

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, feeling distressed (2: 12-13). Finally, in Macedonia Titus shared the welcome news that the Corinthians had responded well to Paul's first letter (7:6-16). As chapters 10 through 13 indicate, however, a minority remained opposed to his apostleship.

This epistle reveals the apostle's heart more than most of his epistles.

While Paul asserted his apostleship in positive terms, 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 through 7), instruction for the collection for the saints at Jerusalem (chapter 8 & 9), and a defence of his apostleship (chapters 10 through 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 began 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 confessed 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 10 May 2020

“We . . . Are Helpers of Your Joy”

Lesson Scope: 2 Corinthians 1:1- through 2:11

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

For the furtherance of God’s kingdom, and the salvation of souls, Paul had endured much affliction, even to the point of despairing of his own life. Though these afflictions were very difficult and wearing to the body and emotions, Paul kept his focus on the goal of saving and comforting other souls. Paul came through these hardships, not as a needy and depleted Christian, but as a strengthened, buoyant Christian who was even more determined to take the opportunities God placed before him to comfort and save others.

Paul had many things he could have been discouraged about. The Corinthians among whom he had laboured sacrificially for at least a year and a half, were suspicious of Paul’s motives, and some had charged him with fickleness of purpose. Paul needed to defend his authority to the very ones who should have been grateful for his sacrifices and labours. Rather than succumb to discouragement, however, Paul kept his focus on the “God of all comfort,” who had proven faithful to never fail to comfort through every tribulation Paul endured. Whenever Paul suffered for Christ and the kingdom of God, Christ more abundantly ministered consolation to him. Comforted by the consolation of God, he endeavoured to be a channel of comfort to others.

God is the consolation of the saints. This provision enables them to help their fellow brethren to joyfully endure the sufferings and trials of life. The setting and background is important to the understanding of this lesson. It would be beneficial to begin with a description of the church at Corinth, as well as a bit of history of Paul’s work there. Consider the connection 2 Corinthians 2:4-11 has with 1 Corinthians 5, which describes the sin that was being worked through. Also note the good news Paul received from Titus at Macedonia, where Titus reported that the Corinthians had responded well to Paul’s first letter.

Lesson Aim: To see how we can be helpers of one another's joy.

Theme Verses: [Romans 15:1-2](#). We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

Lesson Text

Helping by Prayer

[2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)

³ (KJV) Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; ⁴ Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

[2 Corinthians 1:8-12](#)

⁸ (KJV) 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.

God Has Given His Spirit

[2 Corinthians 1:14-15](#)

¹⁴ (KJV) 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 1:21-24](#)

²¹ (KJV) 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.

You Ought to Forgive

2 Corinthians 2:1-11

¹ (KJV) 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

Helping by Prayer

1. For What purposes did Paul recount his own difficulties as he endeavoured to bring joy to the Corinthians?
2. In what ways can we share in another's sufferings and comfort?

God Has Given His Spirit

3. Why is the Spirit also called the Comforter? How is this attribute displayed in these verses?
4. What are some evidences of the Spirit at work in our lives?

You Ought to Forgive

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

6. What is the right time for discipline and correction, and for restoration and forgiveness?
7. In what Ways does forgiveness bring joy?

Analysing the Passage

The word comfort is one of the key words in this passage; and comfort is paramount in the effort to be helpers of each other's joy. The word comfort is translated from a Greek word meaning "to call near, i.e. invite."

To comfort a person involves drawing near to him, answering his call, and walking alongside him to cheer him, to guide him, and, on occasion, to defend him. We cannot be helpers of others' joy while holding them at arm's length or when looking down on them, but only as we draw near to each other in true brotherhood.

Tribulation and trouble come from the Greek word "thlipsis" which means "pressure" and is related to another word meaning "to crowd," which is translated afflict and narrow. Difficult circumstances tend to bring the feeling of being under pressure, and of being in a very narrow space with no visible escape. When Paul was in these circumstances, the only direction he could look was up.

The phrase sentence of death (1:9) refers to physical death. Paul had learned to trust in God regardless of the circumstances. His consolation even in the face of death was the hope of the resurrection.

The words have dominion and helpers (1:24) portray opposite meanings. Dominion suggests lordship and control while helpers refers to a companion in work and a fellow labourer. Paul considered himself a fellow helper, not a master. He was not forcing their faith, but was rather inspiring them to enjoy their faith in Christ.

In 2:4 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

Helping by Prayer

1. God is the source of all comfort (1:3-4).

Paul had been through many very difficult experiences, even to the point of despairing of life. He kept his trust in God because of his confidence that God was with him through every moment of distress. He likely also knew that he could yet face much more distress, yet he did not flee from it as the natural tendency would be.

“We . . . Are Helpers of Your Joy”

2. Believers allow the trials of life to increase their effectiveness in comforting others (1:4). Many times when we relate to an individual who is facing a severe trial, we feel inadequate and at a loss for words to encourage them. Paul encourages us to draw from the source of all comfort when comforting others. We can remember the times God has comforted us; we have found God’s grace sufficient for every hour of trial. Hearing our testimony may lift up those who are in need of comfort. God may open our eyes to needs, whether material, physical, or emotional, that He would have us assist in filling.

3. Unconditionally trusting God inspires others to do the same (1:9-10). No doubt many in Paul’s time who heard of his experiences and trust in God were encouraged to also place their trust in God. May his testimony also encourage each of us to place our trust in the almighty God, who is worthy and trustworthy. In turn, our trust in God may also be that which inspires others to likewise place their trust in God.

4. Prayer is essential for Christian encouragement (1:11).

Prayer 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 special power in response to the united prayer of His people. Many have testified of the encouragement they have received from the prayers of fellow believers.

God Has Given His Spirit

5. Christians are encouraged by the faithfulness of each other (1:14).

We need to be sure our life is an example of faithfulness that will encourage others. As we appreciate the faithfulness of others, we can be strengthened and encouraged by them. And we should not fail to express our appreciation for their faithfulness, returning to them the encouragement they have been to us.

6. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives enables us to encourage others (1:21-22).

As we allow the Comforter to help, encourage, and strengthen us, we can in turn share with others of what we are receiving. We should allow the Spirit to direct us and show us who especially needs encouragement and how to best lift them up. A prayer, a word of encouragement, or a helping hand can be a blessing to others that God will bless.

7. Christians cannot force others to be joyful, but can inspire them to be (1:24). We should have a heavy heart when we need to share a concern, but we should love to encourage. Like Paul, we can encourage by having a ready testimony of what God has done for us and of God's grace and goodness. We can express our appreciation and thankfulness to others for their presence and for what they are doing. Even if they are struggling Christians, we can encourage them in a strong point they possess or ground that they have gained.

You Ought to Forgive

8. Christians want what is best for each other even when it causes temporary sorrow (2:3-4). Both correction and encouragement are necessary and are part of true love and an active concern for others' spiritual welfare. Neither should be avoided because of personal discomfort in carrying them out. When the need for correction arises, the Christian will rise to the challenge out of a sincere concern and a deep love for the individual. Whenever possible, we should follow up correction with encouragement in an effort to bring joy.

9. Forgiveness is essential for Christian encouragement (2:7).

Christian 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.

10. Christian encouragement fortifies us against Satan's devices (2:11). Despondency and discouragement give Satan opportunities while the individual is in a weakened, vulnerable state. If we cause someone to be discouraged because we fail to forgive and restore, we have become a tool of the devil. Forgiveness and restoration provide encouragement and fortification against Satan's further attacks.

Important Teachings

1. God is the source of all comfort (1:3-4).

2. Believers allow the trials of life to increase their effectiveness in comforting others (1:4).

3. Unconditionally trusting God inspires others to do the same (1:9-10).
4. Prayer is essential for Christian encouragement (1:11).
5. Christians are encouraged by the faithfulness of each other (1:14).
6. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives enables us to encourage others (1:21-22).
7. Christians cannot force others to be joyful, but can inspire them to be (1:24).
8. Christians Want what is best for each other even when it causes temporary sorrow (2:3-4).
9. Forgiveness is essential for Christian encouragement (2:7).
10. Christian encouragement fortifies us against Satan's devices (2:11).

Answers to Questions

1. For what purposes did Paul recount his own difficulties as he endeavoured to bring joy to the Corinthians?

Paul was giving his testimony that through every difficulty, God had provided abundantly and had been his comfort. He also expressed his thankfulness to the Corinthians for their prayers for him during this time. His recounting his difficulties explained why he needed their prayers so much during that time. His explaining his difficulties and the answers to their prayers for him gave the Corinthians opportunity to give thanks to God for providing and for answering their prayers.

2. In what ways can we share in another's sufferings and comfort?

We should not be ignorant of our brother's trials and struggles, but have an openness and be communicating so that we are aware of the other's difficulties. We can express our trust that God will provide, and encourage him to keep his trust in God, the source of all comfort. We need to express that we care, and that we will pray for him. We need to encourage each other to keep looking up, and especially encourage the discouraged. When we pray, we should pray specifically for the need, and also pray for the individual's emotional and physical strength during the difficulty. As we have opportunity, we should do what we can to lighten the load by sharing and helping. As we share in another's sufferings, we can rejoice with him and be thankful when the prayers are answered, the trials pass, and a time of respite and blessing comes again.

3. Why is the Spirit also called the Comforter? How is this attribute displayed in these verses?

Jesus went to be with the Father, but did not leave the Christian Without the presence of God. In a sense, the Christian is grieving because he is not in the presence of Jesus, but is continuing to live in this sin-cursed world. Therefore, Jesus sent the Spirit to comfort us in His absence and in the difficulties of living in a hostile world (John 14:12-19). As a Comforter, the Spirit enables, strengthens, encourages, guides, and teaches. Paul was encouraged and strengthened to press on through the comfort of the Holy Spirit. He was then able to share that comfort of the Spirit with others who needed it.

4. What are some evidences of the Spirit at work in our lives?

The indwelling Spirit brings joy to us and helps us to be helpers of the joy of others. We should be experiencing a vibrant and buoyant Christian life, one that rises above the difficulties that beset us, which is only possible through the strength of the Spirit enabling us. The Spirit is shown through an inner strength, stability, and a trust in God that does not waver when difficulties come. The Spirit in our lives will enable us to be more sensitive and perceptive of others' needs and difficulties, and also of what would be encouraging to them. The Spirit helps us to not serve self, but to sacrifice to help lift up others and bring joy to their lives.

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

Paul realized that if he came at this time, it would of necessity be a painful time of correction and discipline. His desire was that things would be set in order before he came, so that he could come both to be joyful and to make joyful.

6. What is the right time for discipline and correction, and for restoration and forgiveness?

One who has failed in his Christian life, has been rebellious, or has been Worldly-minded, and has resisted the brotherly address, or one who has supported others who are doing these things, is subject to admonition, correction, and possibly excommunication. There may of necessity be a time of proving as part of the restoration process. The proving time must not be out of harsh discipline, "lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." Rather, the time of proving should be a time of rebuilding trust and a step in restoration.

When an individual is truly repentant, fellow Christians should readily forgive and, as the individual proves himself faithful, should respond in

restored trust. Just as Paul gave direction as to the time for discipline and the time for restoration, so we must support the steps the leadership takes in this process.

7. In what ways does forgiveness bring joy?

When an individual has repented and has been forgiven and restored, he has joy in the peace and restored relationship both with God and with fellow Christians. The leadership responsible for the congregation has joy at the peace brought back to the church, for the presence and the place filled by the one who has been restored, and for the easing of the burden of needing to administer discipline. The congregation has joy for the flock being whole again, and for the restored peace and strength.

Summarizing the Lesson

Paul's desire to be a helper of the Corinthians' joy, even while facing tribulation in his own life, is a shining example for us to follow. At times we may feel that we cannot help others' joy because of things we are facing. Paul's constant focus on God enabled him to be spiritually buoyant despite the circumstances he was facing, so that he was also able to lift others up. Let us take the opportunities God places before us to bring joy to others through comfort, through being fellow helpers, through encouragement, and through forgiveness, so that we are known as one who is a helper of others' joy.

Research Guide

1. Read the introduction to 2 Corinthians in Halley's Bible Handbook.
2. Research the mounting opposition to Paul's ministry.
3. Read Scriptures that describe tribulation that Paul went through, such as Acts 19, when Paul's life was in danger during a riot; Acts 14:19-20, when Paul was stoned; and 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, where Paul recounts some of the things he faced.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 5, which describes the sin that was referred to in this passage.