might find concrete answers by looking at themselves.
 - A. Is there evidence that they are "in the faith"? Is there evidence of the power of the Spirit in their midst?
 - B. If the answer is "yes" to the above, then Paul's authority would be proven because he would have been responsible for their possession of these things (cf. 12:12-13).

- C. If the answer is “no,” then they were disqualified from the faith (cf. 1 Cor 9:27) and Paul is still proven legitimate.
4. 13:7 – The ultimate aim is for the Corinthians to be the kind of people they ought to be. Paul urges this not for his own credit, but because it is the right thing to do.
 5. 13:8-9 – While Paul is confident within himself, he would gladly appear as weak if it the result was that the Corinthians were strong.
 - A. He will forego the opportunity to “prove himself” if it means that the Corinthians will make their own corrections.
 - B. Further, Paul prays that they might go beyond correction and be complete, whole.
 6. 13:10 – Paul again warns of the need to exercise sharpness if the words of his epistle are not heeded, but he is aware that the primary use of the power bestowed by Christ is for building up and not tearing down (whichever one is always subject to the hearer’s response).
 7. In closing, the highest aims of the Christian life are hoped for the Corinthian community: maturity, comfort, unity, peace, love, fellowship with God, grace (13:11-14).
 - A. Greetings are sent from Macedonia and the brethren are urged to greet each other with a holy kiss (i.e., not a hypocritical gesture, not as a sensual display, and not something to be avoided out of animosity).
 - B. Paul reminds them in his final words that their identity as a church of Christ (13:5) is defined by what the trinity makes possible. In view of what they are before God, let them consider their ways.

Read and Reflect:

1. How can outside criticism cause us to question our motives, abilities and worth?
2. What does Paul mean when he says, “*By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established*” (13:1)? What is he attacking in this statement?
3. How does Paul’s sentiment in 13:10 apply to fathers and others in authority?