

2 Corinthians

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Introduction:

1 Corinthians was about reconciling the Corinthian Christians with each other.

- Remember all the problems?

2 Corinthians is about reconciling Paul with the Corinthians.

- This time the problem is with Paul.
- Jewish Christians have come behind Paul and tried to convince them that some of what he taught was in error.
 - They may have claimed to be apostles (11:5)
 - It probably regarded circumcision and how Paul did not require it of the Gentiles. (Gen 17:11-14 – sounds like this was to be forever).
- This would be a major problem in a racially diverse church in Greece.

Paul writes this letter as a defense of the gospel and to reconcile himself to them.

Paul does not write this out of pride that he has lost popularity. Read 2 Cor 4:5

In all that pain and anguish he sits down to write this letter.

Paul begins his letter by talking about comfort (1:1-7). The reason why is stated in **1:8-11**.

Have you ever been in a situation as serious and risky as what Paul is talking about here?

Was there someone around then or later who was able to give you comfort from those experiences?

Write down some times in your life when you really needed someone to comfort you.

Millington – some of the elders and members were a great comfort but ultimately took another group of Christians outside of that situation to find comfort.

Paul's use of comfort here – “standing beside a person to encourage him when he is undergoing severe testing.” (Hughes).

Read 1:1-7

Paul says that some of our comfort comes from the God of grace and peace. How is God being a God of grace and peace related to how he comforts us?

- He doesn't have to show us comfort because we really don't deserve it but by his grace he does it any way.
- The comfort he provides satisfies and brings peace.

Paul gives God praise for being a God of comfort. *What about God's willingness to comfort us gives us more reasons to praise him?*

- He is not a distant God but an in touch God.

What does God's ability to comfort us say about his awareness of what is going on in our lives?

Now the big question, *How does God comfort us?*

- God as Father – comforter (same word as paraclete – continuous comforter)
 - *How does he give comfort today?*
 - Fathers and children
- Christ as Lord
 - *How does he give comfort today?*
 - All his teaching and his example. His victory over death.
- Holy Spirit as counselor.
 - *How does it give comfort today?*
 - John 14:16 – Counselor = continuous comforter
- Notice all three of these are found in 1:20-22.
 - *How does what Paul mentions in 1:20-22 give us even more comfort?*
- Other Christians – spouses, friends, ministers, people at church

Who do you have in your life you can count on to bring you comfort in difficult times?

What are some ways God has sent comfort to you?

Paul says comfort is a two-way street. *How does Paul say comfort is a two-way street?*

- We receive it and we give it.
- So far we have just talked about receiving.
- Let's spend a minute on giving comfort to others.

Paul says we are comforted in order to comfort others (1:4)

Grace played a role in God giving us comfort. How does grace play a role in our giving comfort to others?

- Just as God shows grace in giving us comfort we are also supposed to show grace to others we comfort?
- There will be times there are people who “don't deserve” our comfort but we will do it anyway because God did it for us.

Barnabas had a real gift for encouraging others. In the negative world we live in that would be a great gift to develop.

Flip your paper. On left side of the paper write some things you are good at that could be used to comfort other people.

On the right side of the paper list some people you know who need comfort. Draw a line between what you can do to comfort and who needs that kind of comforting.

How to's

What are some things that are required to be an effective comforter?

- Be a good listener.
- Be present – hard to comfort others if you aren't in touch with them.
- Be aware – more than just listening. The light bulb has to come on to remind you that when you hear someone is hurting that you can actually do something to help.
- Remember – God has comforted you and he wants you to pass it on.

2 Corinthians 2-3

Paul wraps up chapter 1 talking about his painful visit and receiving comfort from God. He starts off chapter 2 by talking about the other side of comfort – not wanting to grieve anyone. Remember that there has been a rift between Paul and the Corinthians that he is trying to repair.

2:1-4

Have you ever known that a situation was coming that wasn't going to be pretty so you wrote a letter to get things started?

What is it about a letter that you can say things that would be hard to say in person?

- You know they really have to listen to everything that is there before they try to respond.

When someone starts lashing you in a conversation what does your mind automatically shift to instead of listening?

- Shifts to the defense and how we are going to answer and we may miss some very valid points.

Paul talks about comfort and how is careful not to grieve them and how much he loves them. Paul is pointing the finger at himself. *Why is it often important to point your finger at yourself for a while before pointing it at someone else?*

- It shows them that you are not out to get them.
- It shows them you don't think your perfect
- It makes you vulnerable to them.
- It opens up the door for dialogue amount equally weak people rather than from the position of one who is weak and one who is strong – it is mutual.

People like to talk about how smooth Paul was in his writing and his use of rhetoric – argument making to get his way. It is more so that he is being careful with them and approaching things in the best manner possible.

2:5-11 – Forgiveness for the Sinner

- Paul does it again – talks about their success in reconciliation. *Why is it important to point out the good things and victories before talking about the failures?*
 - People need to know that you recognize the good things they have done and not just the bad.
- *How does Paul encourage them to put into practice what we talked about last week?*
- *How would you want to be received if sin in your life was made known at church?*
 - We would want people to be kind to us.
- *What is Paul's recommendation on how to treat this person?*
 - Comfort and love (2:7-8)
- Paul talks about forgiveness and unforgiveness – he says that Satan can use the later to “outwit us.” *How can holding grudges or withholding forgiveness be a powerful tool for evil?*
 - God wants us to be reconciled and withholding forgiveness destroys that process.
- We often misuse forgiveness as a way to get back at someone who has hurt us. *Who really gets hurt when we refuse to forgive someone?*

- *What sorts of things do you struggle to forgive in your life? What advice do you think Paul would give you in your situation?*

2:12-3:6

- *What does it mean to be the aroma of Christ vs. the aroma of death?*
 - Rats in the ceiling – smelled like death.
- *How can the same person smell repulsive to some and sweet to others?*
 - Unbelievers do not understand. They think we are messed up, intolerant, killjoys.
 - Believers understand that this message is the only way to really have life.
- 3:2 – hits the opposition again – do we need letters of recommendation? No. You are our letter.
 - *How does the Corinthian church itself tell the story of the effectiveness and legitimacy of Paul's ministry?*
- *What does it mean that our impact on others is written by the Spirit on the hearts of others?*
 - When you make an eternal difference in someone's life they will never be the same again. They are changed.
- *Where does Paul say their confidence comes from?*
 - God, not self. We are called to be confident people but not boasting in ourselves but in God.
- Notice he is starting to move into talking about the Spirit/New Covenant vs. Old Covenant.

3:7-18

- 3:7-11
- Confusing language – here is the key. Paul wants to be reconciled with the Corinthians. Why? Because Jewish Christians had come among them preaching circumcision of Gentiles before they could be Christians. That is not what Paul had taught. Rift.
- Now Paul is going to talk about his ministry in Christ and how it is superior to only following the law of Moses/Jewish circumcision.
 - Moses came down from Mt. Sinai after his time with God and his face shown with glory. The Israelites couldn't look at him. The glory eventually faded.
 - We look at Jesus, who is God, and his glory never fades.
- The new covenant, that does not require circumcision brings life, not death. The new covenant brings righteousness apart from circumcision and what these false teachers were teaching.
- Paul says we have something in Christ that will last forever.
- 3:12-18
- Those who hold strictly to the law apart from Christ still don't see things clearly.
 - 1 Peter 1:10-12 there was a mystery that is only understood through Christ.
- Not so with Paul's ministry and his message to the Corinthians – they can now see clearly through the message of Christ.

- *How does knowing we are a part of something that brings freedom and righteousness give us hope?*
- *How does that give us boldness?*
- *What sorts of things blind us from seeing Christ clearly?*
- Paul says that we are to reflect the Lord's glory through transformation. *Why is it difficult to reflect God's glory without transformation?*
 - Because we don't do a very good job without God's help to change us.
- *How does looking intently at the Lord's glory result in transformation?*
- Paul is saying that those who spend time looking toward the Lord and contemplating/thinking about his glory will grow in that glory more and more. That takes time and investment. We are missing opportunities if we are not regularly thinking about God, praying, and reading the Bible.

2 Corinthians 4

[Continued from last week]

3:7-4:6

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- 4:1-6
- "Therefore" – points backwards. "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart..." Why do we not lose heart? – Have to look at what he just said. We do not lose heart because we are being transformed. *How does transformation keep us from losing heart?*
 - God is working among us.
- Paul goes on to say what they should do instead of losing heart as a result of what God has done:

- Renounced secret and shameful ways
- Do not use deception (Paul is speaking against his opponents)
- We do not distort the Word of God
- They say “the measure of a man is what he does behind closed doors.” Paul is rejecting such things. He calls us to do the same.
- *What makes secret sin so hard to get rid of?*
- *How can the message of Christ and his mercy help us have the power to rid our lives of those things?*
- These three things probably reflect the things people had been saying about Paul.
- *What contrast does Paul paint between God and Satan in 4:4-6?*
 - Light vs. darkness. Veiled vs. unveiled
- *What tactics does Satan use to blind people today?*
- It is ironic that God opened Paul’s eyes by blinding him on the road to Damascus. Now Paul uses the language of light and darkness to help explain the gospel. He had personal experience with this. (**Acts 9:3**).

4:7-12 – Treasure in Jars of Clay

- Corinth was known for making extremely thin clay lamps. They were so thin they could let out more light but they also broke very easily.
- Paul is putting himself and all Christians in a humbling position. He is trying to show that his opponents have a false view of him – he is not about self promotion, he is about God promotion. This analogy will prove it.
- Gen 2 – God made man out of _____ (dust/earth).
- Jer 18 – the potter is making pots as he sees fit and then he is filling them with treasure. *What is the treasure that God has filled us with?*
 - His Spirit
 - “the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ” – Jesus Christ
- 1 Peter 1:6-7
 - *How do these words help us endure hardship?*
 - We know that there is a bigger plan and we will make it through to the other side.
 - God is at work in us even through difficult times. Remember, while we may be weak and unable to handle everything on our own, we are his and filled with his treasure.
 - Already – treasure
 - Not yet – “the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.” (4:14).

4:16-18 – Do not lose heart.

- Outward vs. inward – we see this all the time. People are dying and we are in the process of wasting away. But there is more to the story.
- *What does Paul say is the result of these troubles?*
 - Eternal glory
- *What does Paul say we should do to overcome?*
 - Fix our eyes on the permanent.
- *How do you fix your eyes on what you cannot see?*
 - Very carefully!

- Heb 11:1 – faith is being sure of what we cannot see.
- Have you ever been driving and looked off to the side and started driving in that direction. We direct our focus toward Christ and that takes faith because we cannot see fully yet.
- 1 Cor 13:12
- Paul is talking about a new kind of sight – looking at life through spiritual lenses/eyes of faith and not how mankind sees the world (See 5:7).

He is going to continue talking about this in chapter 5:

- Destruction of our bodies, eternal house, faith and sight.

2 Corinthians 5

Chapter 4 ended with – “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” The thought doesn’t stop there.

5:1 – The tent vs. the building from God. *How is a tent different from a building?*

- A tent is temporary but a building is more permanent.
- A tent is not very sturdy but a building can withstand much more.

How are our bodies much more like tents than buildings?

- They can be easily torn down. We have seen that in Virginia this past week – life is fragile.

Paul says “if” it is destroyed. *Why do you think he would toss in “if” aren’t we all going to die at some point?*

- Paul really seemed to think that the end was approaching and would probably happen within his lifetime or shortly thereafter.

5:2-4 Seinfeld “good naked” and “bad naked” – except for under very specific circumstances, being naked is a bad thing. *What kind of negative feelings does nakedness give us?*

- Shame
- Guilt
- Vulnerability

Paul says we are in this earthly tent which really amounts to nakedness and we groan because we long for something better. We long to be that building from God. It is like the longing to be clothed when you are naked and shamed. You want the devastation to end. Think about it this way – no matter how good this life can seem at times, it is like being naked and unclothed compared to the life that is to come. It is like going from shame to glory and despair to honor, from unclothed to clothed.

What does it mean to be mortal?

- You are alive but that won’t last forever. You will die one day.

What kind of life must Paul be talking about that will swallow up mortality?

- Eternal life.

5:5 – God has fashioned us for a purpose and has given us his Spirit as a deposit.

What purpose is Paul talking about?

- A change from an earthly tent to a building from God
- A change from being naked to being clothed.

How do deposits work and what does that have to do with this change?

- A deposit is on partial fulfillment of a promise but it holds the place for that promise to take place at a later date.
- We have God’s Spirit inside of us to remind us that he has already started this change in us but not fully yet.

5:6-10 – *Paul says he would rather be with God but what do we do here while we wait?*

- Do our best to please him.

If you lived in heaven with God would you do your best to please him?

- Yes

Why would it be any different just because we are here rather than there?

- It shouldn't be any different.

Paul ends this discussion with a pretty scary image – the judgment seat of Christ where what we have done will be judged and receive what is due. *What do you envision the judgment to be like?*

- 1 John 2:1 – advocate with the father.
- Romans 6:23 – God gives eternal life in spite of our sin.
- 1 Cor 6:10-11 – washed, sanctified, etc.
- Col 2:14 – cancelled the written account

5:14-17

- *How does the love of Christ compel us to see people in a different light?*
 - We saw Christ in the wrong light and we killed him. We are challenged to see people in a renewed way because we are living for him and not for ourselves.
- *What makes it difficult to see others as new creations?*
 - We all still seem so much like works in progress.
- *What does it mean to be a “new creation?”*
 - The new is already here – this ties back to the reference to the Spirit as a deposit. It is already happening.

5:18-21

- Remember the talk on comfort? God does something for us and we pass it on. Now Paul is saying this is true of reconciliation. That is bad news! (not really). You don't need reconciled as much with people you get along with and agree with. You need reconciliation with the people you don't agree with or get along with.
- God & Us
 - Starts with God – Have we always gotten along with God and done things his way? No – sin.
 - How did God react? He paid the price to reconcile us to himself.
- Us & Others
 - Starts with us – *Why are some times harder to start the reconciliation process with someone than other times*
 - Some times someone else is the problem but we may have to initiate the process.
 - *What does it take to try to make things right with someone when it seems like they were the one who was wrong?*
 - Humility and swallowing pride.
 - *Why would we do that when it seems so unnatural?*
 - Because God did that for us through Christ.
 - We do this because God has done it for us.
- *What does Paul say God did not count against us?*
 - Sin
- *How does this help us be more humble in reconciling with those who have wronged us?*
 - We also don't count things against people but try to renew our relationships in spite of past difficulties.

What does it mean to be an ambassador for God in light of reconciliation?

- We have a job to tell others about the fact that God is willing to cancel out their sins by taking them on His son and reconcile them to himself.
- He has done it for us, we have done it for others, and he calls us to tell the world about it.

2 Corinthians 6-7

Chapter 5 was about the ministry of reconciliation that comes through our example from God and is passed on to others.

6:11-7:3 is about practicing reconciliation toward those ministers who brought them the gospel.

This section is bookended by 6:11 – open your hearts and 7:2 – “make room for us in your hearts.” That means **6:14-7:1** has meaning within that context. It must have something to say about how to make room in your heart.

Certainly 6:14-7:1 has something to do with the context of reconciliation Paul is talking about. Commentators don't really connect this up very well but it seems to me that his point is – be reconciled with us – not yoked with unbelievers and their message. There are two options here and Paul is appealing that they chose God/Christ and not pagans. “Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever...”

Beliar/Belial – here Paul uses this in reference to Satan.

Christians as the temple of God vs. temples of idols – “believers are to avoid any alliance with the world that would be unworthy of a community which understands itself as the temple of the living God.” – Furnish, 373.

How are they to make room in their heart/open wide their hearts? By removing their yokes with unbelievers.

7:4-7:16 – “Preliminary Assurances of Confidence”

- “I am greatly encouraged” literally says, “I am filled with comfort.”
- 7:4-7 repeats the theme of comfort and Paul talks about how he received comfort from them as well as from Titus in a very difficult time (Acts 16:16ff – Macedonia and prison).
- Paul tells the story of Titus' return from a visit with them and the good news he brought back.
- Paul almost sounds like it is all about him and how they see him but that is not the case. It is about being reconciled within the body of Christ, that they are to be unified and not divided. If they cannot be reconciled with the one who first brought them the good news, they are in some real trouble.
- 7:8-13
 - *Has anyone ever said or done something that really upset you and only later you realized it was for your benefit?*
 - *Have you ever had to make anyone feel really sorry in order to get them to change their ways?*
 - *What do you think Paul means when he writes, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves to regret, but worldly sorrow brings death (7:10)?”*
 - Godly sorrow – sorrow over sin and wrong doing. Leads to repentance and change.
 - Worldly sorrow – sorrow over the concerns of the world that do not lead to a change in lifestyle. Does not lead to repentance or positive spiritual change.

- *We think of sorrow as a negative thing but how can sorrow lead to something good (7:11)?*
 - 7:12 – again, Paul is not self-centered but is interested that they can treat right the one who first brought them the message of Christ.
- 7:14-16

2 Corinthians 8

8:1-5:

- Paul begins by using an example of others who have given – the Macedonians.
- *Why was giving not easy for the Macedonian churches?*
 - They were under a severe trial and extreme poverty.
 - Yet they gave generously.
- *What things have you found making giving generously difficult?*
 - Keeping up with Jones’
 - Our wants vs. our needs.
 - Priorities
 - Learning to sacrifice.
- *What opportunities do we have to give today?*
 - We can give of our time in service
 - We can give monetarily
- *What would cause someone to beg for the chance to give someone else?*
 - If the cause was big enough
 - If you had a close connection with who needed help.
 - If you had been helped through something similar.
 - If you realize just how much God has given to you.
 - Story – Shaune and life jackets/work bench. When someone gives to you it makes you want to give back or give to someone else.
 - Pay it Forward
 - Give a dollar to someone in the checkout line who is short and tell them to pass it on to the next person they run into who needs it.
 - *What are some other ways we could give creatively?*
- They first gave of themselves before they gave anything else. *Is there a difference between someone who writes a million dollar check to a cause but has no real connection or bond with that cause and someone who devotes themselves to it but maybe only gives \$500?*

8:6-7

- They are asked to excel in the grace of giving. He says they have excelled in many areas but they do not need to fall short in giving. Giving is essential to our transformational process as we are becoming more godly by giving of ourselves to others just as God gave himself for and to us.
- Giving can be the acid test of many other areas of our lives. It is easy to tell someone you love them and quite another to let them live in your house for three months. It is one thing to talk a good talk about how you love God and others and quite another to give your weekends to helping others. ***Giving is the acid test of our hearts.***

8:8-9 – The example of Christ

- Paul says, “I am going to compare your sincerity with the sincerity of others...” The Corinthians think, oh...we can match the Athenian Christians or those Macedonians you just mentioned. Bring it on. Who do you have in mind Paul, we can do it.

- One word – Christ. Can you give like him? Can you follow his example?
- *How did Christ demonstrate a giving heart in his life?*
 - He gave it all
- *How is it unChristlike to only give when you have to?*
 - Because Christ gave when he didn't have to.

8:12-15

- *Which is harder, giving out of your plenty or giving out of your need?*
 - Both.
- *Why is it hard to give when you have plenty?*
 - We have a desire to have more and to have security for self and family.
- 8:14 - Mutuality – you have much and they have little. One day they will have much and you will have little but guess what – there is always just enough when we view our things as each others. This is one of the hardest things to really believe and practice as a Christian and I personally struggle with it.
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2 Corinthians 9:6-15

9:6 – Whoever sows sparingly also reaps sparingly and who sows generously reaps generously. Have you ever heard someone complain that they are not getting anything out of coming to church? Do you ever want to ask, how much have you invested in others? Chances are the answer is, “not very much.”

Is a seed that is sown lost forever?

- No, it produces fruit.

How does that relate to our giving – is our money lost once we give it?

Do we ever feel like putting it in the collection plate is a loss to us instead of a seed planted for future growth?

If you only sow a couple of seeds in your field should you be disappointed if very little grows? *How is that true of our giving?*

9:7 – *What does this verse teach us about when we should decide how much we are going to give?*

- We should decide ahead of time.

How should we decide how much we are going to give?

- We should look at how much we have been prospered and make a joint decision (if we are married) with our spouse.

When are times we should adjust our giving up or down?

- When difficulties arise or when more is given to us we should make adjustments. When we get a raise, God gets a raise too.

Which is more important, the amount given (those who give more are blessed more than those who give less?) or the attitude through which it is given?

Terry Rush on Learning to Give (from terryrush.blogspot.com)

Effective leadership is directly, Directly, DIRECTLY proportioned to giving. The business/flesh world depends mostly upon money. God wants us to make a most daring trade; our reliance for His. If we will surrender that upon which we depend centrally, He will shower us with a new effectiveness in the form of His invisible power: grace.

Grace is what makes any leader an authentic leader. Anything else is simply allowing a person to carry a title in leadership, but has no Spirit backing to be productive. Giving is a significant test. *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.....And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed...II Cor. 9:6,8.*

I know one thing about my elders (although I've never seen one of their checks...ever), each is a strong giver. You can't lead by their skillful standard without having the leading and the backing of His extraterrestrial grace. It can't be done. Grace is the trademark of God working in a man or woman. No substitute will survive.

Years ago Marvin Phillips and I were on a plane destined to speak at some workshop. He shared with me that (and this was over 25 years ago) he had gotten his giving up to \$100 per week. I'd never heard of such a thing. I gasped. I thought \$25 per week was generous.

And, when do we ever find ourselves permitted to share such a comment as Marvin's without being judged negatively for bragging. I was stunned. \$100 a week seemed like \$1000 to me....too far out of reach. Yet, it explains some of Marvin's success. He trusted God more than himself.

Marvin set me on a course that day which has challenged me year by year. I still feel hesitant in discussing my actual giving. I loved what God did for me when Marvin said it, but feel odd being specific with you. So, let me say I have it as my goal to one day be able to give \$500 per week and I am closing in. Understand this important point: that goal was set when I didn't get paid enough to see how I'd ever attain Marvin's giving of \$100. But there was God....promising.

In the early 80s I had not had a raise in several months (18 to 24) at Memorial. My salary was getting us by from week to week as long as the kids didn't need clothes and the car didn't break down. The elders gave me a generous and much needed raise of \$30 per week. We really needed it. Yet, Marvin's example stuck. Mary and I raised our giving \$35 per week (not our giving "to" \$35, but increased it \$35) to send a message to God. He has been ultra faithful to His *abound, always, sufficiency in everything, abundance* promises all along...Ponder the secret. Take the risk. And, step aside. His grace will come aroaring!"

What are some challenges we face to being a cheerful giver?

- Stress
- Debt/Credit problems
- Selfishness

9:8 – When we chose not to give it is usually because we want to make sure we have enough ourselves. *What does Paul say about that in verse 8?* – God takes care of the generous.

In 9:8 it literally says that God provides for us grace in abundance. Paul is saying that our giving does not start with us. It starts with God and his provision in our lives. If giving starts with us we could all just decide not to do it because it would all be ours and we could do with it what we like but what we have comes from God and so we have an obligation to give because it is not ours to begin with – it is all his and he has certain things he wants us to do with it – like giving.

What is the difference between having all that you want vs. all that you need?

9:10 – It all comes from God. God provides the seed. God provides the harvest, *What part do we play with the seed?*

- We are to sow it liberally.

9:11 – Wealthy for a purpose – *what purpose is that?*

- Made wealthy to be generous.

What do you think God thinks of those he gives so much to for free who will not give freely to others in return?

- Sees us as ungrateful.

The model for giving comes from God. He isn't stingy. He freely gives. He expects us to do the same.

9:11-13 – *How can giving result in thanksgiving to God?"*

- Someone out there is praying for financial help and relief.
- God wants us to supply it to them with our blessings.
- When we do, a prayer is answered and God receives thanks and praise.

Would you be more likely to give if you knew there was someone out there praying for help?

- That is hard to keep in mind Sunday morning when the plate is being passed by.
- We should think, this is an opportunity to change someone's life. This is an opportunity to answer someone's prayer.

How can we better remember that passing the plate is more than check writing and formality but that there is a world of difference being made by it?

2 Corinthians 10

Chapters 1-9 have been about the Corinthians

Chapters 10-13 are going to be about his opponents.

Paul concludes with his strongest argument. He has so many plans for these Christians and he doesn't want anything or anyone to get in the way. Imagine if you were a missionary to Australia. You get back home after spending a couple of years there and receive a letter about people who had come in and started teaching them something different. They also started teaching about how evil you are and how much they should dislike you.

What would your reaction be?

- You would probably stand up to them.
- Go visit or write a letter or send someone.
- You would want to find out what they were saying and form a rebuttal.

10:1 – “Meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...”

- While Paul starts this off nice and sweet it only lasts about two verses.
- Why do you think there are quotation marks around “timid” and “bold”? – words of his opponents. He is already sarcastic!
- While Christ was meek and gentle (Mtt 11:29 – meek and gentle) he was not always that way. *When were some times the meek and gentle Jesus showed another side of his emotions?*
 - Casting out money changers
 - Rebuking Peter – away from me Satan
 - A few other possibilities.
- Paul can be meek and gentle and that is how things should be done but his opponents have escalated the problem and now it is, “No more Mr. Nice Paul”

10:2-6 - Paul is describing the battle he is about to engage in with his adversaries

- Verse 2 – get ready because I am on my way to see you and if you don't shape up it is not going to be pretty.
- *What does Paul say is the cause of this conflict?*
 - They are living in a worldly way.
 - They are attacking Paul in a worldly way and letting the world blind them.
- *Why is it easy to live by the standard of this world?*
 - George Straight – It just comes natural.
- When you are seeing the world through worldly eyes you take the focus off of Jesus and put the focus on yourself. These opponents of Paul at Corinth had been leading people astray and had been verbally assaulting Paul and questioning his intentions. Paul fights back here.
- *How are Paul's weapons more powerful than his opponents?*
 - Because Paul's are from God and theirs are worldly.
- *What do worldly people use to injure others?*
 - Swords, clubs, vain arguments.

- *What kind of weapons does Paul say Christians fight with?/How much power do they have?*
 - Divine weapons that can destroy strongholds, arguments, and everything else that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.
- Anthony Wood and the gang members – it is a battle against God. No one can beat God.
- The weapons Paul fights with are more powerful than his opponents because their power comes from God and not from self. Paul is saying I am coming to you and it may not be pretty and the war that I bring to you is going to tear down anything that is not from God or opposes God.
- The Corinthians had started seeing these opponents as superior to Paul. Paul's first point is that their lifestyle is weak – according to the world. The second is that their arguments and weapons against him are weak – they are not from God.
- *How would making all of our thoughts obedient to Christ reduce the number of arguments and divisions Christians have with each other?*
 - We wouldn't divide and split over everything. We would all seek Christ.

10:7-11 – Apparently these opponents were smooth talking and manipulative. Paul was not as impressive.

- *What were people saying about Paul?*
 - He wasn't very attractive or impressive. They were judging by appearances.
 - Onesiphorus in the 2nd century describes Paul as follows, “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.”
 - Not too pretty
- *How can judging based solely on appearance get us in trouble?*
 - Mr. Feely's story about the man who did his windows.
 - Isa 53 – Jesus had nothing to attract us to him. We have this Randy Breece picture of Jesus in our heads. Apparently Jesus was all that great to look at and looked like a normal Joe.
 - When we judge based on external we would even discount Jesus and Paul.
- *Why is it so hard to look past appearances?*
- *What makes it okay for Paul to boast in this situation?*
 - He is boasting in Christ.
 - See Jeremiah 9:23-24

10:12-14 – *What kind of boasting were his opponents doing?*

- They were boasting in themselves and how great they were. They were comparing themselves with each other rather than comparing themselves with God. You can't win when you compare yourself with God.
- If you heard Paul's boasts and their boasts, you could tell the difference.
- Paul says that he boasts about them – *What about the Corinthians does Paul boast about?* – that they have faith in God due to Paul's mission there.

10:15-18 – A greater plan that Paul wants to see done through them.

- The opponents have one plan for the Corinthians – to make themselves look good in the eyes of the church.

- Paul has another plan – to expand the ministry and reach out to even more places.
- *What is the difference between those two plans?*
 - One is focused on self and the other focused on God.

2 Corinthians 11

11:1-4 – Commitment to God like a commitment to a spouse

- Paul is about to wisely take the position of a fool.
- 11:2 – Christians have only one husband – Christ. *How is our relationship with God/Christ a lot like the relationship between a husband and a wife?*
 - We are expected to be faithful. We are pledged to him and no one else.
 - Sin is giving ourselves over to things that are not God.
 - Spiritual adultery
 - When you commit your life to Christ as Lord – that is to the exclusion of everything else. Just like when you got married, you were ruling out everyone else. Making something or someone else Lord in your life is spiritual adultery/unfaithfulness
 - Prophet Hosea.
 - Hosea 1:2-3
 - Hosea 2:7-8
 - Hosea 3:1
- *What three things does Paul say can they accept/receive that would lead to spiritual adultery?*
 - Accept a different Jesus
 - Receive a different spirit
 - Receive a different gospel
- *How can you receive a different Jesus? Jesus Smith or what?*
 - Opponents were characterizing Jesus in a different way than he actually was – presenting him as someone he was not. Mature Christians will not go along with that.
 - What if I told you that Jesus wasn't really a man. He didn't have flesh and blood. He didn't really die on the cross. He was only a spirit who appeared like a man but without a real body. So you can sin in your body all you want because God is not concerned about what people do with their bodies anyway. – Different Jesus leads to different morality.

11:22-29 – Paul's boasting

- BIG LIST – do you think you might view that as a sign? Many of us would say well, this must not be what God wants me to do! Not so with Paul.
- It cost him something. When we are serious about our faith it will often cost us something. Jesus talked about that. *What did Jesus say our faith will cost us?*
 - Everything – what will a man give in exchange for his soul, take up your cross and follow, etc.
- *What would you be willing to do to follow Christ?*

11:30-33 – More boasting

- *Paul does some boasting here but what is different about this boasting than most boasting?*
 - He boasts in his weakness.
- *Why is it important to acknowledge our own weakness?*

- Because it reminds us that we need to trust God because he is the only one who is able.
- It builds trust in God.

2 Corinthians 12

12:1-6 – Paul’s vision (similar to John in Revelation)

- Remember – talking foolishly here!
- “I know a man” – why would Paul talk about himself like that?
- Well, I could boast about this or I could boast about that...but I will choose not to! You just did! Sneaky little guy.
- Things no one is permitted to tell – in Revelation there are things John is not allowed to write.
- Paul continues to talk about his authority and right to preach and teach them.

12:7-10 – More boasting in weakness (Thorn in the flesh)

- Missy’s story about Chris and the hair
- Thorn in the flesh:
 - [May not want to talk about this if we have visitors] - Angel of Satan – how can this fit with coming from God? Satan and his angels are often referred to in the Bible as being used by God (Job). He says it was sent to torment/abuse him. Not to punish him but to keep him from becoming conceited.
 - Many people have tried to figure out what this was and most people favor a physical illness.
 - Gal 4:13-15 & 6:11 – Paul had an illness there – maybe something to do with his eyes.
- This thorn weakened Paul and he asked that it be removed. Natural thing to do. God said no. Why? Because God had a purpose for Paul’s being weak. *Would you remain weakened if you know by it you could serve God’s purposes better?*
- “my power is made perfect in weakness” – *Why does weakness allow God to work in our lives in an even greater way?*
 - Because we depend on him when we are weak
- *Would you rather have your own power or let God’s power be in your life?*
 - Well then you better get ready for weakness because that is how God brings his power to work in our lives is through our own inability.
- Doesn’t it seem ironic that only through our weakness is God’s power made complete in us?
- Paul’s response – If that is the case then I better go ahead and boast about these weaknesses.
- Do you see the importance of viewing life from a higher perspective? When you view life from God’s perspective of the bigger picture than from our perspective then you will be content.
- *How do we train our eyes to see our circumstances in a more godly way?*
 - Paul started with prayer – remove this obstacle.
 - If God says yes, easy.
 - If God says no, then we have to adjust our expectations and understand that his will is best.

- Delights in hardship – because he has a higher perspective. It is like a diet – when you feel those hunger pains you know good things are happening all though it goes against your better sense and natural desires to feed that fire.
- *What things do you think God has placed in your life that may make you uncomfortable or you may not like but God has used them to help you mature?*

12:1-21

- Paul is still proving himself (12:11-13)
- *What three things does Paul say were the mark of a true apostle?*
 - Signs, wonders, and miracles. Those three seem kind of the same.
 - These are from God. If all the signs were of Paul and not of God they would have meant nothing. But these things are clearly from God.

12:14-15 – another trip planned.

- Paul talks to them like a father to children. Paul clearly sees himself like a spiritual father to the Corinthians. *Who in your life have you looked to as a spiritual father or mentor you could lean on?*
 - Charlie Britnell.
 - Parents/grandparents.
- *Why is it important to have people like that in your life?*
 - If you want to do well in business you surround yourself with successful people. Same is true with spirituality.

12:16-18 – The answer is clearly no, he didn't come to take advantage of them but to love them. *Have you ever had to tell someone something fearing that they may take it the wrong way but you were really doing it out of love?* – that is what is happening here.

12:19 – everything said was for their strengthening. But some of it seemed a little harsh. *Has someone ever had a tough conversation with you and only later you realized they were doing it out of love and for your good?*

12:20-21 – Paul concludes by talking about what he is worried he will find. *Why is that a smart thing to mention in a letter before you visit?*

- Maybe they will work hard to clear it up before Paul gets there.
- Like a parent on their way home from a trip. The kids find out the parents are an hour away and they start cleaning up like crazy. Paul is getting them ready for his arrival.
- Paul's call to them is clear – repentance.

Call is to us as well – a call to holiness and repentance.

2 Corinthians 13

13:1-10 – Testing/examining your faith

13:1-4

- 13:3 – They are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through Paul. *What have we been talking about the last two weeks that would show Christ speaks through Paul/Paul has authority to speak to them?*
 - His boasting – third heaven, etc.
- Yet Paul also had his thorn in the flesh – weakness. *Can someone seem more or less credible based on how one presents themselves?*
 - Yes.
- *Why would someone who appeared to be weak and powerless seem less likely to be speaking on God's behalf?*
 - God is powerful. We would expect someone speaking for God to be eloquent. Paul says he is weak. That is not what we expect from someone speaking on God's behalf.
- But it is what we should expect. Why? Because Christ also showed himself to be weak (13:4).
 - *How did Christ show himself to be weak?*
 - His submission to God's will even to the point of death.
 - But through that weakness came ultimate power – raised from the dead.
 - *How does weakness actually display the power of God?*
- So Paul establishes that Christ does speak through him because of his weakness. With that understanding Paul hopes that the Corinthians will finally listen to him.

13:5-10

- 13:5ff – Examine yourself. Test yourself.
- *What are some ways we can test our faith to see if it is genuine?*
 - Take spiritual inventory
 - See how you live in the tough times – not just when things are going easy
 - See if you bear good fruit.
 - Ask yourself - How are you doing spiritually? If the answer is you are weak then you are on the right track because we are all weak. If the answer is you don't have any problems then you may have a serious problem.
- Paul doesn't play around with sin.
- *How serious does the Bible say sin is?*
 - Results in death
- Paul doesn't just hope that they will avoid sin. He is real about it and warns them about it. He is even praying for them that they will avoid all wrong doing.
- *Have you ever known that someone was struggling with something and you should warn them but you knew it was going to be awkward? What did you do?*
- We don't like to talk about our sin because it shows we are weak. We like to appear strong. If we are not strong we would often rather put up a front and appear strong than appear weak. *But what did Paul say about strength and*

weakness? – Weakness is better in some things because admitting we are weak is the first step in letting God work in our lives. Again the perfect model was Christ – on the cross.

- Accountability is important. Paul is going to come and hold them accountable for their actions. *What makes accountability difficult today? How can we better practice accountability with each other?*
- 13:5 – literally says, “unless you are counterfeits” - It is possible to fail the test and discover that you aren’t right with God.
 - Counterfeits – look like the real thing but only in appearance and not in reality. Appear to have value but are worthless. Appear to be legitimate but are fake.
 - *How can our lives turn into spiritual counterfeits?*
- Paul says you can do what is right but it may appear to people that you have failed. *Have you ever struggled with balancing doing what is right with people’s perceptions of your actions?*
 - Sometimes when you do what is right it may raise questions.
 - Are they together? What’s going on with so and so and why did she do that for him? But you were just doing the right thing!
 - Paul says do what is right no matter how it looks to others.
- *How does Paul deal with confronting sin?*
 - He is upfront about it.
 - He wants to deal with them gently
 - He wants to build them up rather than tear them down.
- *Is there a temptation when you find a fault in someone else to use it to tear them down rather than build them up?*

Bottom line – we need each other. We need to be reminded of sin and its seriousness. We need to be reminded that it is possible to “cheat on God” and commit spiritual adultery. Sin in serious business and to brush over it is deadly.

Strength – we don’t really have it on our own. Only through God are we strong.

So test yourself – examine yourself. What has God used to make you weak so he could open the door to make you strong and resist sin in your life?

Final Greetings:

- Good-bye – almost like AOL when it used to disconnect. You would be in the middle of something and it would say, “Good-bye” and shut down. Nooooo! Paul’s good-bye comes in mid sentence. Sounds funny to us. His words are serious.
- Aim for perfection – literally “restore yourselves” – has a slightly different twist than aim for perfection. You need to be restored – get serious about it. Don’t wait.
 - *How do we go about restoring ourselves?*
- Be of one mind – literally “think the same things” – with each other, with Paul, with the Lord.
 - *What makes it difficult to unify our thinking?*
 - *Do we have to think alike on all issues or is there some room for disagreement?*
- Be at peace – literally “be at peace”
 - More than absence of war – state of being.