

Week of July 30 – August 5

Paul's Hardships (2 Corinthians 6:1-13)

In Chapter 6, Paul explains that if you aspire to follow Christ and be involved in the work of the Gospel, you should expect hardships, troubles, and trials. It isn't about being comfortable, but serving God's will. Jesus said in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus adds in Matthew that life with Him would involve self-denial rather than self-fulfillment. We are to give up everything for His sake.

Paul gave the Corinthian believers examples of how he and his companions lived and what they had experienced. He said they had endured suffering and hardship and trouble of every kind. They had been beaten, put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, stayed awake through sleepless nights of watching, and gone without food. They had proved themselves to be what they claimed by their wholesome lives and by their understanding of the Gospel and by their patience. They had been kind and loving and filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been truthful, with God's power helping them in all they did. All of the godly man's weapons of defense and weapons of attack had been theirs.

Paul added they had been faithful to the Lord whether others honored them or despised them, whether they were criticized or commended. He said they were honest, but some called them liars. He explained that the world ignored them, but they were known to God; They lived close to death, but are still very much alive. They had been injured but kept from death. Paul and his companions' hearts ached, but at the same time, they had the joy of the Lord. They were poor but gave rich spiritual gifts to others. They owned nothing, and yet enjoyed everything.

He worked hard to avoid giving any opportunity for others to use some aspect of his life as an excuse for refusing the Gospel.

Do Not Be Yoked with Unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Next, Paul warned them not to team with those who don't love the Lord, for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness? How can there be any harmony between Christ and the devil? How can a Christian live with a partner who doesn't believe? And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? You are God's temple, the home of the living God, and God said of you, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." That's why the Lord said, "Leave them; separate yourselves from them; don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you and be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters."

Paul's Joy (2 Corinthians 7:1-16)

As if Paul hasn't already made himself clear, he said, "Since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, making holiness perfect in fear of God." Paul is bluntly telling them to stop sinning and be righteous and perfect.

No man can be a Christian who voluntarily indulges in sin and enjoys it. He has no real desire to be perfect.

He continued to talk about three main topics, urging believers to avoid sin, to avoid sinners who refuse to repent (whether they claim to be believers or not), and he defended himself and his companions against those who claimed he was wrong, saying, "Make room in your hearts for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one."

Paul said he wasn't trying to condemn them, and instead, often boasted of them.

Paul mentioned that while he was in Macedonia, they experienced fear from persecutions, but God, who applauds those who are discouraged, refreshed us by the arrival of Titus. Not only was his presence a joy, but also the news he brought of the wonderful time he had with you. "When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit, and how sorry you were about what had happened, and about your loyalty and warm love for me, well, I overflowed with joy!"

Essentially, Paul told the believers in Corinth that he thought highly of them and that their faith had been a source of comfort when he was experiencing hardship.

Paul explained why his tone is more gentle in this second letter than in his first, saying, "Now I'm glad I sent it, not because it hurt you but because the pain turned you to God. It was a good kind of sorrow you felt, the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have so that I need not come to you with harshness. God sometimes uses sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek eternal life. We should never regret his sending it. But the sorrow of the man who is not a Christian is not the sorrow of true repentance and does not prevent eternal death."

He said he was glad he spoke of their sinful behavior because it led to repentance, *which is necessary for salvation*. "Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you weren't harmed in any way by us. Godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death."

The Giving of the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8:1-24)

Paul then moved to a new subject, which he discussed in 1 Corinthians 16, about a collection of donations for the Christians in Jerusalem.

He spoke of the churches in Macedonia and how they were extremely generous despite their financial hardship. Paul urged the believers in Corinth to be as generous. He told them he wasn't commanding them to be generous, but that he's "testing the genuineness of their love against the earnestness of others."

Paul gave the example of Jesus being poor, "who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross."

Paul told them that it is appropriate for them to want to help the believers in Jerusalem. He explained he didn't want them to be financially pressured while others received financial relief.

Still, instead, he said it's a "question of a fair balance," meaning they currently have a financial abundance compared to those in Jerusalem.

He then mentioned that Titus and another believer (who was well-known) were being sent to them. Likely, these two people were the ones who delivered this second letter.

The Offering for the Christians (2 Corinthians 9:1-15)

Paul continued to speak of this gift offering to the Christians in Jerusalem, saying that he wrote so they would be prepared with the gift when he arrived with believers from Macedonia.

He encouraged them to be ready with their voluntary donation, comparing it to planting seeds. "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

He told them to give cheerfully and generously, stating, "Yes, God will provide you with much so that you can give away much, and when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for your help. So, two good things happen as a result of your gifts - those in need are helped, and they are thankful to God. Those you help will be glad not only because of your gifts, but they will praise God for this proof that your deeds are as good as your doctrine. And they will pray for you with deep fervor and feeling because of the wonderful grace of God shown through you."

What would have to change to make you more generous? How far would you have to go to find Christians in need? If a believer is more materially blessed, it isn't because he is more spiritual, deserving, better, smarter, more intelligent, or lucky. It's because God, for His reasons, causes undeserved material favor to abound to some. But they must remember the responsibility that goes with abundance: God gives them more so they can respond more readily and abundantly to the needs of others. God gives to us so we can provide for others.

Paul Defends His Ministry (2 Corinthians 10:1-18)

Paul then spoke about himself, saying he was bold in his writing, but humble when he was with them in person. He warned them that when he arrived, he didn't want to have to be bold to any opposition; however, he said he would if necessary.

Paul said they wage war to destroy false arguments and arrogance. Satan's strongholds are ignorance, prejudices, lusts, vain imaginations, carnal reasoning, high thoughts, and proud conceit. We war against sin, idolatry, sensuality, corruption, profaneness, the powers of darkness, and evil spirits seeking to destroy us.

Paul also spoke of his authority, meaning Jesus Christ gave it to him to instruct them in the truth. He mentioned what his opponents said, "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'"

He then talked again of his authority over the church in Corinth, saying he wasn't trying to take credit for the work that others did in the church. Instead, he hoped that his influence would reach beyond the church through them as they matured.

Paul then explained that everyone is a new creation, still speaking of the fact that believers will be resurrected with an imperishable body.

He said he and his companions' role was to be "ambassadors for Christ," and urged the Corinthians to "be reconciled to God."

It is important to mention that Paul was making the case to the believers that he was a messenger of God's true message of salvation and that he was urging these "believers" to be reconciled to God.