

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE 2 CORINTHIANS

November 7, 2018

Answers to Lesson 31 – 1 Corinthians

Page 167: Corinth was a link between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas which made it a strategic location for a bustling commerce. All routes from the Orient and Egypt passed through Corinth en route to Rome. There was rapid growth in the city and its political importance matched its economic importance. It became a melting pot of cultures and nationalities that was frequented by sailors. It became a morally corrupt city and it was more pagan and more immoral than its neighbors. Not only were the people in great need of the gospel but because of the location of Corinth the gospel could spread quickly from there to the rest of the world.

Page 167: Paul told the people that Christ alone is the wisdom and power of God. He believed human wisdom was worthless and foolish. Following various leaders because of their supposed wisdom was a grave mistake.

Page 168: Chapter 5 addressed the issue of sexual immorality. The implication was that at least one man in the church had been sexually intimate with his mother or stepmother. Instead of being grieved the church was proud. The people used their liberty in Christ as an excuse for sinful behavior. They were proud that they were not bound by the law. But Paul reminded them that the church was to be a pure church and a strong witness to the world. Those who profess to be Christians were expected to live in a way that was appropriate for believers.

Page 168: Paul preferred the unmarried to remain as they were because he knew the difficulties in trying to serve God and meet the needs of a spouse and family. He spoke about holding each other accountable in marriage and he placed greater responsibility on the man. Ultimately each person should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him/her and to which God had called him/her.

Page 169: Women should respect their husbands by submitting to their authority. Women were to remain silent in the church and to save their questions for when they were in their homes. Women were expected to restrict their freedom for the sake of their witness to others in their culture.

Page 169: There should be some kind of interpreter of those who spoke in tongues so the church could benefit to what is said. Everything should be done decently and in order – for the strengthening of the church. Only one person should speak at a time and if an interpreter is not available then those with the gift of tongues should keep quiet. Paul did not want the Corinthian church to forbid the gift altogether simply out of fear for its abuses.

Page 170: If what we teach and believe is not true then we could simply eat and drink until the time we die. Since what we teach and believe is true then we are to come to our senses and stop sinning. We are to stand firm and let nothing move us. We are always to give of ourselves fully to the work of the Lord because we know our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Confession of Sin

In the Hebrew Bible an early example of confession on behalf of the entire congregation is found in Leviticus 16:20-22 (scapegoat). Earlier in Leviticus we learned that people needed to confess their personal sins before they could bring an offering to the altar (Leviticus 5:5-6). Yom Kippur is focused on the idea of repentance and atonement.

In the New Testament those who traveled to see John the Baptist confessed their sins and then were baptized. In the letters from Paul he used the term to refer to a confession of faith in Christ rather than a confession of sins. James 5:16 showed that there was a clear tradition of confessing sins. In some letters Paul also indicated that certain sins should not be forgiven by the church. For example, heretics and unrepentant adulterers and blasphemers should be shunned.

In the third and fourth centuries the issue of what should (or should not) be forgiven became a contentious issue. It became the practice of sinners to go to confessors to plead their case and be restored to communion with the approval of the bishop or priest. In the Roman Catholic Church this is called the sacrament of penance. Priests were delegated the authority by Jesus to exercise the forgiveness of sin on earth (John 20:22-23). Within the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches confession and repentance has more to do with the spiritual development of the individual and much less to do with purification. Sin is not seen as a stain on the soul but rather a mistake that needs correction.

In early Lutheran tradition, confession and absolution were made either in private to the pastor or with the assembled congregation who made a general confession before the pastor (prior to the start of the service). In the 18th and 19th centuries private confession and absolution fell into disuse. At present private confession is used only when specifically requested by the sinner.



Nowhere else in his letters do we see such an enduring relationship with one particular church. In 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul relates to the believers over a number of years. Scholars have found references to five letters Paul wrote to them and one they wrote to him. Poor scheduling and failure to make a promised trip generates a reflection on God's faithfulness. Paul seeks to reconnect with the believers as he reflects on his ministry with them. His commitment to the collection in Jerusalem offers powerful reflections on the grace of God. In arguments with opponents he talks about the paradox of divine strength and human weakness.

Before Paul wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians he wrote a *previous* letter.
After some time he wrote a second letter to them (our 1 Corinthians).
Sometime after he wrote and sent 1 Corinthians he went to Corinth as promised in 16:5-7.
During that visit, one of the men made a verbal attack on Paul.
No one came to his defense (2 Corinthians 2:3) and Paul was so mortified he left the city.
Although he had promised another visit to the Corinthians he rethought it (1:23).
Instead he sent a harsh and frank letter which (as reported by Titus) achieved some success.
In 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 and 7:2-16 we hear that most of the Corinthians embraced Paul again.

Paul saw Titus and learned that Titus successfully gathered the collection from the Macedonians.
His earlier plans for the collection were well under way.
But now a group was ready to leave for Corinth.
Paul was in a bind:
Corinthians (in their back and forth with Paul) had lost their zeal for the collection.
On the other hand the Macedonians were ready and eager to participate.

In this context, Paul wrote his fourth letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians).
He tried to rebuild his relationship with the believers.
He explained why he broke his promise about a scheduled visit.
He needed to recognize and sign off on the punishment given to the one who did him wrong.
He reached the point where he could appeal to them for full participation in the collection.

A fragment of his fifth letter to the Corinthians is found in 2 Corinthians 10-13.
Several developments (none of them positive) made it even more difficult for Paul.
Letter referred to those who still harbored resentments that had been building up in the church.
Some Corinthians thought him to be two-faced –
On the one hand Paul preached a gospel free of cost.
And then he was asking for money for the collection in Jerusalem.
It is likely that his third letter (the harsh one) exacerbated some old irritations.

The ultimate blow came when some of the Corinthians wanted to *test* Paul and his apostleship.
Paul projected a third visit (a showdown so he could sort out their differences).
2 Corinthians 10-13 announced this visit and warned the Corinthians of the stakes involved.

Previous Letter	Paul is asked to clarify issues of holiness and living in the world.
1 Corinthians	Paul is in a somewhat good relationship with the believers.
Harsh Letter	Paul calls the Corinthians to task.
2 Corinthians 1-9	Paul tries to build on the last letter to encourage participation in collection
2 Corinthians 10-13	Shows the contentious relationship Paul has with the believers.

Dates of Composition

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus around 53-54 AD.
He promised a visit to Corinth after he made the journey through Macedonia.
Paul made that visit and it turned bad and instead of another visit he wrote the harsh letter.
He wrote 2 Corinthians 1-9 from Macedonia in his desire to connect with Titus.
Based on the timing of the collection he would have written this part around 54-55 AD.

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

- Chapters 1-7: Reconciliation & Defense of Paul's Ministry
- Chapters 8-9: Participation in Contribution for Jerusalem
- Chapters 10-13: Reaction to Opponents at Corinth

Outline of 2 Corinthians

Chapter 1:15-2:4 Reference to Travel Plans / Reference to Painful Letter

In the first verses Paul established the faithfulness of God as the ground for the blessings of God. He pictured himself as a dependable, steadfast friend whose hallmark was his morality. Now he had to account for what seemed to be a contradiction of this self-portrait. Paul did not make the visit to Corinth as he had promised. Instead he sent the believers a painful letter.

Modern Context:

Prayerful reflection, self-examination of whether or not we are seeking the goodwill of the other person, and a trust in God should precede any use of frank speech.

It is difficult to restore trust once it is splintered.

Chapter 2:5-11 One Who Caused the Pain / Nature of Forgiveness

One man caused Paul pain and therefore it caused pain for the rest of the community. Paul was upset with this person and with the Corinthians who failed to take his side. Majority of the believers punished the man but Paul counseled them to pardon and console him. Paul was himself ready to forgive for the sake of the whole community.

In Greek the word for *forgiveness* is *charis*.

Its understanding is grounded in God freely forgiving people who do not deserve it. For Paul the term functions to describe the restoration of relationships between people. His understanding of restored relationships with God includes justification and reconciliation. In the letters attributed to Paul the term *forgiveness of sins* is not used. For Paul, forgiveness and pardon are reserved for failed relationships between human beings.

Chapter 2:14-6:10 Treatment of His Ministry

Paul's Place in God's Purposes (2:14-17)

A New Covenant (3:1-4:6)

Ministry Sustained Through Affliction and Mortality (4:7-5:10)

Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-6:10)

In this section Paul is helping them understand the purpose of his ministry. He wants to bind them more closely to himself as their apostle. Given his recent experiences with the Corinthians he does not move too quickly with them. Rather than risk further alienation Paul lays out an approach that should lead to affirmation. He explains how he is the agent of the powerful and triumphant gospel message. We walk by faith and not by sight –

It is one of Paul's great pieces of wisdom.

Appearances are a sure way to be misled about what is really important.

Conclusions based on superficial information will likely prove us wrong.

In the section on the ministry of reconciliation we learn it is the heart of all that we do and say. It means we do not join in when others are making negative or judgmental comments. Faith does not function as a protection from hard times or from difficulties. Problems and tribulations are not signs of God's disfavor. Faith is the assurance that God is for us (and with us) through tough times and good times.

Chapters 8-9 Macedonians as Models (8:1-17)
 Finish What You Began (8:8-15)

Macedonian churches at Thessalonica and Philippi had a good relationship with Paul. They embraced the idea of the offering for the poor and generated an astonishing collection. Corinthians started out with great enthusiasm but later had some logistical questions. In 1 Corinthians they asked Paul for general guidelines about how to proceed. By the time of 2 Corinthians 1-9 a year had past and they had lost their earlier enthusiasm.

Collection symbolized for Paul a reciprocal partnership between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul viewed the Gentiles as being indebted to their Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith. Therefore the Gentile believers were to reciprocate by being of service in physical matters. Those who have more were obligated to help those who had less or who were in need. How much one put aside was to be proportionate to how well one prospered. At the same time everyone owed love to others. Remembering the poor was for Paul the supreme sign of the unity he preached and taught.

For we walk by
Faith
not by sight

Chapters 10-13 Paul Ready to Do Battle (10:1-6)
 Boasting (11:16-12:10)
 Ground Rules and Challenge (13:1-10)

2 Corinthians 10-13 was written from Macedonia in 55-56 AD.

The Corinthians' opposition to Paul broke into the open.
Paul was offended when the Corinthians did not rally to his side.
Outsiders now intruded into his ongoing problems with the believers.
Heart of the matter was the outsiders challenged his authority by wanting to be on par with him.
Plus the outsiders presumed they had rights to support their own preaching of the gospel.
His most scathing attack centered on the outsiders taking advantage of the Corinthians.
Paul accepted personal support from other churches but refused assistance from the Corinthians.
Making things worse was that Paul accepted support from the Macedonians while in Corinth.

Chapters help us discern the best ways to resolve disputes.
Paul anticipated a showdown visit and gave a stern warning of his intentions.
He made one last effort to avert a direct, personal confrontation.
Paul needed to make his understanding of his case convincing.
For Paul to have overcome his latest struggle he must have had a contingent of loyal fans.
Moving forward Titus and Timothy maintained good connections with them across the years.

In the ending verses Paul concluded his letter with a series of very pointed exhortations.
He addressed the Corinthians as brothers and sisters.
He called upon the Corinthians to be at peace and extended the promise of God's peace.
Corinthians stood on the same ground and belonged to one another because of the love of God.
Grace was in and through Jesus Christ and in the fellowship generated by the Holy Spirit.

Assignment for November 14

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 32 on Pages 171-174

Read *Galatians and Ephesians* or the portions outlined on Page 174