

Preview of 2 Corinthians

The Apostle Paul had written the first, largely corrective, epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus. He evidently intended to stay there until after Pentecost and then to travel on to Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:5-8). He expected to meet Titus at Troas as he journeyed after leaving Ephesus. When Titus failed to arrive, Paul went on to Macedonia, greatly distressed (2 Corinthians 2:12, 13). Finally, in Macedonia Titus shared the welcome news that the Corinthians had responded well to Paul's first letter (2 Corinthians 7:6-16). As chapters 10-13 indicate, however, a minority remained opposed to his apostleship.

This epistle reveals the apostle's heart more than most of his epistles. Paul asserted his apostleship in positive terms, yet his love for the church is evident. The apostle described the pressures of persecution, physical weakness, and other adversities that he was enduring, yet he spoke of the Christian ministry as a glorious calling and showed that he triumphed in every circumstance.

The epistle divides into three main parts. Paul gives an account of his ministry (chapters 1-7), instruction for the collection for the saints at Jerusalem (chapters 8, 9), and a defense of his apostleship (chapters 10-13).

Because of the personal nature of this epistle, 2 Corinthians does not follow an obvious doctrinal development. There are, however, two recurring thoughts in the epistle. (1) The believer's loyalty must be to Jesus Christ, not to any human leader. Paul begins the epistle by calling himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." He repeatedly declared that he had preached the Gospel of Jesus, not of himself. He freely confesses his weakness and unworthiness. And he laid bare the burden and yearning of his heart. (2) Respect for divinely appointed leaders is inseparable from loyalty to Jesus Christ. Paul spoke of mutual rejoicing with the Corinthians. He called himself and the other leaders "helpers of your joy." He represented himself as Christ's ambassador, commissioned to present His message to them.

Lesson 1 4 May 2014

The Motivation of God's Servant

Lesson Scope: [2 Corinthians 1:1](#) – [2 Corinthians 2:11](#)

Lesson Focus

Paul opened this epistle with his usual introduction, emphasizing his apostleship by the will of God. He followed this with a salutation of grace. His reference to God as "the God of all comfort" is linked to the great trouble he had endured. He then noted the contribution that suffering makes to the ministry of serving others. Paul had a confident expectation that the Corinthian church would experience the consolation that accompanies suffering for Christ.

Evidently some had charged Paul with fickleness of purpose, because he had not come to them as he had suggested he would do. In light of this charge, Paul explained why he had not come.

Paul's heart was in the work at Corinth; he had ministered among them for at least a year and a half. His great concern was that they would not turn aside from following the truth.

Fervent love for the church grows out of one's love for the Head of the church. This love is exemplified as God's servants willingly pour out their lives for the welfare of their fellow men.

The very heart of the lesson is found in verse 4 of chapter 2. That would be a good place to start. Paul's motives were pure and sincere. His desires for the church at Corinth were sanctified. He was motivated by love.

In much of contemporary Christianity, love and discipline seem to be mutually exclusive or incompatible. Dealing with sin is viewed as a lack of love, and love overlooks wrongdoing. This is erroneous. Paul's love for the Corinthians motivated his correction and discipline—for their good. When taught properly, love cannot be overemphasized, the teaching of this lesson is done out of love for Christ and any who are willing to study this lesson.

In verses 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 Paul makes an interesting reference to the Trinity. Jesus the Son is declared to be the fulfillment of God's promises. God the Father is the one who established us in Christ and

anoints and seals us. The Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance. And it is the Spirit who produces the fruit of love in our hearts.

Lesson Aim: To consider principles that direct effective Christian service.

Theme Verse: [1 Thessalonians 2:8](#). So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Lesson Text

Gracious Living

[2 Corinthians 1:8-12](#) ⁸ For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: ⁹ But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: ¹⁰ Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; ¹¹ Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf. ¹² For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Spiritual Guidance

[2 Corinthians 1:14-15](#) ¹⁴ As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also *are* ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁵ And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit;

[2 Corinthians 1:18-24](#) ¹⁸ But *as God is* true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. ²⁰ For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. ²¹ Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; ²² Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. ²³ Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came

not as yet unto Corinth. ²⁴ Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

Loving Forgiveness

2 Corinthians 2:1-11 ¹ But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. ² For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? ³ And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy* of you all. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. ⁵ But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. ⁶ Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many. ⁷ So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him. ⁹ For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. ¹⁰ To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; ¹¹ Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Questions for Study

Gracious Living

1. Why did Paul want the Corinthians to know about his difficulties?
2. What contribution do the trials of life make to our service for God?

Spiritual Guidance

3. Upon what is the authority of the church based?
4. How should our accountability to Christ and the church affect our service?

Loving Forgiveness

5. Why did Paul write this letter before he visited Corinth?
6. What apparently preceded the restoration described in 2 Corinthians 2:7-8?
7. What are the motivating factors in our service for Christ?

Analyzing the Passage

The "sentence of death" (2 Corinthians 1:9) refers to physical death. Through his severe troubles, Paul had learned to trust in God regardless of the circumstances. His consolation in the face of death was the hope of the resurrection. Paul speaks of deliverance in the past, present, and future tenses (2 Corinthians 1:10). Prayer was effectual not only in Paul's deliverance, but the answer to prayer also gave reason for thankfulness on the part of those who made the request (2 Corinthians 1:11). Paul aptly acknowledged "the grace of God" as the means by which all was accomplished.

"Yea and nay" (2 Corinthians 1:18, 19) implies changeableness and dishonesty. Paul was assuring them that he was not being slippery when he spoke of coming to them, and then failed to do so. See in 2 Corinthians 1:23 that Paul got right to the point about his reason for not coming to them.

In 2 Corinthians 2:1-4 Paul illustrated the soul-searching that accompanies the administration of church discipline. Verses 5-11 refer to the one who had committed sin (1 Corinthians 5). In these verses Paul explained how the principles of love and forgiveness should be applied to those who are subjected to church discipline.

Principles and Applications

Gracious Living

1. The Christian involves himself in service for the Lord regardless of the difficulties that arise (1:8). The apostle Paul found rest in the face of difficulty because he believed that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). Difficulties caused him to trust in God rather than in himself. As others entered into his difficulties, brotherhood ties were strengthened.

2. Service is effective when God directs and empowers it (2 Corinthians 1:9, 12). Paul was not trusting in himself; his trust was in God! His testimony was that he was serving by "the grace of God." Fleshly wisdom and worldly renown do not aid this work. In simplicity and godly sincerity, we serve for God's glory and the blessing of the church.

3. Prayer is an essential part of effective Christian service (2 Corinthians 1:11). Prayer is the vital link that connects us with divine power. It is the means by which "many persons" may enter into a work in which

only a few can be actively involved. Answers to prayer stir within us a heart of thankfulness. God has promised to honor the united prayer of His people.

Spiritual Guidance

4. The believer serves with an awareness of his accountability to Christ and his fellow servants (2 Corinthians 1:14, 21). In the Day of Judgment, we will answer to Christ. What we have done for His brethren will in essence have been done unto Him. Also, we will be held responsible for the way we responded to those whom Christ placed over us in the church. We live in a time when church authority is being undermined by those who withdraw from a Scriptural fellowship.

5. God's Word must remain the foundation of our faith and practice (2 Corinthians 1:18-20). An inseparable union exists between the living Word and the written Word. A faithful application of the Scriptures in no way detracts from the centrality of Christ. In reality, failure to make the principles of Scripture practical is a denial of Christ. The challenge for the believer is to know the Scriptures and to remain steadfast in faith and practice.

6. Activities in Christian service are tempered by a desire to promote growth in faith (2 Corinthians 1:23-24). The one law that governs the child of God is the law of love. Love never overlooks sin, but it always tempers the spirit and directs the activities. To contend for the faith contentiously is a denial of the faith. A critical and judgmental spirit tears down rather than builds up. In love we seek to build each other up in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Loving Forgiveness

7. Self-sacrificing love is an essential element of Christian service (2 Corinthians 2:1-4). Verse 4 is a window into Paul's heart. Through it we see that he was motivated by "fervent charity." The sacrifice of self goes against the flesh, but it bears fruit unto life eternal. A genuine love for our brother is expressed by a prayerful and active concern for his spiritual welfare.

8. True love causes the believer to relate to the erring with a heart of compassion (2 Corinthians 2:5-10). Love not only chastens but also forgives. When a brother who has failed truly repents, we forgive him and desire his restoration to the fellowship. This is a vital part of building the church. Paul wrote to make sure that the Corinthians were con-

firming their love in this way.

9. The believer serves with a constant awareness of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). If we fail to forgive, we are also in need of forgiveness. If we cause someone to be discouraged, we have become a tool of the devil. But we are not ignorant of Satan's devices; therefore, we are prepared by God's grace to withstand his attacks personally and to help others.

Important Teachings

1. The Christian involves himself in service for the Lord regardless of the difficulties that arise (2 Corinthians 1:8).
2. Service is effective when God directs and empowers it (2 Corinthians 1:9, 12).
3. Prayer is an essential part of effective Christian service (2 Corinthians 1:11).
4. The believer serves with an awareness of his accountability to Christ and his fellow servants (2 Corinthians 1:14, 20).
5. God's Word must remain the foundation of our faith and practice (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).
6. Activities in Christian service are tempered by a desire to promote growth in faith (2 Corinthians 1:23, 24).
7. Self-sacrificing love is an essential element of Christian service (2 Corinthians 2:1-4).
8. True love causes the believer to relate to the erring with a heart of compassion (2 Corinthians 2:5-10).
9. The believer serves with a constant awareness of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Answers to Questions

1. Why did Paul want the Corinthians to know about his difficulties?
The severity of Paul's trials provided occasion for God to demonstrate His great power to deliver. Paul also wanted them to know that their prayers had made a difference.
2. What contribution do the trials of life make to our service for God?
Trials and tests help to keep us humble and to sense our need of brotherly help, which makes us more willing to help others when they are in need. When we experience the comfort of God, we are then able to

comfort others who face similar experiences. A special comfort comes to us when we know that others understand. Experiencing trials and tests should also strengthen our prayer life; we sense more urgently the need to pray for others.

3. Upon what is the authority of the church based?

The authority of the church derives from God. The church, established in Christ, receives direction through the Spirit, who indwells the believers. The living Word and the written Word are inseparable. The church's faith and practice must be rooted in the Scriptures to be authoritative.

4. How should our accountability to Christ and the church affect our service?

Since we are accountable to Christ and the church, our service is necessarily directed by the church. Individual gifts are blended and balanced within the brotherhood. Paul's directives were not a matter of lordship but a desire to help (2 Corinthians 1:24). We are workers together in Christ's vineyard. He is the head; we are His body.

5. Why did Paul write this letter before he visited Corinth?

Paul wrote to assure the church of his love. He did not want them to feel that he was lording it over them. Neither did he want to visit them until he knew they had accepted his directives. He very much felt the need of their support and encouragement. He needed the assurance that they were relating properly to those involved in sin in their midst.

6. What apparently preceded the restoration described in 2 Corinthians 2:7-8?

Apparently, Paul's first epistle had stirred the church to take action against the flagrant sinner in their midst. The church as a whole had supported the disciplinary measures. The guilty one had repented and made proper restitution.

7. What are the motivating factors in our service for Christ?

The first and all-inclusive motivating factor is love! We desire the growth and encouragement of our brethren. This includes the enlargement of the fellowship through outreach and the reclaiming of any who fall. We are motivated by the desire to worship God and to contribute to collective worship. We desire to be a blessing to others.

Summarizing the Lesson

True service is motivated by love! Jesus is our perfect example. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who ... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:5-7). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Let us respond in love and obedience, seeking to serve out of a compassionate love for Christ and His church.

Research Guide

1. Unger's Bible Dictionary gives helpful information concerning this epistle. Look under the heading "Corinthians, Second Epistle."
2. Read 1 Corinthians 13 and 14. These chapters put service and love in proper perspective.