

# Imagine

for a moment that you and a group of friends are going to see a new play one Saturday evening. On your way to the theater you run out of gas. By the time you get a ride to the gas station, refuel and get to the theater the play is half way done. As you settle into your seats, you struggle to catch up with the plot. The broad outline of the story is somewhat familiar, but at this point in the action many of the details and characters have already been developed. You feel lost. Why did that person say that? What did it mean when he defended his honor? Why does he appear to be angry? This is something of what it is like to begin reading 2 Corinthians. We enter the story at midpoint, making it challenging to fully understand everything that is transpiring.

While we know of Paul and the church at Corinth, it can seem to the reader that vital details of the story are either omitted or assumed as common knowledge by the recipients of this letter. At times we scratch our heads. Who are these “super-apostles” with whom Paul seems so upset (2 Cor. 11:5)? Why does Paul, after being so conciliatory earlier in this letter, now seem so upset and sarcastic (yes, sarcastic) in chapters 10-13? To what letter is he referring in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and what did it say?<sup>1</sup> Who is the man who is forgiven and what did he do (2 Cor. 2:5-11)? Why does Paul change his travel plans? One thing is for sure. 2 Corinthians is a very different letter from 1 Corinthians and certain details will forever remain obscure.

The apostle Paul’s relationship with the church at Corinth was very stormy. At many points the church was an immature mess. There was an internal faction that challenged Paul’s apostolic authority and even his own spirituality! Sin was often rampant in the congregation. In spite of their carnal propensities, the church at Corinth was arrogant, naively thinking that they had “arrived” spiritually. Paul’s visits to the church were at times so painful (2 Cor. 2:1; 13:1-2) that the thought of returning for another visit was aborted (2 Cor. 1:23). The apostle’s relationship with this perpetually adolescent church has been described by scholar Linda Belleville as “one of the most complex topics in New Testament studies.” Paul’s pastoral relationship with the church in Corinth was like that of a father who loves his unruly children, at times feels rejected by them, and yet continues to attempt to lead them to maturity.

Both 1 — 2 Corinthians are pastoral letters written by the founder of the church. Paul’s relationship with this church took place over a period of seven years and included three personal visits and four letters. The church was originally established on Paul’s second missionary journey in the spring of 50 A.D. The apostle spent roughly 18 months in Corinth at this time to establish the church and then moved on to Jerusalem and eventually to Ephesus where he resided for about two and a half years.<sup>2</sup> Of the four letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, our Bibles have the second and fourth. 1

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<sup>1</sup> This letter, which we no longer have, has come to be known as the “severe letter,” the “sorrowful letter,” or the “letter of tears.”

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18 — 19 record this period of Paul’s life.

Corinthians was written from the city of Ephesus while 2 Corinthians was most likely written from the province of Macedonia (see 2 Cor. 7:5, 8:1, 9:2) in the fall of 56 A.D.

### **THE CITY OF CORINTH AND THE CHURCH**

In 146 B.C. the Roman consul, Lucius Mummius, destroyed Corinth because of the city's participation in a revolt against Rome. The men were killed and the women and children sold into slavery. It was one hundred years later, in 46 B.C., that Julius Caesar rebuilt the city and populated it with retired soldiers and freed slaves. Corinth became a working class city that, for the most part, lacked an aristocracy. It was a growing, bustling city full of commercial opportunity. It was a city that attracted people.

Numbering some 500,000 slaves and 200,000 nonslaves at its height, Corinth's cosmopolitan population was made up of a mix of local Greeks, Orientals (including a large number of Jews) and Italians. As a comparatively new, thriving city of the nouveaux riches, it could be compared with urban areas like San Francisco, Chicago, and Boston and their "yuppie" populations. (Belleville, p. 14)

Corinth was strategically situated on a plateau overlooking the Isthmus of Corinth, standing between the northern and southern parts of the province. It also stood between the eastern and western sea straits. Because of its ability to control both north-south trade routes and east-west shipping, Corinth became a major center for industry and trade. It was in this atmosphere of a busy, prosperous and transient city that Corinth developed a well deserved reputation for degeneracy. Accordingly, Aristophanes used a term that became well known. To "Corinthianize" became a euphemism for sexual immorality.

It is in this context of cosmopolitan heathenism that the Corinthian church was born. It is no wonder that Paul could say of this group of believers, "Neither the sexually immoral nor idolater nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. **And that is what some of you were**" (1 Cor. 6:9-11, emphasis added). Ralph Martin explains the situation.

Acts 18:1-11 tells us that the church was formed as a result of Paul's preaching in the local synagogue. Nonetheless, it is probably correct to assume that the preponderance of the church members were Gentile, converted to Christ from a pagan milieu. These were called to be God's people in the "Vanity Fair" of the Roman Empire. Murphy-O'Connor writes of Corinth in Paul's day as "a wide-open boomtown," comparing it with San Francisco of the gold rush days. (Martin, p. xxix)

Unfortunately, the Corinthian church all too often looked more like Corinth than the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul's most obvious reason for writing this letter is to bring the church closer to himself and re-establish his apostolic authority and their confidence in him. In the process he

hoped to distance the church from the “self-acclaimed apostolic meddlers” who were attempting to subjugate the church (Belleville, p. 22). In light of the tension that existed between Paul and the church, and the challenges he faced as an apostle, there is a large emphasis on the theme of comfort in the midst of affliction (see 1:3-7, 7:4,7,13). In the first nine chapters the noun “comfort” (*paraklesis*) occurs nine times and the verb “comfort” (*parkaleo*) is found eight times. These reminders of God’s comfort are found in the midst of the afflictions that Paul is experiencing (“afflict” or “affliction” occurs 12 times). While there is a cost that accompanies Paul’s ministry as an apostle, God’s comfort is more than adequate to compensate for the pain.

**Outline**

- I. Paul Explains his Conduct and Apostolic Ministry 1 – 7
- II. The Collection of Money for the Believers in Jerusalem 8— 9
- III. The Difference Between True and False Apostles 10—13



**STUDY ONE**  
**THE GOD OF COMFORT**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11**

When you think of comfort, what comes to mind? Possibly Hawaii with its temperate weather, an air conditioned house on a hot summer day, waking refreshed after a good night's sleep, a house equipped full of modern appliances and conveniences, or possibly the security of successful financial investments. In spite of the tensions and frustrations of life, you experience the sense that all is well.

After his initial greeting Paul begins his letter to the church at Corinth with a discussion of God's comfort and compassion in the midst of the temporal suffering that he has experienced. As we shall see, the suffering that Paul experienced, while not always easy to pinpoint, was severe. As a result, Paul is well equipped to address the comfort of God for the sufferings of his people.

Before continuing in this study, read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11. Write down any initial thoughts that you have as you begin the study of this letter. In what ways have you experienced suffering and the comfort of God that Paul describes in these verses? Does this discussion sound completely foreign to you?

In verses 1 - 2 we find that Paul begins his letter in fairly typical fashion. As we have seen in the introduction to this study guide, one of Paul's main concerns in the church at Corinth was his apostolic authority and leadership. Both were questioned by certain segments of the church. This was not an easy relationship. So Paul begins his letter by asserting that he sees himself as one called by God as an apostle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is not unusual for Paul to mention Timothy as a co-author or co-sender as he is in 1 — 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Colossians. Timothy, alongside of Paul, had served the church at Corinth from the beginning (Acts 18:5) and then, some years later, was sent by Paul from Ephesus back to Corinth for a

Paul's opening section focuses attention on an issue that will preoccupy him in the remainder of the letter, if in various ways. It is the question of his apostolic authority in the congregation. Clearly this authority was under fire at Corinth and was a matter of warm debate. So it is fitting that at the outset Paul should clearly indicate that such authority as he has is derived from "the Lord himself" (as 13:10 remarks) and is exercised for the "upbuilding" of the church (10:8; 12:9). (Martin, p. 4)

Paul begins in verse 3 by praising God because of his compassion and comfort. This theme of God's comfort in the midst of suffering and pain is one of the key themes in 2 Corinthians. The Greek word for "comfort" (*paraklesis*) means "called to one's side to help." It is also at times translated "to encourage." The verb is used 18 times and the noun is used 11 times in this letter. In these eleven verses alone we find the word "comfort" eight times! Think about the issue of suffering and God's comfort in your life. In this text, how does Paul say that God comforts us?

All people, at various levels, experience suffering, trials and hardships. How would a Christian's experience of "comfort" be different from a non-Christian's experience of "comfort"? How would you explain this difference to someone who didn't know God?

Take some time to unpack verse 4. If we are troubled and seek the comfort of God in our lives it often ends there. What does verse 4 tell us about the corporate nature of comfort in the local church? Is God's comfort to be our personal possession?

Respond to Paul Barnett's statement.

Basic to this process is the sense of sympathy for others evoked by God's comfort of oneself in afflictions. God's comfort is to stir up compassion leading to the passing on to others of the comfort of God; it is not to terminate on the receiver. (Barnett, p. 73)

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visit. (1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10). This visit was probably the source of the report back to Paul in Ephesus that resulted in the "painful visit."

“Triumphalism” is a heresy found in some Christian movements that says you don’t have to suffer in the Christian life.<sup>1</sup> God will protect and deliver the believer from all hardship and pain. Believers are never meant to suffer. The current “Health and Wealth” movement would be an example of this type of thinking. Many commentators think that the immature and overly self-confident Corinthian church was guilty of this type of theology (Fee, Barnett). How does verse 4 say we are comforted? Are we promised deliverance from the suffering or help in the midst of it?

Have you been guilty of any type of “triumphalism” in your Christian life? How does our text for this study help?

Attempt to unpack the corporate dimensions of both suffering and comfort that are addressed in our passage. In light of Paul’s relationship with the church at Corinth, what point is he trying to make? If one person is suffering in your homegroup, how does it affect everyone else? If an individual is experiencing the comfort of God, how does it affect the rest of the group? How have you seen this dynamic at work in your homegroup?

Notice in verse 7 how Paul, who has suffered a great deal, is absolutely sure of his “hope” for himself and for the church at Corinth. Paul uses a commercial or business term for “firm” that carries with it the idea of being guaranteed. Barnett points out that, “Paul does not base his ‘firm hope’ on sentiment or pious wish, but on God.” (Barnett, p. 79) When you are brought to the edge of despair because of suffering in your life, do you find that your “hope” is firm? Why? Why not?

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<sup>1</sup> Benny Hinn, for example, writes, The Bible declares that the work was done 2,000 years ago. God is not going to heal you now—He healed you 2,000 years ago. All you have to do today is receive your healing by faith. . . . Sickness does not belong to you. It has no part in the Body of Christ. Sickness does not belong to any of us. The Bible declares if the Word of God is in our life, there will be health, there will be healing—divine health and divine healing. There will be no sickness for the saint of God. . . . He promises to heal *all*—every one, any, any whatsoever, everything—all our diseases! That means not even a headache, sinus problem, not even a toothache—nothing! No sickness should come your way. . . . God’s greatest desire for the church of Jesus Christ. . . . is that we be in total and perfect health. (Rise and Be Healed, 1991)

We are not exactly sure of the sufferings that Paul is referring to in verses 8-9. What is obvious is that these sufferings were severe. He thought he was going to die. Paul chronicles some of the hardships that he experienced in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul may be referring to the city-wide riot in Ephesus that ended his three year ministry there (Acts 19:23-41). Undoubtedly, whatever Paul experienced in his sufferings for Christ are probably of a different nature than what the average SBCC member will go through. Avoid comparing your sufferings to the apostle Paul's or, say, to those of Christians in Sudan. In what ways have your sufferings brought you closer to God?

In verse 9 we find that there is a tremendous blessing that comes with suffering. What is it?

Commenting on this verse pastor and theologian John Piper says:

Paul does not concede his suffering to the hand of Satan but says God ordained it for the increase of his faith. God knocked the props of life out from under Paul's heart so that he would have no choice but to fall on God and get his hope from the promise of the resurrection. (Piper, Let The Nations Be Glad, p. 87)

When you have had the "props of life" knocked out from under you, how have you responded to God? How have you found comfort?

Our text for this study ends with a request for the prayers of the Corinthian church (verse 11). Do you pray for the comfort of those who are suffering or distressed? Spend some time in your homegroup doing this.

*Sermon Notes. . .*

**STUDY TWO**

**TENSIONS IN CHURCH LIFE**

**2 CORINTHIANS 1:12—2:11**

We live in a time when rapid communication and travel are the norm. If you want to tell your mother, who lives in New York, that you love her, you simply pick up the phone. If you are a businesswoman working in Portland, Oregon and are needing to contact a supplier in Thailand, you can have a fax or e-mail to them in a matter of moments. If you and your spouse decide on Friday morning that it would be fun to get away for the weekend, you can board a plane in Santa Barbara in the afternoon and be having dinner that evening at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. It would be no problem to have a full weekend and still get back for the afternoon service at SBCC! You can even, if you are really patient, write a letter ("snail mail") and have it arrive at your friend's house in just a few days. It hasn't always been this way.

In our study of 2 Corinthians we are finding that Paul's relationship with the church is strained, full of complications and misunderstandings.

Communication was not easy. Long periods of time would go by before the apostle could communicate with his church. Paul visited the church on three occasions. His first visit when the church was founded was the longest and lasted 18 months. He wrote the church four letters, two of which we find in our Bible as 1 — 2 Corinthians (really the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>). This relationship took place over a period of seven years.

Our text for this study can be, at points, very challenging. We long for more information. Much is understood between Paul and the church at Corinth that causes the modern reader to feel left out and in the dark. Paul is seeking to restore the relationship he has with the Corinthian church. To do this he begins in these verses to explain his motives for his change in travel plans and his actions concerning an unnamed man who is under church discipline. Slowly read this text several times. Before going on, try to write your own outline of these verses. Be ready to share this outline with your homegroup.

If you could have one question answered that would help clarify these verses for you, what would it be? (You only get one!) Share these questions as a group.

Now try reading the text again with the following outline as a guide.<sup>1</sup> Make note as to what is becoming clear and what remains unclear.

- 1:12-17 - Paul defends his change in travel plans.
- 1:18-22 – Paul gives a theological defense of his integrity.
- 1:23-2:2 – Paul explains why he changed his plans and did not return to Corinth.
- 2:3-4 – Paul explains why he wrote a letter instead of returning in person.
- 2:5-11 – Paul requests a change in action to the man under discipline.

It is obvious from reading the text that Paul was under criticism from some at the church at Corinth. This, undoubtedly, placed a great strain on their relationship and on Paul's leadership. Why does Paul begin his defense with boasting (vs. 12)?<sup>2</sup> What is he boasting about?

In our text we find references to letters written (2 Corinthians 1:13, 2: 3, 4, 9) and a particular “painful” visit that Paul made to the church (2 Corinthians 2:1). This can tend to be a little confusing. Think through this chronology of Paul's writings and visits to the Corinthian church. This will be of help for the rest of our study of 2 Corinthians.<sup>3</sup>

**Stage One** – Paul establishes the church and stays for 18 months to teach and lead (Acts 18:1-18).

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<sup>1</sup> Based on an outline from Barnett, pp. 91-132.

<sup>2</sup> Paul uses the word “boast” often. It occurs 36 times in Paul's letters and 29 times in 1 — 2 Corinthians.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars have a field day in this area of New Testament studies. Absolute certainty as to details will elude us.

**Stage Two** – Paul writes what is known as the “previous letter” referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9. We do not have this letter.

**Stage Three** – The church writes back in response to the “previous letter” and asks questions (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul writes our 1 Corinthians in response.

**Stage Four** – The relationship between Paul and the church deteriorates. This results in the “painful visit” referred to in 2 Cor. 2:1.

**Stage Five** – Paul returns to Ephesus after the “painful visit” and writes what is known as the “severe Letter” ( 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8).<sup>1</sup>

**Stage Six** – Paul meets up with Titus somewhere in Macedonia who brings news, both good and bad, of the church. Paul now writes our 2 Corinthians.

Any misunderstanding between people can cause real problems. Misunderstandings between God’s people in a local church can create havoc in the body. Paul’s change in travel plans was an opportunity for hurt feelings and confusion.

The news of Paul’s canceled visit was not well received at Corinth. They looked on his willingness to forgo a return visit as a sign of a fickle person who can say yes one moment and no the next. (Belleville, p. 65)

The phrase “worldly manner” of 1:17 (*kata sarka*) could be translated “according to the flesh.” These super spiritual Corinthians may be accusing Paul of making his decisions without the benefit of the Spirit. In verse 17 how does Paul respond to the charge of being unreliable, lighthearted and “fleshly” in his decision making?<sup>2</sup>

In verses 18-22 Paul develops a theological argument to answer his critics and establish his credibility and integrity.

Paul is so distressed by this charge and so convinced of his innocence that he solemnly invokes the unquestionable trustworthiness of God (I Cor. 1:9; cf. 11:10) as guaranteeing and testifying to the consistency of his message to the Corinthians. How could the message of a faithful God vacillate between a reassuring “Yes” and a disconcerting “No” or deliver a message that was not an emphatic “Yes”? (Harris, p.324)

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<sup>1</sup> This “severe letter” that Paul composed “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2 Cor. 2:4) has been identified in several ways. Earlier commentators often thought it was 1 Corinthians. Some more recent scholars have argued that chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians are at least a portion of this letter. For a variety of reasons it is best to see this “severe letter” as a separate document that has never been found.

<sup>2</sup> The grammatical construction of the two rhetorical questions of verse 17 demand a negative answer. Hughes translates the verse: “Did I really show fickleness? Of course not! Do I really purpose according to the flesh? Of course not!” (Hughes, p.34)

In verses 18-22 what does Paul tell us about God and his work in the life of the Christian? You should find at least 4 distinct points (maybe more).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

When Paul refers to the Spirit as a “deposit” (*arrabon*) in verse 22 he is using a commercial term. The idea is of a “first installment” or “down payment.” Even today in modern Greece the word is still used for the “engagement ring.” (Belleville, p.68) How does this word picture give the Christian security in her relationship with God? Read Ephesians 1:13 for additional insight.

In 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4 the discussion returns to why Paul changed his plans and did not return to Corinth, but instead wrote to them. What reasons does Paul give for not returning to visit the church at this time? What insight does this give you into Paul’s character?

What lessons can we learn about what at times may be an uneasy relationship between a spiritual leader and those being led?

After making reference to his “painful visit” (2:1) and his “severe letter” (2:3-4), Paul turns to the issue of the man who is under the discipline of the church. Curiosity causes us to long for more information!<sup>1</sup>

Paul now speaks indirectly about the disciplinary problem with which the Corinthian church had to deal. The incident itself is well known to the recipients of the letter, so Paul has no need to be specific. He uses allusions that are

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<sup>1</sup> Most modern commentators do not think this is the same man that is disciplined in 1 Corinthians 5. Interestingly Paul does not mention any Corinthian by name in 2 Corinthians.

sufficiently clear to the initial readers but lack specificity for all others.  
(Kistemaker, p. 76)

What do we learn about church discipline from this text?

We are not told the specific nature of the “punishment” (verse 6) on this man. What are some possibilities? You may want to refer back to 1 Corinthians 5.

Paul says it is now time to “forgive” and “comfort” (verse 7) this man who has been under church discipline. Think practically and give illustrations of how this could be done in a similar situation at SBCC. Look at Galatians 6:1. Have there been times in your life when, having been in the wrong, you have received forgiveness and comfort?

Paul points out that this messy situation might easily play into the schemes of Satan (verse 11). The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer, John Calvin, suggests that, “Whenever we fail to comfort those that are moved to a sincere confession of their sin, we play into Satan’s hand.” (Kistemaker, p. 79) Why would this be true? How can SBCC avoid allowing Satan to cause problems in our body?

## **STUDY THREE**

### **UNVEILED FACES**

### **2 CORINTHIANS 2:12—4:6**

In 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 we find Paul in Troas preaching the gospel. Evidently God had “opened a door,” that is, made an opportunity to preach.<sup>1</sup> Paul had hoped to find his friend and co-worker Titus in Troas. Unfortunately, he is so distraught over not finding Titus that he leaves and goes to Macedonia. Literally, verse 13 reads, “I had no relief in my spirit.”

Beginning in 2:14 we come to the heart of 2 Corinthians, and its largest unified section that eventually ends in 7:4. In 2:14—7:4, Paul gives a lengthy defense of his ministry as an apostle and of the new covenant. What was the situation that called for such a lengthy and technical response? There are several possibilities. Paul may be responding to newly arrived intruders to the church at Corinth that were possibly Judaizers (those who advocated adherence to Old Testament laws). Another option is that there were some sort of teachers that were dividing and confusing the church. A third view is that Paul is addressing long term breaches between himself and insiders at the church. In spite of our less than certain understanding of the situation at Corinth, this section is full of rich gems for the Christian life.

Whatever the truth about the currents of thought in Corinth at the time —and we are unlikely to know them with confidence —Paul appears to have constructed this powerful defense as a statement in its own right. Its applicability is not finally dependent upon our ability to reconstruct the historical situation. As in the First Letter, Paul appears to have allowed the problems of the moment to stimulate a Spirit-led response of breadth and depth that profoundly transcends the immediate and now long forgotten circumstances in Corinth, providing believers and churches from every generation with godly instruction and inspiration. (Barnett, p.144)

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<sup>1</sup> This idiom of an “open door” is one that Paul used frequently to describe evangelistic opportunities (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:9, Col. 4:3).

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14—4:6. Yes, it is a little confusing. Now read it again a little more slowly. The Bible is full of symbols, similes and metaphors.<sup>1</sup> While their significance is not always easy to discern, they do provide a rich way to help us understand deep theological truths of the Christian life. In this section Paul moves rapidly from one metaphor to the next. Considering each of these, write down your initial thoughts, understandings and questions.

Metaphor #1 – “triumphal procession” (2:14)

Metaphor #2 – “fragrance / aroma” (2:14-16)

Metaphor #3 – “peddle” (2:17)

Metaphor #4 – “letter of recommendation” (3:1-3)

Metaphor #5 – “new covenant” (3:4 ff.)

Metaphor #6 – “Moses and the veil” (3:7-4:6)<sup>2</sup>

The opening metaphor combines the “triumphal procession” and the “fragrance / aroma” that accompanies this procession (2:14-16). In what is probably an understatement, commentator Murray Harris says that, “Not all of the details of this picture are to be pressed.” (Harris, p.332)<sup>3</sup> Paul is most likely drawing on the picture of the Roman “*triumphus*” where a victorious general would lead his troops and captive enemy soldiers in a parade into the city of Rome and to the temple of Jupiter. Priests would be a part of this procession burning incense along the route. Pastor Warren Wiersbe points out that, “It was their equivalent of the American ‘ticker-tape’ parade.” (Wiersbe, p. 32) The question that we have to ask of the image is where does Paul see himself? Is he a part of the victorious army or is he identifying with the captives? Commentators are divided. However we understand this rather complex metaphor, “In the final analysis it is God who gets the job done.” (Belleville, p. 82)

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<sup>1</sup> A metaphor is a figure of speech in which something is referred to by a different name or association. For example, Jesus often refers to people as sheep, and thereby paints a word picture (John 10:3, 15, 27).

<sup>2</sup> In our next study we will encounter one more in this rapid succession of metaphors, “jars of clay” 4:7.

<sup>3</sup> One commentator has identified ten distinct understandings by various scholars of this metaphor! (Barnett, p. 146)

In 2:15-16 Paul says there are two groups of people in the world, “those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”<sup>1</sup> Depending on which group you belong to Christians are either the “smell of death” or the “fragrance of life.” What does this graphic imagery point to? Is there a third option? How does your Christian life smell?

In 2:17 we find our third metaphor “peddle.” The word “peddle” is borrowed from the business world and carries with it negative connotations of profiting unfairly. This may be a hint that there were teachers, either inside the church or coming from the outside, that were attempting to profit from the Corinthian believers.

But it is not getting paid for preaching per se that is the issue. Paul argues at length in 1 Corinthians 9 for the right of the itinerant preacher to receive financial support, even though it was a privilege that he himself forwent. What he is concerned about is *why* one preaches the gospel. The motivation of *the many* was money. Like the Sophists of the day, the majority showed more interest in lining their wallets than in preaching the truth. By doing so, they were in effect treating God’s message like so much cheap merchandise. (Belleville, p. 85)

Why do you think Paul was so zealous to preach and share the gospel out of pure motives? Are you motivated in a similar way? Why? Why not?

In 3:1-3 we find the fourth metaphor in our passage, “letter of recommendation.” It was common in the first century world to carry a letter of recommendation, in much the same way that today we might present a prospective employer a resume that contains a list of references.<sup>2</sup> Evidently Paul’s opponents in Corinth had come with letters of recommendation. What does Paul say is his letter of recommendation?

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin writes, “This Gospel is preached unto salvation, for that is its real purpose, but only believers share in this salvation; for unbelievers it is an occasion of condemnation, but it is they who make it so.” (quoted in Kistemaker, p.91) In both the Old and New Testaments God pleads with the unrepentant to believe and turn to him (Ezek. 18:32, 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9). It is the responsibility of the individual to choose life or death.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 18:27. Paul obtained credentials from the High Priest in Jerusalem before he went to the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:2, 22:5).

Have some fun applying this metaphor to your life. If someone were to ask to see your “spiritual resume” whom would you list as your references? What would their letter of recommendation say about you?

Our fifth and sixth metaphors, “new covenant” and “Moses and the veil,” overlap (3:4-4:6) so we will consider them together. It can be a difficult section for the modern reader to understand. Paul is moving rapidly and freely with the images. The background for these verses is found in Exodus 34:29-35. Read these verses. How does it help clarify the text for you?<sup>1</sup>

As you read 3:4-4:6 write down words and phrases that highlight the differences between the old covenant and the new covenant.<sup>2</sup> Compare and contrast. Why is the new covenant superior to the old covenant?<sup>3</sup>

**Old Covenant**

**New Covenant**

When someone trusts in Christ, Paul tells us “the veil is taken away.” What does this mean? How have you experienced this?

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<sup>1</sup> A careful reading reveals that Paul gives details in 2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6 that are not found in the Exodus account. As a good rabbi Paul is probably relying on other rabbinic interpretations (midrash) and even adding his own contributions. “Paul, then, reflects the literary traditions of his day.” (Kistemaker, p.112)

<sup>2</sup> “A covenant, simply put, is an agreement into which two parties enter. It can be a bilateral agreement between equals or a unilateral arrangement where the terms are dictated by one, superior party. God’s covenants with his people are of the latter kind.” (Belleville, p. 94)

<sup>3</sup> If you are finding this difficult going rest assured you are not alone. Alfred Plummer described this section of 2 Corinthians as a “trackless forest” and Linda Belleville points out that, “The grammar is at best tortuous.” (Belleville, p. 100, 102)

One of the key differences between the old and new covenants is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In 3:17 Paul says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”<sup>1</sup> Why is this the case? How, as a new covenant Christian, have you experienced the “freedom” talked about in this verse?

In 3:18 Paul points out that believers are in the process of being “transformed.” What is this transformation like in your Christian life? What role does the Spirit play in our transformation?

In 4:1-6 it is obvious that the glory of this new covenant has changed Paul and his ministry. List the ways in which Paul now functions in ministry because of this new covenant.

What have you learned in this study? What truths can you apply to your Christian life this week?

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<sup>1</sup> Interpretations of 3:17-18 divide over the issue of who the “Lord” is referring to, the Father or Christ. Paul is often fluid in his language when he talks about the Spirit and Christ. Compare Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

**STUDY FOUR**  
**LIVING IN TENTS**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 4:7—5:10**

We live in a culture where there is tremendous preoccupation with our bodies, our health and our looks. Gold's Gyms on every corner, a multi-million dollar cosmetic industry, constant shopping for "just the right" clothes, vitamins, and a fascination with beautiful people all point to our national obsession. If you don't like how you look, you can nip it, tuck it, suck it, or augment it. Losing your hair? Try Rogaine! Don't like the color of your hair? The options are limitless. (I have been advised by the female members of my extended family to tread lightly here!) In 2 Corinthians 4:7—5:10 Paul reminds us that all of this effort on the external self will eventually come to nothing.

*Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16)*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7—5:10. The text divides nicely into two parts.<sup>1</sup> In 4:7-18 the people of God are likened to "jars of clay" (4:7), and then in 5:1-10 we are told that we live in "tents" (5:1). Before going on in this study write down your initial thoughts and questions.

Clay pottery was extensively used for the common functions of life in biblical times. It was not a costly material or difficult to work with. Clay was the material of the common person and was used in every household for utilitarian purposes. In 4:7 Paul is drawing a sharp contrast between the vessel and the treasure. What is Paul's point? What is this picture of a "treasure" in "jars of clay" intended to show?

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<sup>1</sup> The chapters and verses that we have in our Bibles were not originally there. They were added at a later date for clarity and convenience. Stephen Langton added chapter divisions in the thirteenth century and Stephanus, a sixteenth century printer, added the verse divisions. They were, however, based on interpretive decisions and therefore not always correct. Gordon Fee calls the 2 Corinthians 4:1 break one of the most unfortunate in the New Testament. He believes the break should be at the end of 4:6. (Fee, Regent College, May, 1997).

Christians will frequently complain of their lack of giftedness, talents or abilities to function as ministers for Christ. What does this verse (4:7) have to say to those Christians who may feel inadequate? What type of container does God use to carry his “treasure”?<sup>1</sup>

Paul now continues his discussion with a description of the hardships he has experienced for the sake of the gospel. Paul does this often (see 1 Cor. 4:11-13, 2 Cor. 1:8-10, 6:4-10, 11:23-27, 12:10). In 4:8-9 we find four vivid pictures of the adversities he has experienced. Fill in the blank how each of these trials are qualified.

“We are hard pressed on every side” \_\_\_\_\_

“perplexed” \_\_\_\_\_

“persecuted” \_\_\_\_\_

“struck down” \_\_\_\_\_

In 4:10-18 Paul sounds victorious in spite of his hardships and trials.<sup>2</sup> What makes a person put up with a life of hardship and trouble? Why is Paul motivated to speak out and preach even though there are serious personal consequences?

Linda Belleville points out that this entire section which highlights suffering and hardships, poses difficulties for modern women and men. Respond to her statement:

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<sup>1</sup> “While the human body might initially come to mind as the clay pot in which the treasure of the gospel has been placed, it is the human being and not the body per se that is in view here.” (Belleville, p. 120)

<sup>2</sup> In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul gives a rather cryptic quotation from Psalm 116:10. Kistemaker says, “The reason for the quotation is that Paul identifies completely with the psalmist. He meditates on the thoughts on life and death expressed in this psalm. Both he and the psalmist have the same spirit of faith in God. He can say with the psalmist, ‘I believed, therefore I have spoken.’” (Kistemaker, p. 153)

“This is a hard message for the twentieth-century mindset. We like to be in control of our circumstances and operate from a position of strength.” (Belleville, p. 123)

As we have already seen in our first study, the Corinthians were guilty of some type of “triumphalism”, the belief that Christians are free from any type of pain and suffering. “The Corinthians, like many Christians today, believed that adversity was inconsistent with the Spirit-filled Christian life, let alone the gospel ministry.” (Belleville, p. 123) Paul, while not a “triumphalist,” is obviously living triumphantly. What enabled Paul to live this victorious life in spite of pain and hardship? The difficulties we encounter in life are most often of a different type and for different reasons. They are no less real. How are you living like Paul in the midst of pain and suffering that you experience?

Why is it that Paul did not “lose heart” (4:16-18) in spite of the fact that he saw his physical body wasting away?

It is obvious that in these verses (4:16-18) Paul has a future orientation and an eternal perspective.<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe says that, “Paul was writing with eternity’s values in view.” (Wiersbe, p. 53) What spiritual truths enabled Paul to have this type of perspective? Do you have this same view of life and the future? Do the scriptures below add anything to your understanding of 2 Corinthians 4:7-18?

- Romans 8:22-25
- Colossians 3:1-2

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 Paul uses a series of three metaphors to discuss the Christian’s hope after death. Examine these metaphors. How do they help illuminate the hope we have of resurrection and transformation?<sup>2</sup>

“tent” —————→ “earthly”

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7—5:10 has often been understood in terms of Greek dualism, that separates the physical outer body from the inner soul. This type of thinking, however, has no place in Paul’s thought. Harris points out that what we have in this text is “. . . a contrast between what is now seen by mortals and what is as yet hidden from mortal gaze, rather than the Platonic antithesis of the real and the ideal or a philosophical distinction between the visible and the invisible. Paul is not repudiating any interest in the visible world.” (Harris, p. 345)

<sup>2</sup> It is important to remember that the Corinthians who are reading this letter have also read 1 Corinthians 15. This is not new information for them but rather a reiteration of themes that are familiar.

“building” → “from God”

“clothed” → “with our heavenly dwelling”

Metaphors are instructive and can greatly enhance our ability to draw a picture with words. They can also be confusing. Try to paraphrase the ideas in this portion of Scripture with straight simple language. Be ready to read it to your homegroup.

In 5:2-4 Paul tells us that he “groans” and has a “longing” for something. What is it that he is looking forward to experiencing?

A surface reading may lead a person to think that Paul longs to be free from the physical body. Murray Harris gives us some help.

Paul’s sighing did not stem from a desire to become permanently disembodied but from an intense longing to take up residence in his “heavenly dwelling.” Paul sought liberation only from the imperfection of present embodiment, from the “bondage to decay,” not from any and every form of corporeality. After all, it is to Paul that Christian theology owes the doctrine of the “spiritual body” 1 Cor. 15: 35-49. (Harris, p. 347)

Paul was groaning for glory. He longed to see Jesus and be clothed with his new and glorified body. How does a longing for glory manifest itself in your life?

What does 5:5 say is the ultimate purpose of the Christian?

What does 5:5 say is the guarantee of the future for the Christian? The key word in this verse is *arrabon*, which, as we learned earlier, is taken from the business community and is used of a down payment or pledge that a transaction will be completed.

Our Scripture for this study ends with a very confident apostle Paul. In spite of hardships, sufferings and the possibility of death, Paul is “always confident” (5:6). Why is Paul so confident?

The last verse in our study, 5:10, elicits many questions. Paul is not referring to the last judgement when all of humanity will be judged.<sup>1</sup> What judgement is this? Who is being judged? When does this judgement happen?

Paul’s intention is to remind the Corinthians that all who serve Christ will have to give an account of what they have accomplished for the Lord, not how they have increased their own reputation. (Belleville, p. 142)

Do you find this encouraging or discouraging to your Christian life? Why?

How should the teaching that you have looked at in this study affect the way you live your life as a Christian in this world? Does this chapter’s perspective on life encourage you or discourage you? Why?

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<sup>1</sup> Paul is not teaching that we earn our salvation by good works. We are saved by God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9). John Calvin, the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer, said of this verse, “Having thus received us in his favor He graciously accepts our works also, and it is upon this acceptance that the reward depends.” (quoted in Kistemaker, p. 181)

**STUDY FIVE**  
**RECONCILED TO GOD!**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 5:11—6:2**

It is easy for human beings to get into arguments, disagreements, or misunderstandings that create animosity and distance us from one another. When friends, spouses, co-workers and roommates are at odds with each other we say that they need to be reconciled. Their relationship needs to be repaired. The Bible teaches that because of our rebellion and sin we have been separated from fellowship with God. The heart of the text in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 deals with the great theme of God reconciling us to himself and how we in turn have been given a task of announcing to the world that this reconciliation is available to everyone.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 several times. Write down your thoughts making note of what is clear and what is unclear as you read.

In 5:11-15 Paul discusses what motivated him to ministry. What reasons for Paul's motivation do you find in these verses?

What is this "fear" of the Lord that Paul speaks of in 5:11? Should "fear" of the Lord be a motivation to be involved in God's work (ministry)?

He does not have in mind a reverence for the Lord—that is taken for granted (1 Peter 1:17)—but a holy fear that relates to the judgement seat of Christ (v.10). He

is not speaking about overwhelming dread but rather about reverent fear of divine judgement. (Kistemaker, p. 183)

As we have seen in our study of 2 Corinthians, Paul is sensitive to those in Corinth who would be critical of him. Verse 12 seems to point out that there were some in Corinth that took pride in externals, “*what is seen.*” Paul, however, took pride in the internals, “*what is in the heart.*” Paul may be thinking of those who boast in ecstatic experiences since he goes on in verse 13 to say, “*If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind it is for you.*”<sup>1</sup>

In 5:14 Paul plainly says that it is the “love of Christ” that compels him to service.<sup>2</sup> Is this verse talking about our love for Christ or his love for us? Most commentators feel that it is Christ’s love for us because Paul goes on in verses 14-15 to speak of Christ’s dying on our behalf which is the ultimate expression of love. Read the verses listed below. How much does God love us through Christ? When you think about serving God how does this motivate you?

- John 3:16
- Ephesians 3:18
- Galatians 2:20
- Romans 8:35

Paul is beginning to probe the meaning of Christ’s death for us. The second half of 5:14 “therefore all died” had been the source of a great deal of theological discussion. Linda Belleville helps to clarify it for us.

Paul’s conviction is that *one died for all*. But by *all* does he mean all believers or all people? The contrast *between one* and *all* suggests that the term be taken in the broadest sense. Even so, while Christ may have died for all humanity, it is only believers who reap the benefits. This is why Paul can say elsewhere that “Christ died for *us*” (Rom. 5:8; I Thess. 5:10) and Christ died for *our* sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). The scope of Christ’s redemptive work may be all encompassing, but the application is particular. (Belleville, p. 150)

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<sup>1</sup> It is hard to know the background of this difficult verse. The English translation of verse 5:13 is much longer than the original Greek. Kistemaker points out that “the brevity of these clauses indicates that Paul must have been emotionally agitated.” (Kistemaker, p. 186)

<sup>2</sup> The verb *synechei*, that the NIV translates “compel” finds many translations: “impels” (NAB), “urges us on” (NRSV), “overwhelms us” (NJB), “lays hold of us” (MLB), “controls us.” (cf. Kistemaker, p. 187)

When Christians say that, “Christ died for us” what do they mean? What does 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 say the death of Christ accomplished? What insight do the verses below add to your understanding of Christ’s death?

- Romans 5:6-11
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10
- Galatians 3:10-14

In 5:16-17 Paul points out that to be “in Christ” involves a radical transformation of our lives.<sup>1</sup> We are a “new creation.”<sup>2</sup> Paul says that the contrast is both negative, “the old has gone,” and positive, “the new has come.” Think about your life. In what ways are you a “new creation?” Take a personal inventory and write down how your life in Christ has changed you. What has “gone” and what has “come?”

***“the old has gone”***

***“the new has come”***

In 5:18-21 we come to one of the great words used in the New Testament that helps us to understand our salvation. The word is “reconciliation.” In first century Hellenistic religions, as in most religions in the world today, it is the human being that seeks to be restored and reconciled to the god’s favor. In the biblical account of salvation, who is the one who is the active agent in restoring relationship, in reconciling?

According to 5:18-21 what was required for our reconciliation with God to take place?

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “in Christ” occurs twenty-five times in Paul’s letters. It is one of the apostle’s favorite expressions to point to the intimate fellowship the believer has with Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine was one of the great leaders and theological thinkers in the history of the church. He was converted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the Italian town of Milan. After his conversion he returned to his home in North Africa. As he entered the town his former girlfriend saw him and called to him: “Augustine, Augustine, it is I.” Understanding that he was a new creation, he turned to her and said: “Yes, but it is not I.” (Belleville, p. 151)

What do these Scriptures add to your understanding of reconciliation?

- Colossians 1:20-22
- Romans 5:9-11

Reconciliation is based on the fact that God “imputed” our sins to Christ. While the word “imputation” does not appear in the text, it is a term theologians use to describe what is happening in the sacrifice of Christ. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (5:21) Pastor Warren Wiersbe illustrates this great truth for us.

This is a word [imputation] borrowed from banking; it simply means “to put to one’s account.” When you deposit money in the bank, the computer (or clerk) puts that amount to your account, or to your credit. When Jesus died on the cross, all of our sins were imputed to Him—put to his account. He was treated by God as though He had actually committed those sins. The result? All of those sins have been paid for and God no longer holds them against us, because we have trusted Christ as our Saviour. But even more: God has put into our account the very righteousness of Christ! (Wiersbe, p. 67)

Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel message. It is much more than two friends “making up” after a fight. “Reconciliation is not some polite ignoring or reduction of hostility but rather its [sin] total and objective removal.” (Harris, p. 353)

What does reconciliation mean to you? Think both objectively and subjectively. In what ways are you now free to live a new life because you have been reconciled to God?

Do you see yourself as an “ambassador” for Christ? (5:20) Why? Why not?

5:21 makes the point that Christ could be our substitute because being God, he “had no sin.” Read the verses below and remind yourself of Christ’s sinless nature. What do these verses add to your understanding of the person of Christ?

- Hebrews 4:15
- Hebrews 7:26
- I John 3:5
- 1 Peter 2:22

In 2 Corinthians 6:1-3 Paul urges the believers at Corinth “not to receive God’s grace in vain.” What is Paul driving at in these verses? What would it look like to receive God’s grace in vain?

Take a moment and think back over this study. How will you live your life differently this week because of what you have learned?

**STUDY SIX**  
**COMFORT IN AFFLICTION**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-13, 7:2-16**

Life is not easy. Some Christians may assume that once you give your life to Christ the problems and pains of life quickly fade. In our text for this study, 2 Corinthians 6:3-13, 7:2-16, Paul makes it very clear that hardships, frustrations, interpersonal turmoil and sorrows are often a part of following Christ. In the midst of these hardships Paul finds the comfort of God.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout our study of 2 Corinthians we have seen that Paul has an affectionate but uneasy relationship with the church at Corinth. At times they don't seem to understand him, his apostleship and even the gospel itself. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-13, 7:2-16 Paul continues to address these issues. Read the text. If this was your first and only exposure to the apostle Paul, what would it tell you about him? What sort of portrait could you draw of the apostle from just these verses?

It is not uncommon for Paul to itemize the hardships of his life (I Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9, 11:23-29). In light of the criticism that Paul had received in Corinth, he is attempting to defend his ministry as a servant of God. What is Paul's concern in verse 3?

In 6:4-7a Paul uses the preposition *in* to introduce eighteen phrases that describe his life and ministry.<sup>2</sup> Linda Belleville suggests that this group of eighteen can be divided into three subgroups. (Belleville p. 166)

1. Missionary hardships and sufferings (vv. 4-5)

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<sup>1</sup> You have undoubtedly noticed that 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, which is in the middle of the text for this study, has been saved until study #7. The topic in these verses is entirely different, addressing holy living in a pagan society. Why does Paul change directions so abruptly? As you might suspect, theories abound. Among the many ideas put forward for Paul's rapid shift in topics in 6:14 are the following suggestions: 1) a dictation pause, 2) Paul's tendency to stray off the topic; and 3) the need to bring up lingering problems dealt with in a more substantial fashion in previous letters. (Belleville, p. 175)

<sup>2</sup> Chrysostom has referred to this list as a "blizzard of troubles." (Barclay, p. 212)

2. Ethical virtues (v. 6)

3. Spiritual weaponry (v. 7)

Reflect on your own discipleship and service to God. Out of Paul's list of eighteen phrases pick three that you most closely identify with in your Christian life. Be ready to share with your homegroup why you chose these three phrases.

1.

2.

3.

In verses 8-10 Paul gives us a list of seven contrasts or paradoxes that characterize Christian life and ministry. We have already seen a similar and shorter list in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. As you fill in the blanks it would be a good time to consult other translations or paraphrases for additional insight.

1. "genuine, yet \_\_\_\_\_"
2. "known, yet \_\_\_\_\_"
3. "dying, and yet \_\_\_\_\_"
4. "beaten, and yet \_\_\_\_\_"
5. "sorrowful, yet \_\_\_\_\_"
6. "poor, yet \_\_\_\_\_"
7. "having nothing, and yet \_\_\_\_\_"

Of this list, with which do you most closely identify? Why? How do you see this contrast or paradox working itself out in your Christian experience?

Paul, the spiritual father, now reminds the church that he has opened wide his heart and never withheld his affection (6:11-13). English translations have a difficult time communicating the strength of these verses. The phrase "opened wide our hearts" more literally reads, "our heart has been enlarged." Essentially Paul is saying that he has plenty of room for them in his heart. In verse 12 "affection" is likewise hard to translate.

The noun *splanchnon*, translated *affection* in the NIV and "bowels" in the KJV, actually refers to the inward parts (heart, lungs, liver and kidneys). Like the noun

*heart*, it was used metaphorically of the seat of a persons feelings- especially feelings of anger and love. (Belleville p. 175)

Paul is available, open and emotionally involved with the Corinthian church.<sup>1</sup> He pleads with them twice to reciprocate, “open wide your hearts also” (6:13) “make room for us in your hearts.” (7:2). What can we learn about the nature of ministry and church relationships from these verses (6:11-13, 7:1)?

In 2 Corinthians 7:2-16 we continue to gain insight into Paul and his relationship with the church at Corinth. It is always important to remember in reading 2 Corinthians that the letter is being written in light of Titus’ return from his visit to Corinth and the delivery of the “severe letter.”<sup>2</sup> Titus brings to the very anxious Paul news of the church’s response to his “severe letter” (7:8-9). In light of all the problems, accusations, discipline and misunderstandings between Paul and the Corinthian church, the optimism expressed in this section can be a bit baffling!

“I have great confidence in you.” (7:4)

“I take great pride in you.” (7:4)

“By all this we are encouraged.” (7:13)

“I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me.” (7:14)

“I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.” (7:16)

Linda Belleville gives us some insight.

Paul assumes the role of the father who not only takes pride in the accomplishments of his children but also actively boasts about them to anyone who will lend a willing ear. Is this a momentary euphoria stemming from Titus’s good report? Not at all. Paul had boasted to Titus even prior to his Corinthian visit (v. 14). Nor has he suddenly become blind to the many failings of the Corinthians, as is the wont of parents when speaking about their children. But just as a parent will encourage a strong-willed child by praising her when she is obedient, so Paul encourages the independent-minded Corinthians by boasting about them when he can. (Belleville p. 191)

In 7:2-16 Paul makes it clear that he is both encouraged and comforted. There are several reasons for this. As you read this text make a list of reasons why Paul was encouraged and comforted.

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<sup>1</sup> This tender and affectionate side of Paul surfaces often in his letters. See 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Titus, along with Timothy, was one of Paul’s most trusted and valued co-workers. He was a Greek by birth (Gal. 2:3) and at some point in Paul’s ministry had been converted (Titus 1:4). Curiously, his name never appears in the book of Acts. He first appears as a traveling companion on Paul’s second trip to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-3).

It is obvious that Paul found great comfort in his relationship with Titus (7:6).<sup>1</sup> Try to look behind the scenes. How do you think Paul was comforted by the presence of Titus? Can you think of a time in your Christian life that you have been spiritually comforted by another brother or sister? Be ready to share this with your homegroup.

Don't you wish we had the "sorrowful letter" that Paul refers to in 7:8-13? We are left only to guess as to its contents. Whatever the issue was, it obviously was a sensitive issue for both Paul and the church.

Overcome by emotion, Paul is unable to write his letter smoothly. He writes in the first person singular throughout this section to indicate that the matter at hand touches him deeply and disturbs his equilibrium. The letter is no longer extant, so we are unable to say anything about its content. But we expect that Paul dealt with a sensitive issue that involved one of the members of the Corinthian congregation. The possibility is not remote that the letter dealt with a disciplinary problem. And we surmise that Titus had to provide leadership in this delicate matter. (Kistemaker, p. 251)

Most of us don't like confrontation and will do almost anything to avoid it! Paul, however, was bold in confronting the Corinthian church directly. While he obviously didn't relish the procedure, he understood its importance. As Belleville points out, "He did it because he valued his relationship with the church more than his own reputation" (Belleville, p. 194). When have you seen spiritual confrontation function properly in church life? Are there any lessons that we can learn from the example of Paul and Corinth? Is spiritual confrontation a strength or weakness in your life? How can you improve?

Paul's "severe letter" produced a deep "sorrow" in the church at Corinth (7:9-13). What is the "Godly sorrow" that Paul is describing in these verses and how is it different from "worldly sorrow" (7:10)? Is "Godly sorrow" the same as "feeling badly"?

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<sup>1</sup> As we learned in study #1 the idea of "comfort" is a major theme in 2 Corinthians. The Greek word for "comfort" (*paraklesis*) means "called to one's side to help." It is at times translated "encourage."

## ***COMFORT IN AFFLICTION!***

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Describe a time in which “Godly sorrow” has brought you to repentance (7:9).

What was the end result of the confrontation through the “severe letter” and the resulting sorrow?<sup>1</sup>

We have covered a lot of territory in this study! Choose one or two points that you have learned and share how you will apply them to your life this week.

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of the “injured party” in 7:12 is usually thought to be Paul. (Harris, p. 363)

**STUDY SEVEN**  
**HOLINESS IN A PAGAN SOCIETY**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 6:14—7:1**

From Old Testament times, through the beginning of the church in the first century, up to our present day at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Santa Barbara, God's people have struggled with living holy lives in the midst of an ungodly society. The Bible is the story of God calling a people to himself as a new community to worship and serve him completely. The Old Testament in particular reads much like a roller-coaster. Israel is involved in a seemingly never-ending cycle of falling into pagan idolatry and anti-God lifestyles. The result is God's judgement, the people's repentance, only to eventually be seduced again by the gods and the thinking of the culture

in which they lived.

The Corinthian church struggled with living holy lives which were completely set apart for God. In our study of 1 Corinthians we have already seen that Paul has rebuked the church for accommodating themselves to the values of the pagan society in which they lived.

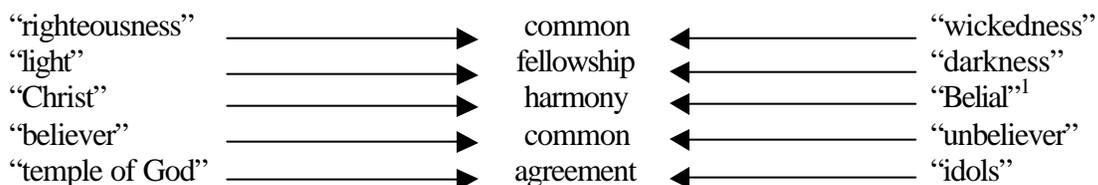
- 1 Cor. 5:1-13 – Paul rebukes the church for taking pride in their openness and acceptance of a Christian man who was in a sexual relationship with his stepmother.
- 1 Cor. 6:6-22 – The church is chastised for approving of sexual unions with prostitutes.
- 1 Cor. 10:6-22 – Paul admonishes them for participating with pagans in their cultic meals.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1. Our passage is relatively short for this study. Write one or two sentences which summarize the teaching of these verses. Be ready to read your summary to your homegroup.

In 6:14 Paul issues a clear and pointed command which literally reads, “Stop yoking yourselves to unbelievers.” Belleville points out that the “[u]se of the present imperative shows that Paul is not merely warning the Corinthians about a potential danger (“do not start”) but instructing them to stop an action already in progress.” (Belleville, p. 176) What does it mean to be “yoked together?”

There are certain Old Testament pictures behind this. Paul begins by urging the Corinthians not to be joined to unbelievers in an alien yoke. Undoubtedly that goes back to the old commandment in Deuteronomy 22:10, ‘You shall not plough with an ox and an ass together.’ (cf. Leviticus 19:19). The idea is that there are certain things which are fundamentally incompatible and never meant to be brought together. It is impossible for the purity of the Christian and the pollution of the pagan to run in double harness. (Barclay, p. 221)

Paul goes on, in 6:14b-16a, to ask five rhetorical questions that point out the sharp contrast between the Christian and the “unbeliever.” What insight do these contrasts give you into the incompatibility of the believer and the unbeliever being “yoked” together?



What Paul does not do is tell us exactly what kind of relationships, partnerships and “yokings” he has in mind. Paul is however a realist. He knows that we will have interactions and friendships with “immoral” people (1 Cor. 5:9-10). This is part of living in the world. This text has often been understood to be a teaching on marriage, prohibiting the union of a believer and an unbeliever. While there is certainly application to be made to marriage the thrust of the passage is much broader.<sup>2</sup> How would you apply this text to your life in Santa Barbara? Give some concrete illustrations of ways in which you should not be “yoked” together with unbelievers. In what ways should Santa Barbara Community Church be separate and unyoked?

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<sup>1</sup> Paul here uses a Hebrew term for the devil, meaning literally “worthless, good for nothing” (Belleville, p. 180)

<sup>2</sup> Paul encouraged a believer in a marriage to an unbeliever to stay in the marriage as long as it was possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16). He also instructed a widow to marry only someone who “belongs to the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

Respond to Murray Harris' summary of our text. Would you want to add or delete anything from it?

Do not form any relationship, whether temporary or permanent, with unbelievers that would lead to a compromise of Christian standards or jeopardize consistency of Christian witness. And why such separation? Because the unbeliever does not share the Christian's standards, sympathies, or goals. (Harris, p. 359)

In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul reaches the climax of his argument for holiness. "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God." Don't forget that these Corinthian believers had already been instructed concerning their new identity in Christ. In what sense were they (and are we) the temple of the living God? How does this make Paul's point in our passage?

- I Corinthians 3:16
- I Corinthians 6:18-20

Much of Corinthian social and economic life centered around the temple worship and participation in the cultic meals. (Barnett, p. 348) Gordon Fee makes the point that these temple meals were social events that included births, deaths, and even anniversaries (Fee, unpublished class lectures).<sup>1</sup> Paul has already addressed the believer's participation in these meals in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. Try to imagine what it would be like to a Christian in this first century city. What tensions and frustrations would you feel? In what ways was their situation similar to yours in Santa Barbara? In what ways was their situation different?

To establish his point Paul now quotes several Old Testament passages.<sup>2</sup> In all of these Old Testament Scriptures the concern is that Israel separate herself from pagan practices,

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<sup>1</sup> "Corinth was home to two renowned temples, the temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love, fertility and beauty) situated on the Acrocorinth, an 1,886-foot-high fortified mountain, and the sanctuary of Asclepius (god of healing). The pagan temples, which were under the patronage of a particular god or goddess, were a focal point of social activity." (Belleville, p. 180)

<sup>2</sup> None of the passages that Paul quotes are done so accurately. Why? "We must remember that in his time books were written on papyrus rolls. A book the size of Acts would require a roll about thirty-five feet long, a very unwieldy thing. There were no chapter divisions; they were inserted by Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century. As we learned earlier, there were no verse divisions; they were inserted by Stephanus, the printer, in the sixteenth century. Finally, there was no such thing as a concordance until the sixteenth century. The result was that Paul did the only sensible thing—he quoted from memory, and so long as he got the substance right he did not worry about the actual wording." (Barclay, p. 223)

idolatries and compromise. These warnings are now applied to the church. What can we learn from them?

Our last verse for this study, 7:1, is a powerful verse. Based on the Old Testament passages just cited, Paul bases his plea for holiness on “these promises.” Go back over the Old Testament verses (6:16-18). What “promises” do you find in these verses? Does this make holy living sound like a good or bad way to conduct your life?

We are instructed to “purify ourselves” and work at “perfecting holiness.” How can a Christian do this? How do the verses below add any insight?

- James 1:27
- 1 Peter 1:15-16
- 1 John 3:3
- 1 Thessalonians 4:7

Where do you need to break with your culture in order to live a holy, uncompromised Christian life?

*Sermon Notes. . .*

**STUDY EIGHT**  
**GIVING GENEROUSLY - PART 1**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-24**

Money. \$\$\$\$\$ Just about everyone wants to have it and almost no one wants to talk about how much he or she has. In 2 Corinthians 8 — 9 the word “money” is never used! Words such as “giving,” “sharing,” “rich generosity,” and “gift” all refer to monies that are to be collected for the relief of the poverty stricken church of Jerusalem. Paul spent close to ten years collecting funds for the church in Jerusalem, which was caught in a devastating famine.

Beginning in chapter 8 we come to an abrupt transition in 2 Corinthians.

Gordon Fee says that we are probably coming to “the real reason for the letter.”<sup>1</sup> Chapters 8 — 9 comprise the longest section in the New Testament that addresses the issue of financial giving. The length of this section points to the seriousness of the Jerusalem relief effort. How was the church at Corinth involved?

According to 2 Corinthians 8:10, it was the first church not only to give but indeed to have the desire to do so. Paul must have made the Corinthians aware of the relief fund on his founding visit or shortly thereafter, for a little over a year later the church asked for his counsel on the best way to go about saving up such monies (1 Cor. 16:1). . . . Between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the collection effort in Corinth fell by the wayside. . . . Second Corinthians 8-9 is Paul’s final attempt to get the Corinthians to finish what they had pledged to do the previous year (8:10-11). (Belleville, p. 209)

To gain some background read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Now read 2 Corinthians 8. As you read these two sections of scripture take some preliminary notes in two areas: 1) What principles of giving do you see in these verses? 2) What was Paul’s fundraising strategy?

**Principles of Giving**

**Paul’s Fundraising Strategy**

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee, Regent College, May 1997.

Paul begins his plea for generous giving tactfully. He starts with the example of the sacrificial giving of the Macedonian churches (8:1-7).<sup>1</sup> In 8:1-7, what observations does Paul make about the giving of the Macedonian churches?

Paul is quick to point out that the Macedonian churches were not wealthy. In verse 2 we are told that they gave from a state of “extreme poverty.” The phrase literally reads “down to the depth poverty.” Philip Hughes translates it as “rock bottom” poverty. (Hughes, p. 288) It is not difficult to understand how the rich would be generous givers, but in this example Paul uses poor churches who gave in “rich generosity” (8:2). What clues do you find in verses 1-5 as to why these churches were motivated to give?

In 2 Corinthians 8 — 9 the word “grace” (*charis*) is found ten times. Gordon Fee calls “grace” the most significant word used in connection with the collection. (Gordon Fee, class lectures on 2 Corinthians) It is used in a variety of ways. Make note of how the word “grace” is used in connection with giving in chapter 8.

- 8:1
- 8:4 (NIV translates as “privilege”)
- 8:6
- 8:7
- 8:19 (NIV translates as “offering”)

Ralph Martin gives a succinct summary of how “grace” is used in these verses. “‘Grace’ is the activity inspired by God’s grace that leads to giving.” (Martin, p. 255)

Paul makes the theological basis for giving in verse 9. Belleville points out that, “We humans are selfish by nature. Generosity is not something that comes naturally but is the result of God’s grace in our lives.” (Belleville, p. 214) How has God’s grace encouraged you to be generous in your giving habits? What are some obstacles that keep you from growing in your giving habits?

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<sup>1</sup> The “Macedonian churches” would include those at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. The gathering of money for the church at Jerusalem was widespread and included not just Macedonian churches but also those in Asia Minor and Greece.

Read 8:8 again and look carefully at what Paul is doing. He is gently testing the “sincerity” of their love by comparing it with the giving of the Macedonian churches! How would you feel if one of the pastors at SBCC challenged the body to give by comparing our giving with another, very generous, church in Santa Barbara?<sup>1</sup>

Paul is concerned about the attitude with which the Corinthians give. In 8:10-15 what sort of giving attitude is Paul looking for in their gift?

What sort of attitude do you have in your financial giving to God?

The money being requested is to be in proportion to what one has (8:12-15). John Calvin points out, “If you offer a small gift from your slender resources, your intention is just as valuable in God’s eyes as if a rich man had made a large gift out of his abundance.”<sup>2</sup> Read Mark 12:43-44 for a great illustration of this principle. The question as to how much a person should give is not designated. We do, however, find principles to guide the Corinthians in this decision. What principles do you find in this chapter that would guide you in deciding how much you should give? It would be helpful to go back and also include any principles of giving from 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.<sup>3</sup>

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Paul deals with some of the practical matters involved in this collection of money. He is obviously concerned to do everything with great integrity. He wants to “avoid any criticism” (8:20). In all probability there were false teachers in Corinth who were spreading rumors that Paul was using this collection for himself (see 2:17; 11:7; 12:14).

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<sup>1</sup> Belleville says that Paul is trying to motivate the Corinthian believers “by means of some friendly competition.” (Belleville, p. 215)

<sup>2</sup> quoted in Kistemaker, p. 286

<sup>3</sup> New Testament Christians will be hard pressed to find any fixed percentage for giving. The Old Testament “tithing” is never mentioned in the New Testament. “For it is curious that at no point here - or for that matter elsewhere in Paul’s writings — is the tithing put forward as a guideline for giving. In fact, no New Testament writer either encourages ‘tithing’ or presents it as the normative or even occasional practice of the church.” (Belleville, p. 218)

The misuse of money in the local church is a serious matter and has been the cause of a great deal of pain for many churches. What concrete steps does Paul take to avoid the mishandling of this collection? What lessons can SBCC learn about how to handle our giving money?

New Testament scholars have a field day attempting to guess the identity of the “brother” in verse 18. Luke, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, Mark, Aristarchus, and Apollos have all been mentioned as serious candidates. Some scholars think they know the identity of the “brother” in verse 18. There is, however, almost universal consent that nobody knows the name of the “brother” in verse 22! This brings the delegation to collect the gift to three: Titus, plus the two unnamed brothers. What is the point of sending a group? Why not just Titus alone?

What have you learned about giving from this study of 2 Corinthians 8? In what ways have you been challenged in your own giving habits? Be ready to share with your homegroup how you plan to implement what you have learned.

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*Sermon Notes. . .*

**STUDY NINE**  
**GIVING GENEROUSLY – PART 2**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15**

Most of us tend to have great intentions. “This year I will exercise for thirty minutes everyday!” “I am going to read the entire Bible in the next twelve months.” “I will never fall asleep in one of Steve’s sermons again.” “As a part of my worship I am going to be a consistent and sacrificial giver of my money.” The problem is that we need discipline, motivation and encouragement to translate our intentions into actions. Undoubtedly, the church at Corinth had been enthusiastic about giving to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, their initial eagerness had not resulted in much action. In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul continues his encouragement to generous giving that he began in chapter 8.<sup>1</sup> Paul’s emphasis is on the completing of the task at hand. “We must draw a careful distinction between the Corinthians’ ready desire to give and the actual readiness of having completed the collection.” (Harris, p. 374)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. Make note of any similarities and differences that you see between chapters 8 — 9.

In 9:1-5 Paul reiterates some of the points he has already made in chapter 8.<sup>2</sup> In 9:2 Paul comments again about the Corinthians’ “eagerness” and “enthusiasm” (literally, “zeal” from the Greek word *zelos*). Some time had passed, however, since the Corinthians’ original “enthusiasm” for the giving project which we first learned about in 1 Corinthians

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<sup>1</sup> Some commentators feel that chapters 8 — 9 are separate letters that were put together at a later date. Ralph Martin, along with others, suggest that chapter 9 is a circular letter that was sent to churches in Achaia. (Martin, p. 281) Other commentators see chapter 9 as a note that was sent as a follow up to firm up the details of the collection. Several other potential scenarios are proposed by a host of commentators. But as Linda Belleville points out, “The idea of a separate letter, while attractive in theory, actually introduces as many problems as it solves.” (Belleville, p. 232)

<sup>2</sup> In 9:2 Paul uses the term Achaia instead of Corinth. Why? “Achaia was the Roman province that comprised all of southern Greece. The capital of this province was Corinth, which served as the mother church for the congregations in the surrounding area (see Rom. 16:1). To be more inclusive, Paul mentions the province instead of the city.” (Kistemaker, p. 306)

16:1-4. This brings up an important question for Christians who want to consistently honor God with their money. How can we maintain “enthusiasm” for giving in our lives? Do you see anything in chapters 8 or 9 that would help you to be consistent in your enthusiasm for giving?

Evidently, the gift the church promised was a large one. Twice in 9:5 Paul refers to it as “generous.”<sup>1</sup> Paul is again concerned about the attitude of the giver. The gift is **not** to be given “grudgingly” (9:5), “reluctantly” (9:7), or “under compulsion” (9:7). The reason for this is that “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7).<sup>2</sup> The term for “cheerful” in Greek is *hilaros* where we get the English term hilarious. How can the Christian go about giving cheerfully? Does this mean that if we are not cheerful and glad in our giving that we shouldn’t give?

The Bible was written in an agricultural society and is full of illustrations that reflect this setting. In 9:6 Paul is either quoting a popular saying or possibly paraphrasing an Old Testament text (Job 4:8; Proverbs 11:24-26, 22:8-9; Hosea 10:12-13).<sup>3</sup> The point is obvious: our harvest will be in proportion to our planting. How does Paul allude to this metaphor of sowing and reaping in the rest of chapter 9?

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<sup>1</sup> In 9:5 Paul again refers to the “brothers” (see 8:18,22), which are Titus and two unnamed individuals. Why are they being sent in advance of Paul himself? Paul seems to be indicating that the believers in Corinth were not unwilling, but rather unorganized. Hughes points out that the “chief problem at Corinth in connection with the charitable project was that of organization, not unwillingness to give generously.” (Hughes, p. 327)

<sup>2</sup> This phrase comes from Proverbs 22:8a, “God blesses a cheerful man and giver...”

<sup>3</sup> This saying also appears in somewhat abbreviated form in Galatians 6:7 and closely parallels the statement of Jesus in Luke 6:38.

What does 9:7 have to say about how **much** Paul wanted an individual to give toward this gift? Does this help you in your decisions about giving? What does God's grace add to the giver in verse 8?

Some Christian leaders, usually found on television, teach that giving is always rewarded by God and that the giver will be materially blessed. So we hear slogans like, "You can't out give God!" What does verse 11 have to say about God's blessing and giving?

Respond to the following:

The idea that God can and does multiply the generous giver's material resources is not well received today. Experience seems to indicate otherwise. The rich, who often are stingy with their wealth, seem to get richer, and the poor, who frequently are the most liberal givers, appear to get poorer. . . . But Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians that they *will be made rich in every way so that [they] can be generous in every occasion* (v. 11) . . . . Nonetheless, we would do well to observe what Paul does not say. He does not say that wealth or surplus income is a sign of God's blessing. Nor is it giving per se that is applauded. It is, rather, a lifestyle of generosity that Paul commends. For those who give cheerfully and willingly, the promise is that God will provide all that they need to continue doing good. (Belleville, p. 241)

Verse 9:12 gives two reasons for giving. What are they? When you give do you think of these as motivations in your giving?

- 1.
- 2.

Evidently, 9:14 tells us, the believers in Jerusalem were praying for the church in Corinth. These are believers who would never meet face to face in this world. Not only was the physical distance great, the cultural divide was huge! What we have is a predominately Jewish church in Jerusalem praying for a predominately Gentile church in

pagan Corinth who is in the process of collecting money to send as a gift! Both the privilege and obligation to be involved in the larger, multi-national and multi-cultural body of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture. Read the following verses.

- Acts 11:27-30
- Acts 24:17
- Romans 15: 25-28

How should Santa Barbara Community Church relate to the church around the world?

Paul ends these two chapters with a brief doxology of praise. He thanks God for his “indefinable gift”, an obvious reference to Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Why does Paul end this long section on giving with praise to God for the gift of Christ? What is the connection between the great theological truth of salvation in Christ and our own temporal giving of our money?

After two weeks of study on generous giving in 2 Corinthians 8 — 9, what attitudes about giving have changed in your life? How do you plan to implement changes in this area of your discipleship?

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<sup>1</sup> Paul uses this formula “Thanks be to God . . .” often. See Romans 6:17, 7:25, 1 Corinthians 15:57.

*Sermon Notes. . .*

**STUDY TEN**  
**MINDS LED ASTRAY**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 10:1—11:6**

Have you ever been fooled into believing something that you later found out not to be true? Have you ever invested in the “sure thing” only to lose your money? Have you ever followed a leader only to find out that he was a fake? How did you feel? It is fairly easy for any of us, regardless of education and sophistication, to be led astray. In the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians Paul is concerned that his spiritual children are about to be seduced and led astray by false thinking and

unscrupulous teachers.

Beginning in 2 Corinthians 10 the tone of the letter changes dramatically.<sup>1</sup> Paul uses biting sarcasm, impassioned and at times bitter language, and ironies to defend his ministry and lambaste those who are attempting to destroy it. After commending the Corinthian believers in chapter 7—9 Paul now is very tough on them.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1—11:6. (If you have the time it would be helpful to read all of the last four chapters, 10—13.) In our text for this study Paul takes on his opponents and defends his work in Corinth because he is concerned that the believers may be fooled and led astray. As you read you will need to look behind the scene. As was mentioned in the introduction, reading 2 Corinthians is something like coming to a play which is half way through. You quickly get the idea of the plot, but the details seem unclear. Everybody around you, who has been present for the entire play, knows exactly what is going on! What is Paul afraid may happen to the church at Corinth? Why is he so upset?

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<sup>1</sup> The radical shift in subject matter and tone has led some commentators to see 2 Corinthians 10-13 as a separate letter that was added later to chapters 1-9. As we have already seen, this has made some wonder if chapters 10-13 are in fact the “severe letter” referred to in 2:3-4. Others, seeing the letter as a unit, have tried to explain this change in tone and style. Some have suggested that Paul had a bad night’s sleep or that there was a long break in the dictation of the letter (days or weeks)! Others think that chapters 1-9 are addressed to the Corinthian congregation and that chapters 10-13 are directed to the false teachers, “super-apostles”, who appear to have infiltrated parts of the church. Possibly the change in tone can be attributed to a new report from Corinth that Paul receives as he is writing. The various options are numerous and perplexing! Possibly the best explanation is that of Simon Kistemaker who sees 2 Corinthians as a single unit but, “the writing of the letter took place with interruptions that impeded continuity.” (Kistemaker, p. 15)

From the very beginning of our text it is obvious that Paul wants to arrest his reader's attention. The apostle, who rarely uses his own name in the body of his letters, begins with an appeal, "I, Paul . . ." <sup>1</sup> It is important to remember that Paul is not primarily concerned with defending himself personally, but rather he wants to defend his ministry in Corinth and his apostolic authority. Obviously, Paul's detractors had made several accusations and statements against him. While reading 2 Corinthians 10:1—11:6, list as many of the accusations made against Paul that you can find. What were his opponents saying about him?

Paul sees the situation in Corinth as nothing less than spiritual warfare (10:3-6). <sup>2</sup> Paul is not "other-worldly," he knows that we live in "the world" (10:2). He is concerned, however, because our battle is spiritual and therefore it requires spiritual weapons. Linda Belleville points out that, "What distinguishes his weapons from those of the world can be summed up in one word— *power (dynato)*. The weapons that Paul fights with have *divine power* and, as a result, can accomplish what the world's weapons cannot (*demolish strongholds*, v.4)." (Belleville, p. 254) What does it mean to fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons? How do you fight the spiritual battles in your life? Be prepared to give an illustration to your homegroup.

Paul uses "divine power" to "demolish strongholds" and "demolish arguments" that are against God (10:4-5). What is he talking about?

These strongholds appear in many forms but are essentially the same; they are the systems, schemes, structures, and strategies that Satan designs to frustrate and obstruct the progress of Christ's gospel. (Kistemaker, p. 335)

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<sup>1</sup> Paul only does this in 5 other places in his letters. Gal. 5:2; Eph. 3:1; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:18; Philemon 9. (Belleville, p.247)

<sup>2</sup> Paul will often use military language in describing the Christian life. See Rom. 13:12-13; 1 Cor. 9:7; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3-4.

Let us translate this lofty theological language into practical examples. How do **you** use God's power to demolish the arguments and strongholds of Satan that affect **your** life?

So much of spiritual warfare takes place in our minds. In verse 5 Paul states one of the great principles for living the Christian life. The believer is to "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ." To live in this crazy world is to be exposed to thinking that is against God and his will for our lives. At times this exposure happens because of poor choices we make (movies, books, music, television, internet, etc.). At other times we simply find ourselves exposed to anti-God thinking because we live in an anti-God society. How do you "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ?" What sort of mental filtering system have you put in place that enables you to think Christianly?

How does Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this verse help?

*"We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structures of life shaped by Christ." (Peterson, p. 381)*

Paul is the spiritual father of the church at Corinth. As he defends his ministry, his opponents have obviously sunk in their tactics and attacked him personally. This must have hurt Paul deeply. In 10:10 they go so far as to make fun of his speaking ability and his looks!<sup>1</sup> Paul doesn't deny the charge of being a second rate speaker. In fact, elsewhere he admits that his speaking is less than perfect (1 Cor. 2:1; 2 Cor. 11:6). How does Paul respond to these accusations? What can we learn about church life from this interchange?

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<sup>1</sup> One second century apocryphal account describes Paul as "A man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of the body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness." (Barnett, p. 477)

In 10:12-18 Paul mentions “boasting” six times. Why does Paul “boast?” How is his boasting an answer to his critics? Is this “boasting” the same as “bragging?”

In the first part of chapter 11 (11:1-6) Paul begins to sharpen the attack on his opponents.

The moment has come for Paul to confront his opponents. He has made it known that he detests the manner in which they commend themselves. To convey his message, he continues to mock them (see 10:12-13) and applies increasingly pointed sarcasm. He portrays his opponents as superapostles (v. 5;12:11) who masquerade as apostles of Christ (v.13). These men are rivals intent on undermining Paul’s calling and mission. (Kistemaker, p. 357)

In 11:4 we find Paul is concerned the believers in Corinth will have their minds “led astray” in three areas.<sup>1</sup> What are they?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Do you think that you are a Christian that could be easily led astray by incorrect teaching? Are you like the Corinthians who apparently, “put up with it easily enough?” Why? Why not?

In 11:2 Paul says he is jealous for the Corinthians with a “godly jealousy.” Murray Harris points out that, “Human jealousy is a vice, but to share divine jealousy is a virtue.” (Harris, p. 385) What is the difference between human and “godly jealousy” ?

In 11:2-4 Paul uses an illustration that would be very familiar to first century ears but is quite foreign to the twenty-first century reader. Paul, speaking as the spiritual father of

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<sup>1</sup> The NIV translates the verb *phtheiro* as “led astray.” This is probably not a strong enough translation. More literally it reads “to destroy,” “to seduce,” or “to ruin.” The idea is more of an influence that corrupts to the extent that it leads to intellectual and spiritual ruin. (Martin, p. 333)

the church at Corinth, likens himself to a father who has found a husband to marry his daughter. He is responsible for the spiritual purity of the church in the same way that a father would be responsible for the physical purity of his daughter.

In the oriental culture of the day, an engagement was equivalent to marriage without consummation. The betrothal period lasted for one year, during which bride and bridegroom prepared for the wedding ceremony. From the day of her betrothal, the woman legally was the wife of her future husband but she remained a virgin until the wedding day. In addition, the engagement might not be broken. If this happened, it was considered a divorce. Only death might end an engagement. Unfaithfulness of either party was regarded as adultery and had to be disciplined accordingly. The bride had to remain a virgin to be presented to her husband. So Paul exerts himself to keep the church pure from doctrine contrary to the gospel as he strives to present her to Christ. (Kistemaker, p. 359)

How does this first century background help you understand Paul's parental concern for the church at Corinth?

This illustration of Paul's brings up the interesting subject of spiritual parenting. In what sense does any local church need spiritual fathers and mothers? How do the pastor / elders, and homegroup leaders at SBCC function as spiritual parents? Who has been your spiritual father or mother in your Christian life? Are you parenting others in our body?

What has this study taught you about the danger of being "led astray"? What practical things will you do differently to prepare yourself to remain faithful to Christ?

**STUDY ELEVEN**  
**PAUL THE APOSTLE**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 11:7—12:13**

When people are backed into a corner or feel that someone they love is threatened, they will usually go to extreme measures to protect themselves or their loved ones. This is especially true of parents and children. You don't want to come between a grizzly bear and her cub, a mother and her child, or an apostle and his church. As you read 2 Corinthians 11:7—12:13, remember that Paul is the spiritual father of the believers in Corinth. He is zealously protective of their faith. Paul is unrelenting in his attack on those who would seek to subvert or compromise their allegiance to Christ. It is obvious that the intruders in Corinth, who Paul has already cynically referred to as "super-apostles" (11:5), have spread gossip and innuendo about Paul in an effort to discredit his ministry. Paul is now forced to protect himself in order to protect his church.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:7—12:13. As you read write down some preliminary thoughts. How does Paul characterize these false apostles that are influencing the church? How does he defend himself from their accusations?<sup>1</sup>

In 11:7-12, Paul defends his financial independence from the church at Corinth. The implications are that Paul's teaching was not worthy because it was offered free of charge!

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<sup>1</sup> One of the problems in studying 2 Corinthians is that we really don't know exactly who these false apostles were or precisely what they were teaching. "Speculation on the identity of Paul's Corinthian opponents is endless. The more popular suggestions include (1) Judaizing Jerusalemite Jews who, backed by the prestige of the mother church, constituted a rival apostolate to Paul's, (2) Hellenistic Jews who were preaching another gospel and another Jesus based on syncretistic Gnostic principles, (3) Hellenistic Jews who patterned themselves after the Greco-Roman charismatic, miracle working ecstatic and (4) ethnic and religious Jews who masqueraded as Christian leaders in an attempt to impede the gospel." (Belleville, p. 272) The first option, that these false apostles were Judaizing Jews, is the most widely held, and probably the best view.

To be sure, from their viewpoint Paul had painfully breached social conventions in rejecting their patronage of money, gifts, and hospitality, which were at the time conventionally given to those who taught and lectured. (Barnett, p. 513)

Simon Kistemaker explains Paul's policy of financial support.

He refused to accept remuneration when he was working in a local church as a teacher of Christ's gospel (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 12:14). But when he was away from a certain church, he gratefully accepted support, which he considered a fragrant offering to God. We read that the Philippians, for example, repeatedly sent him monetary gifts (Phil. 4:15-18). (Kistemaker, p. 369)

In 11:7-12, what reasons does Paul give for not accepting financial support from Corinth? Does his reasoning make sense to you? How can money sometimes get in the way of spiritual leadership?

Paul uses unusually harsh language in 11:13-15 to describe his rivals. He even goes so far as to say that they are servants of Satan! This is the only place in the Bible where Satan is described as masquerading as an "angel of light" (11:14). Since Satan masquerades and deceives (see John 8:44), Paul points out that his followers do the same by masquerading as "servants of righteousness" (11:15).

Paul's statement is sobering. Church leaders can seem genuine in appearance and profession and yet actually be Satan's minions. How one sees through the outward guise to the inner truth is not stated. But it is clear to Paul that the Corinthian intruders have disguised themselves in this fashion. The charge is a serious one. If the Corinthian intruders really are Satan's servants, then they are not merely Paul's opponents but also enemies of Christ. (Belleville, p. 283)

How can a church protect itself from this sort of enemy infiltration? How is Santa Barbara Community Church susceptible to this type of danger?

The New Testament is full of warnings concerning false teachers who attempt to infiltrate the church. Read the Scriptures below. Do they give you any further feeling for what Paul may be facing in Corinth?

- Galatians 1:8-9
- 2 Peter 2:1-3
- Jude 4
- 1 John 2:18-19

In 11:20 we find five terms that sum up how these false apostles were taking advantage of the Corinthian congregation. What are they?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Beginning in 11:16 Paul begins to “boast.” It is obvious that he feels like a “fool” for doing this. In 11:16—12:13 how many times does Paul use the word “boast?”

This entire section drips with sarcasm and irony. “Having begged their indulgence, he now points out that bearing with his senseless boasting should pose no problem for them, since they are used to putting up with fools.” (Belleville, p. 285) Paul’s boasting goes on at some length. The outline below will help you organize the text.<sup>1</sup> Under each heading make a few notes about the content of Paul’s boastings.

- Heritage – 11:22
- Service Record – 11:23-25
- Dangers and Deprivations<sup>2</sup> – 11:26-27
- Pastoral Concerns – 11:28-29

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<sup>1</sup> From Belleville, p. 288-297.

<sup>2</sup> Compare these verses to Philippians 4:12.

- Daring Escapades<sup>1</sup> – 11:30-33
- Ecstatic Experiences<sup>2</sup> – 12:1-6
- Paul’s “Thorn”<sup>3</sup> – 12:7-10

The apostle Paul lived an amazing life, filled with both numerous hardships and the joy of knowing Christ. How is Paul’s boasting a sufficient answer to his critics in Corinth?

What can we learn from the example of Paul’s life? How does it cause you to re-examine your spiritual journey?

Our study ends with Paul making a last appeal that he is a true apostle (12:11-13). The Corinthians saw evidence of this apostleship in “signs, wonders, and miracles” done in their midst (12:12).<sup>4</sup> Do the verses we have looked at in this study, 2 Corinthians 11:7-12:13, give you any additional insight into the apostle Paul? Do they give you the sense that church life is fragile?

What principles from this text can you apply to your life this week?

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<sup>1</sup> This is an episode that Luke also recounts in Acts 9:1-22, taking place about three years after Paul’s experience with Christ on the road to Damascus.

<sup>2</sup> Paul had several experiences of super-natural revelations or visions. See Acts 9:12, 16: 9-10, 18:9-10, 22:17-21; Gal. 2:2. The experience described in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 has led to a great deal of speculation. We would do well to heed the words of William Barclay, “We cannot even guess what happened to Paul. We need not form theories about the number of heavens because of the fact that he speaks of the third heaven.” (Barclay, p. 256)

<sup>3</sup> Preachers and Bible teachers love to speculate as to the nature of Paul’s “thorn.” Suggestions include: depression, poor eyesight, epilepsy, enemies, and malaria. We need to remember, however, “The problem of Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ is another one of those questions which, on the evidence available, must remain unanswered.” (Hughes, p. 442)

<sup>4</sup> The miraculous was a regular part of Paul’s ministry. In the book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that miracles were performed in all the cities that Paul visited.



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*Sermon Notes. . .*

**STUDY TWELVE**  
**GET READY FOR A VISIT!**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 12:14—13:14**

When your relatives from Indiana come for a visit, you find yourself getting your house in order. You change the sheets on the bed in the guest bedroom, fill the refrigerator so you won't have to run to the market, clean the house, and then make a few plans of things you can do and sights to be seen with your guests. Paul ends 2 Corinthians with a plea for the church to get ready for his imminent visit. As Paul points out twice (12:14, 13:1), this will be his third visit. His first visit lasted eighteen months and resulted in

the establishment of the church (Acts 18:1-18). His second visit was a painful experience for Paul, and one that he does not want to repeat (2:1). Paul concludes with warnings and instructions in preparation for his arrival.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14—13:14. As you read take a few notes as to what is clear and what is confusing.

In 12:14-18, Paul makes it clear that as he comes he will not alter his policy of financial payment that he has already discussed (11:7-10). The apostle uses an illustration, of a child and parent, as a way to say that he is their spiritual father and that they are his children.<sup>1</sup> He is resolute in his desire to not be a burden to his children. It appears, however, that there is something more to Paul's policy. Read 12:16-18 and attempt to look behind the scenes. What is going on in Corinth?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul often refers to those under his spiritual care as his children and to himself as their father. See 1 Cor. 4:14-15; 2 Cor. 6:13; 1 Thess. 2:11.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek term *panourgos*, which is translated as "crafty fellow" in 12:16, carries with it the idea of a person who is ready to do anything to achieve his purposes. In the same verse the word *dolos*, which appears in our Bibles as "trickery", refers to bait used to catch a fish. (Belleville, p. 319)

It seems that gossip and slander lay behind Paul's comments.

The saying that Paul cannot be trusted has been circulating openly in Corinth. The background is that Paul, who refused to accept money for his services, has sent Titus to them with a request for a collection. The slanderers spread the rumor that under the guise of helping the poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem, Paul and Titus are working to fill their own pockets. These doubters suspect that the money will not go to the poor but will remain with the apostle. (Kistemaker, p. 431)

How did Paul answer these rumors and gossip in 12:16-18?<sup>1</sup>

Gossip, rumor and innuendo can be deadly to a local church. It was obviously a part of the problem in the church at Corinth. In our study of 2 Corinthians, what have you learned about how this destructive sin can be avoided? What do you see in our text here in study twelve that would help Santa Barbara Community Church avoid this sort of problem?

In preparation for his visit, Paul once again gets very tough with his spiritual children. In 12:19-21 he threatens church discipline, if there is not repentance. Undoubtedly he hopes that sin will be dealt with before he arrives. In 12:20 we find a list of eight vices. What are they? Think practically. How would these attitudes create havoc in a local church? Do you need to repent of any of these attitudes?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Paul goes on to say that he will be "grieved" if those who have sinned in "impurity," "sexual sin," and "debauchery" have not repented (12:22). Paul is tough. He doesn't look the other way when there is sin in the church. As a good father he is not afraid to correct and rebuke his unruly spiritual children. How do you find yourself gravitating

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<sup>1</sup> "Who this brother [12:18] was and why he is mentioned at this point is something of a mystery. This is the second time in the letter that Paul has refrained from naming an envoy (8:18-24)." (Belleville, p. 320)

toward the pastor, friend, or homegroup leader who simply flatters you? When do you come alongside the one who corrects and challenges you in your obedience to Christ?

Paul has been very forthcoming about the fears he has for his impending visit. It is on the basis of these fears that he issues two warnings in 13:1-2.

**Warning #1** – Every matter must be established by the testimony of “two or three witnesses.”<sup>1</sup>

**Warning #2** – Discipline will not be spared for the unrepentant.

What is the relationship between these two warnings?

How do you see these warnings being implemented at Santa Barbara Community Church?

One of the big issues in 2 Corinthians revolves around spiritual authority. Paul the apostle is very clear in his threat of church discipline. As a spiritual leader, he is not afraid to use his authority. Authority that comes from outside of ourselves is not a popular concept for twenty first century American Christians. In 13:10 how does Paul go about using his spiritual authority?

How do you see yourself responding to spiritual leadership and authority in the context of the local church?

In 13:5 Paul pleads with the Corinthian believers to “examine themselves” and “test” themselves regarding their faith. This is a plea for spiritual self-examination. Paul wants this church that seemed to live in perpetual adolescence to grow up!

Be prepared to share with your homegroup how you go about examining your faith? Do you do this on a regular basis?

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<sup>1</sup> Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 19:15 in 13:1 which required “two or three” witnesses in legal matters. Jesus uses this principle in Matthew 18:15-20 in his discussion of church discipline. Paul also uses this same principle concerning accusations brought against an elder in 1 Timothy 5:19.

Respond to the quote below.

The reality of the church is not seen in the splendor of its buildings, the size of its congregation, the number of its programs, the amount of its budget or the sophistication of its liturgy. It is seen in changed lives—and if there are no changed lives, there is no church. Paul, in rather blunt language, reminds the Corinthians of this truth in the final section of his letter. (Belleville, p. 322)

What does Paul pray for the Corinthian church in 13:9? This theme of “perfection” is addressed again in 13:11. What is the goal of the Christian life? Do you find yourself striving for this goal or settling for something less?

Paul ends with an exhortation to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (13:12). This was a common practice in the culture of the day<sup>1</sup>. This kiss, however, was to be “holy.” What was the significance of the “kiss” for church life and fellowship? What might be the equivalent today at Santa Barbara Community Church?

2 Corinthians concludes with an unusual benediction for Paul. Murray Harris points out that, “Paul grounds his pastoral appeal for unity of spirit and for the rejection of discord in the theological doctrine of the Trinity.” (Harris, p. 405) How does a proper understanding of Jesus, God the Father, and the Spirit help in creating warm and harmonious church life?

Think back over these last thirteen weeks of our study in 2 Corinthians. Thumb through this study guide. At times this has been a very challenging and personal letter, interspersed with some tremendous theological gems. What were some of the highlights in this study for you? What will change in your life as a result of having studied this book? What will be one or two things that you think you will remember about 2 Corinthians a year from now?

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the “holy kiss”, see also Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14.



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*Sermon Notes. . .*