

2 Corinthians – Section 1

A Study in 2 Corinthians 11weeks

- 01 - Peace From God and Jesus 1:1-2
- 02 - Comfort 1:3-6
- 03 - Error 1:7-11
- 04 - Conscience 1:12-18
- 05 - Delays 1:19-24
- 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done 2:1-4
- 07 – Discipline 2:5-8
- 08 - Acknowledging Maturity 2:9-11
- 09 - Aroma Of God 2:12-17
- 10 - Living Letter 3:1-4
- 11 - New Covenant or Law 3:5-11



This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

2 Corinthians - 01 - Peace From God and Jesus

Many Bible scholars tend to say 2 Corinthians was written in "haste"- and a hasty second letter seems to be in order.

Consider a parent who has had to punish their child for completely unacceptable behavior - and then - they not only hear they child say "I am sorry" - but they see the child getting rid of things they should not have - they see the child putting things in the proper order - and the child appears to be doing all that they know how - to do the things that they know - they should be doing. The parent then goes to the child – hugs them, speaks encouraging words to them - maybe tells the child how proud they are of them - and in short – the parent re-assures the child of how much they are loved.

This is a fairly good analogy of why this Second letter was written so quickly. Now – just a short re-visiting of the situation in Corinth that started the letter writing. Some false teachers had worked their way into the Corinthian church. The false teachers were not only mixing their false teachings into the gospel but they were saying things to dis-credit Paul even suggesting Paul is not a legitimate apostle.

Paul had written an earlier letter to the Corinthians – that previous letter dealt with several of these issues and false teachers. Things like: dividing the fellowship into rival groups - a case of incest within the church - taking petty squabbles into the civil courts - disorder in and during the Lords Supper - the lack of Love in some of the relationships - and other such issues.

These were serious issues - the kind that lead to weighty consequences. They were not small things - that could simply be ignored - with the hope that they would go away. There is no apology for the strong language - or for the forceful rebuke of the previous letter.

However, Reports come back to Paul - that the Corinthian Believers had been making some changes. They had put the incestuous man out of the local church - they were making efforts to restore broken relationships - and to find ways to put love into the relationships - that had been more business like than Christ-like. And there were other indications that the Corinthian church was taking the chastisement seriously - and responding positively to it.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1 and make notes:

First, let's look at what this verse says about the Corinthian Believers - and then what the verse says about Paul. The Corinthians are called "the Church of God in Corinth." The believers in Corinth are recognized as "a church" - and this letter is not only to the "church in Corinth" - it is too all the “saints throughout Achaia.” This is a clear recognition – that the Believers in Corinth are as much a part of "The Church" - as are any of the "Called Out and Sanctified" people anywhere.

2 Corinthians - 01 - Peace From God and Jesus

This also implies that if you are in Corinth - and you are living an impure lifestyle - then you are "NOT" included. For it is to the "saints" - but for all those in Corinth that ARE trying to mend their ways - for all those who are trying to live a life that pleases God - then they are part of something significant – The Church.

Word has come - that the Corinthians have heeded the instructions of the first letter.

In the earlier letter, it was necessary to refute the charge - that Paul was not really an apostle. The false teachers were trying to lure the Corinthian Believers away from the teachings of Paul.

This letter opens with a confident declaration that Paul Is An Apostle – and not just an apostle – but an apostle of the Lord! A very important little statement is made here. Paul is not An Apostle of the Lord – as the result of an election held among the church members - nor as a result of board decision by church leaders - But Paul is an Apostle of the Lord – "By The Will Of God'!

If Paul is doing the ministry that he is doing – because it is God's Will - then Paul has fallen into a category where we find Jesus. Read John 8:29.

By always doing what pleases the Heavenly Father - Jesus is in the category of doing what is God's Will. This little statement by Paul - in the opening of this letter to the Corinthians - is a rather daring statement - when we consider the implications in this light. Paul is doing God's Will - Just as Jesus did !

Read 2 Corinthians 1:2 and make notes:

In a similar manner to verse 1 - let's work from the bottom of this verse upward. "The Lord Jesus Christ" - This is an interesting choice of words. The word we have translated "Lord" - in the original text is the Greek word "*kyrios*." This is the word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the name of God "*Yahweh*."

There were other Greek words that could be translated "lord" - words that would mean "master" or "the one in charge." But the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use the word "*kyrios*" - which is the "name above every name." There can be no doubt Paul understood Jesus to be the same as God - or at least that is what the Holy Spirit is conveying through the use of this particular word.

2 Corinthians - 01 - Peace From God and Jesus

This may not sound like an important point to you or me today – because we're thinking, "ah, I know that." The Corinthians were surrounded by people who were worshiping many gods and many lords. And these people were forcefully confronting the Christians at Corinth. This little verse – overlooked by so many – gave the Corinthians a major point to use in counter-acting some false teachings. "We serve and worship Lord Jesus" - "the one who's name is above the name of every other lord."

"Peace to you" - When we talk about "peace" that comes from God – this is no ordinary "peace." Jesus himself said in John 14:27, the "peace" He gives is not like the peace the world gives.

Paul is saying that he wishes for the Corinthians - not just any peace – and certainly not "just worldly peace"- but to have the "peace" that comes from God. I am wanting for you - to receive the Very Best - in fact – I want for you the Ultimate Peace - the Peace that EXCEEDS all other peace.

"From God AND Jesus" - The works that the Father does - that's the work that the Son also does. The gifts that the Father gives - that's the gifts that the Son also gives. This is perhaps the most worrisome aspect of the "Jesus Only" teachers - in the days of the Early Church AND today.

When we go to separating the Son from the Father - to the point that we will recognize something as being from the Father in Heaven - and yet declare that it IS NOT from Jesus the Son - then we are dishonoring Jesus the Son. We are – in fact - dishonoring God!

When we go to separating the Son from the Father - to the point that we will recognize a ministry – such as baptism – as being in Jesus the Son - and yet declare that it IS NOT in the name of the Father - then we are dishonoring the Father. We most assuredly - are dishonoring God!

When we come to realize that God the Father - and God the Son - are one and the same - we would not dare try to exclude either one from our worship – from our praise – or from our ministry. And hopefully – we understand that the ministry does not belong to us. When we say "our ministry" - we are referring to the ministry that has been assigned to us!

God and Jesus are one and the same - "Grace and Peace to you" - that grace and peace that is from both God - and also from Jesus Christ.

This is important, please don't miss this:

It is not that Grace is from one - and Peace is from the other. It is not that there is One Grace from God the Father - and another Grace from Jesus Christ. The gift of Grace – and also the gift of Peace - are from the One True God - who is both the Father and the Son - wrapped up in the mystery of the Trinity.

2 Corinthians - 01 - Peace From God and Jesus

From the few words that are in these first 2 verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 1:

What does our Christian walk look like to those who observe us?

What does our Christian daily activity and conversation look and sound like?

Do we see ourselves as part of the "Church" that is God's Church?

When we speak to other Believers who have accepted Jesus as their Savior -
do we speak to them as though they are part of the "Church"?

Do we make an effort to do what pleases God?

Do we pretty much do what we do because it is what pleases us?

Are we doing "Our Will" or "God's Will"

Is it the "Will of our Church" – the "Will of our Group" - or is it "God's Will"?

Do we sincerely want other Believers to have the "peace" that comes from God?
Or do we only want that kind of peace for ourselves?

Are we guilty of separating the Son from the Father?

Do we dishonor God by saying that either Jesus or The Heavenly Father
is in some way excluded from any part of our Worship or from our Ministry?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

Most of us have experienced pain or suffering. Most of us have at some point in time been in need of "comfort." Sometimes we suffer because of our own bad choices - sometimes we suffer because of the choices of another person.

The most simple truth is - many people all around the world - either spend a great deal of time seeking relief - or they have simply given up - and have resigned themselves to live out their life without any hope of ever finding comfort. When we are suffering - there is very little we desire more than relief from our pain - or at least some comfort.

The message in this lesson is especially important to those who are currently in need of comfort. But this message is for all of us because we will all at some point in time - be in need of comfort from affliction - or from pain and suffering of some kind.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3 and make notes:

The word "comfort" appears 10 times in verses 3 thru 7. Sometimes as a noun and sometimes as a verb. "God of all comfort"- God is the divine fountain from which all comfort originates. There are many different kinds of comfort - and these different kinds of comfort come through different people and different things. But the originator of "all comfort" is God! God is not only "our Father"- God is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Why is this such an important statement? If God were only "God the Creator" - and not the "Father of our Lord Jesus" - then there would be many reasons for us to be concerned about our salvation.

We know from other Scriptures in the New Testament - that we are "united with Christ" when we are saved. We become "brothers and sisters to Jesus" - through our salvation experience. If God were only "the God" of Jesus - and not the Father of Jesus - it could be argued that just because God is the God of Jesus - does not mean that God is our God.

When we consider the overall un-faithfulness of human beings - a very good argument can be made that perhaps God is the God of Jesus - but we are not really righteous enough to be acceptable to God. However - since God is ALSO the Father of Our Lord Jesus - and we are adopted into His Family - then God – the Father of our Lord Jesus - becomes Our Father also when we are Saved - by adoption – but children of God for sure!

Jesus is the avenue of our adoption. Jesus is the means of our adoption. It is not a matter of us being worthy – for we are not! When we accept Jesus as our Savior - then we are acceptable to God - Through Christ Jesus !

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

John 14:6 tells us that "no one can come to the Father except through Jesus." We are not children of God by means of Creation. We are not children of God by heredity. We are children of God by Election! It is a choice that God has made.

Let us keep in mind - God did not – and does not - have to choose us. But He does choose us! When we accept Jesus - God accepts us! "Praise to the God And Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" - who is not only the Father of Jesus - but is also the Father of Compassion - and He is the God of all comfort!

This was probably very consoling to the Corinthians. In the previous letter they were thoroughly rebuked and chastised. Here are these people who are grieving from discovering how much they have displeased God - and now they are told that this Same God - is ALSO the God of Compassion - and the Father of All Comfort.

Think for a moment what kinds of things might be going through the minds and imaginations of the people - who have been told they are wrong before God - and their concept of God - is that of a God who chastises - a God who brings about retribution and punishment for wrong doing.

What a relief – What a Comfort! To hear that God is the God of Compassion - when He sees people mending their ways!

We can almost hear the Corinthians going "WHEW!" And the people after having it pointed out to them that they are missing the mark - when it comes to pleasing God - they are expecting to have the boom lowered. They know they deserve to have it lowered on them - they are waiting with worry and anxiety. Then they hear – "and oh by the way" - "God is the Father of Comfort!" We can hear the second round of "WHEW!"

Read 2 Corinthians 1:4 and make notes:

God does not sporadically comfort us. God is not intermittent in comforting. God is not "hit or miss" – so that we are left wondering - is this is one of those times when He won't comfort us. God is the one who sends all comfort - and God is the one who comforts in all afflictions - and God is the one who always comforts!

Here is a very important thing for us to grasp concerning God's Comfort. God does not intend for the comfort He gives us – to terminate with us. The Buck may stop here – but the Comfort Must Not Stop Here! God expects us to pass along to others - the comfort we receive from Him and this is a good place for us to remind ourselves - we certainly may have reached out with comfort - and eased another person's suffering - but it was NOT OUR comfort - we only passed along what God has given to us! All comfort comes from God!

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

The person who continually receives comfort from God - is particularly equipped to offer comfort to others. And this principle is something that is true - in many areas of a Christian's life. We receive From God – so That we can Give To Others.

"Comfort those in any trouble" - There are at least two kinds of Comfort – one is the comfort that comes to those who are being afflicted unjustly - maybe the only reason they are being afflicted is because of their faithfulness to Christ - the other comfort is that which comes to those who are being afflicted as a result of their own sins.

God – comforts us in "all of our troubles" - and we receive this comfort from God – "So That" - we can comfort others who are afflicted - with the comfort we ourselves have received and have enjoyed. Whether unjustly – or whether deservedly afflicted - we can share with those who are being afflicted - that the God we serve – the God we worship - is the God of all Comfort in all of our troubles.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:5 and make notes:

"The sufferings of Christ flows over into our lives" - Sometimes – Believers find themselves suffering for no apparent reason – other than the fact that they profess to be a Christian - or that they are trying to live a Christian life. When this happens - the hurt, the frustration, and the confusion - can run really deep.

This verse brings us assurance that while "the sufferings of Christ" may be overflowing into our lives- rest assured - "also it is through Christ that our comfort overflows."

It is not an unreasonable interpretation of this text that our comfort will be at least to the same proportion of our suffering for the cause of Christ - whatever our level of suffering for the cause of Christ - our comfort will be at least to that same proportion.

For the Christian - Suffering never outweighs Comfort . For the Christian – Comfort is never "just enough" – there is always an "overflowing" amount of comfort. Sufferings that are the result of selfishness or the result of disobedience - have no blessing associated with it. These sufferings have no expectation of receiving comfort. However, when we repent of the actions and attitudes that led to these sufferings - then our repentance has every reason to expect to receive comfort.

It is the sufferings for the cause of Christ - that automatically receive comfort. Self inflicted suffering requires repentance!

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

Read 2 Corinthians 1:6 and make notes:

In the earlier letter to the Corinthians - they were told when one member of the body suffers - all members of the body suffer with it. Therein lies part of the evidence that the Corinthians were not in a right relationship with God. Because they were not in a right relationship with each other - some of those in the Corinthian church were watching others suffer - and they felt no sympathy for them.

Their lack of spiritual sensitivity - revealed their lack of right relationship with God. Just as it does in people today - and it also prevented them from appreciating the afflictions - that Paul – or any other apostle endured for their sake.

When a person does not have a personal relationship with Jesus - they will never be moved by the sacrifices others make for them - or the sufferings that others endure for them. We have seen it in our society - when lost children fail to be moved by the sacrifices and sufferings of their parents. We have seen it in our society - when lost people fail to be moved by the sacrifices others make - in order for them to have a second chance – or a 3rd or a 4th.

Some of the Believers in Corinth were suffering persecution from the un-believers. This verse encourages them to "hold on and don't give up." Christ will not desert us – if we are careful not to desert the faith. When the believers witnessed – or heard about – the apostles suffering because of the witness - some of the Believers were tempted to use this as an excuse - or at least were tempted – to abandon the Christian faith. After all – when we are told - "if you do this – I am going to hurt you"- our flesh will instinctively think about "not doing this." When we see others experiencing real physical pain – or real financial pain – or real societal pain - for their Christian life - then others – perhaps especially New Believers – will be tempted to turn and walk away from the Christian walk. Nobody in their right mind – wants to be hurt!

Here is a word to help resist the temptation to walk away from the faith. When we apostles have suffered as a result of our teaching and ministry of the gospel - we have suffered for your benefit. We have willingly suffered so that you can receive comfort - and when you receive comfort – then we are comforted.

While there were those who tried to claim Paul wasn't a genuine apostle - others held him in high esteem. So much so - that when Paul sent a letter chastising their behavior and actions that they responded with obedience – in much the same way that a child would respond to the parent they love and respect.

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

This letter must have been really encouraging to the Believers at Corinth. These Believers saw themselves as somehow spiritually short of where Paul was - but Paul was in essence telling these Believers at Corinth - they were on the same spiritual plain as he.

For those of us - who have ever felt as though we were not as much a Christian - as others - this is a Comforting Word!

Through repentance – the Corinthians were being born again - and being made brand new. This is much better than receiving a pardon from the deserved punishment. This is receiving Restoration!

Isn't this an interesting approach in reaching out to people who are guilty of wrong doing?

Instead of starting out speaking about suffering - start out by speaking about Comfort. Praising God and Giving Thanks - for the Compassion and the Comfort that comes from God!

If you are being afflicted unfairly – and unjustly - please do not despair. Do not give in - or give up. God Will Comfort you in due time.

If you are suffering as a result of your own bad choices and decisions - please do not despair. Do not give in or give up. As soon as we repent - and begin to mend our ways - God will comfort us from all our troubles.

Some people need to accept Jesus as their Savior - in order to start receiving the comfort they need and so desperately desire.

Some prodigal Sons and Daughters need to return home to their Heavenly Father. He is watching and waiting - ready to comfort and embrace. He so deeply desires to comfort us when we hurt.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 02 - Comfort

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

Paul planned to visit with the Corinthians again – and had told them as much - but his return trip was delayed for quite some time. Some of the trouble makers in Corinth started telling the Believers - Paul wasn't really interested in visiting with them. They pointed to his continuing delay as proof Paul didn't really want to visit there again

In this letter, Paul is not making an excuse - he is telling them the reason for his delay - and using it as another teaching tool - to help encourage the Believers in Corinth – to Not Give Up!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:7 and make notes:

If a Believer is steadfast in their faith - they will suffer – as Jesus suffered. However, those who are steadfast in their faith - will also be comforted.

We find an interesting statement in this verse - "our hope for you is firm." These Believers had matured in their spiritual walk. And Paul affirms them and encourages them by telling them - his hope in them is "firm." In other words - Paul's hope for them was now Un-shakeable.

For Paul to say such a thing is really a big deal: in spite of the fact - they had been unfaithful to the Christian walk; in spite of the fact - they had allowed the church to become so messed up in Corinth; in spite of the fact - there was a list of things they had been doing wrong; in spite of these things - their quick and willing attitude toward repentance - and their quick and ready response in trying to make things right - showed Paul where their heart was.

Just as straight as Paul had been in his chastisement - Paul is straight up with them - that his hope in them is "firm."

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8 and make notes:

This is interesting. Paul didn't seem to care to tell them what exactly the afflictions were - but only to let them know the intensity of the afflictions. Paul told them about his suffering until he almost died. He wanted the Corinthians to know - not only did he suffer harm - but he was willing to do so for their sake.

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

Paul does not want to keep his suffering a secret. Paul isn't ashamed of having suffered - nor is he proud of having suffered. It is simply a matter of letting them know what happened.

We all know what happens - when a story is told by a person who was not there. When other people tell the story – it is always enhanced in one way or another. Sometimes enhanced toward the negative - and made to be worse than reality. Sometimes enhanced toward the positive - and made to be more spectacular than reality. It's always best to hear the story first hand. That's the best way to reduce the rumors!

We are not told in this letter - what the suffering was - that Paul endured to the point of almost dying. A number of interesting suggestions have been made through the years. It isn't important to this message as to what the suffering was. It is only important to know - Paul suffered evils - and that he had suffered them for the sake of the salvation - of those who lived in Corinth.

Another possible reason for Paul to be telling them about his suffering - is to let them know the suffering they are enduring isn't nearly as bad - as what he has had to endure on their behalf. Probably not always - but many times - when we are suffering and then we find out somebody either has - or is currently suffering for us - it does help us endure our suffering. It says in a way - "we are not alone in our suffering" - and somehow that helps.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:9 and make notes:

Things were so bad – Paul was sure his death was being planned and anticipated. Death was staring Paul in the face!

God rescued Paul at the height of the danger. Had God not intervened – Paul was sure - he would have died. One of the positive things about death - death teaches us - human beings are inadequate. Our only hope is to rely on God. That's what Paul did.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:10 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

Not only did God deliver him from a deadly peril - God will do so again if peril comes and threatens him again. God will continue to deliver his faithful servants from threats of peril on this earth - until we receive the ultimate deliverance from peril - by allowing us to come Home to be with the Heavenly Father - because once we arrive there - no peril of any kind - from any source - will even be allowed near us - let alone be allowed to stare us in the face.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:11 and make notes:

This is a big statement. As for as the Corinthians were concerned - as mentioned in an earlier message - they had considered Paul to be on a higher spiritual plane than they were. Here Paul is telling them their "prayers" had helped him.

Can you see how it must have sounded? Paul, whom they saw as so much higher than they were - is helped by their prayers. This communicated to them - a humble and modest attitude. Something quite different from what the self promoting people of the world usually did.

Paul, knowing full well the Corinthian Believers were trying to elevate him to some spiritual pedestal - used it as a means of teaching the Believers in Corinth a better way to see themselves and other Believers. Paul is demonstrating a humble attitude. And that - not only would be a noticeable thing in his day- but it would be quite something different to see in our day!

Many people will read this passage and think - it is only a recorded passage of history - and most of those will consider it to be "not so important history." God did not inspire people to write down things of mere historical happenings. God had a purpose for all the events - He inspired people to write down and pass along. So, what is the message God has for us in this little passage of Scripture?

There are Three points we can take from this text that will help us walk "more like Christ" in our Christian journey:

First - there is a large segment of the Church community today that will be quick to toss out anyone who misses the mark - even half as much as the Corinthians did. Some will not allow a person to make even one mistake until they want them not only excommunicated - but crucified.

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

I have, on more than one occasion, been attacked because I was trying to help someone who is in error - either in their teaching or lifestyle. While there is a time and situation - when a person must be dis-fellowshipped - it is unlikely that will ever be the "first time" and probably not the "second time" they fail. And I am sure it grieves the heart of our Heavenly Father - when someone has the attitude they are to be the executioner of New Believers who have slipped and fallen. My desire is to help people who are in error to learn the way more perfectly. I believe that is the heart of God!

When people do wrong - when people are less than faithful - when people allow false teachings to creep into the gospel message - if they are truly Christian in their heart - they will feel really low when they find out they have missed the mark. We should never judge a person on the seriousness of the mistake they have made. We should judge the person on the condition of their heart and how they respond when they find out they have missed the mark.

Are they willing to admit they have done wrong?

Are they willing to do whatever they can to make amends?

If so, then we can depend on them. That is why Paul was able to tell the Corinthians - that his hope in them is "firm."

Just look in the first letter to the Corinthians. Consider the long list of errors which had become part of the Church in Corinth - and yet, as soon as they repented - and started trying to put things aright - Paul affirmed and encouraged the Believers in Corinth - and he did so as directly as he had chastised them when they were wrong.

Secondly - Consider Paul's willingness to suffer for the benefit of the Believers in Corinth. Consider that Paul did so even to the point that his physical life was being threatened.

How many Church people today would stop attending Church if their life was threatened?

How many Church people today would stop confessing publicly to being a Christian if their life was threatened for doing so?

How many Church people today don't allow others to know they claim to be a Christian?

How many Church people today don't let others know they actually try to live a Christian lifestyle because they are afraid it might hurt their chance of keeping their employment - or their so called friendships?

One of the keys to joyful living is to let go of our affection for this physical life - and to embrace our life with God - as being much more valuable. When we love - and some even worship - our physical life - this physical life becomes the most valuable thing we have. And how quickly and easily our most valuable thing can be destroyed.

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

We can find ourselves with no hope - in the blink of an eye. And our Joyful life suddenly becomes sadness and despair. But when we de-value this physical - temporary life - in favor of the spiritual eternal life with God - when this less valuable thing is destroyed - we still have our joy and our hope - because we still have our most valuable thing - "life with God."

So our Joyful Life continues to be Joyful - because the thing we lost - is the less important thing.

Third - We need to be lifting up other Christians in prayer - especially those who have answered the call to a place of ministry.

I don't share this as a boast - but merely as an example. I had a minister to remind me of a simple act of encouragement - I had offered them some time ago. They shared that I probably did not know - but they were ready to quit – just give up.

They shared that when I came by and took the few minutes to encourage - that was the thing that told them God cared - and they picked up and continued in the ministry.

I did not know they were considering giving up. I just felt led of the Lord to go to them and encourage them. We never know – when the most simple prayer - or the most simple words of encouragement - might be the very thing that helps another Believer - to be able to pick up and continue to walk!

Regardless of "how spiritual" we think another Believer to be - we need to take a cue from the Corinthians and lift other Believers up in prayer.

Have our prayers encouraged any minister or any other Christian anywhere?

Are our prayers currently encouraging any other Christians anywhere?

What do we hold as the most valuable Physical Life or Spiritual Life?

Do we need to make some things right with God concerning how we respond to others who make mistakes?

Do we need to make some things right with God concerning how we value our physical life or perhaps our earthly reputation?

2 Corinthians - 03 - Error

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

Paul had sent a message that he wanted to visit with the Believers in Corinth again. It sounded as though this was going to happen soon - but a great deal of time went by and he had not returned. The enemies of the Church were using Paul's delay as an argument to hurt the cause of the gospel in Corinth.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12 and make notes:

My Conscience is clear! I don't have a guilty conscience! The declaration by someone, "I have a clear conscience" - Is Not Proof - that they have done nothing wrong!

There are two primary reasons for this:

One – ignorant people. A person who does not know "right from wrong"- will most likely have a clear conscience. When they do something that is wrong - but they don't know it is wrong - their conscience isn't going to bother them about it.

The Second – evil people. The New Testament tells us that some people have a "corrupted conscience." Read Titus 1:15. Then there is a statement about those who teach the doctrines of demons. Read 1 Timothy 4:2. A person who has had their conscience "seared" - doesn't feel guilty - they simply won't be bothered by a guilty conscience.

These two reasons are enough to let us know - just because a person does not have a "guilty conscience" - does not prove they have done nothing wrong. Let's look again at what Paul stated about his conscience in the First letter to the Corinthians - 1 Corinthians 1:12.

It is in regards to the way he has conducted himself "in the world" - "especially in our relations with you." So how has he conducted himself in his relations with the Corinthian believers? He has conducted himself "in holiness and sincerity." And yes, an evil person can be sincere - they can be sincerely evil - but Paul states - he has done this - with the "holiness that comes from God" - and with the "sincerity that comes from God." And then he goes on to declare that he has "not done so according to worldly wisdom" - but according to "God's Grace."

The last statement in this verse is the key - to understanding the previous statements. "Holiness that comes from the world" - comes from the things we do and the things we do not do. In other words – worldly holiness is works based - and it isn't really holiness - it is simply man's imitation of holiness.

The world's definition of holiness - is based upon the things that I say - the things that I do - the things that I refrain from doing - the things that I refrain from touching. And in some cases it becomes a very long list of "do's and don'ts."

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

"Holiness - that comes from God" - is clearly NOT about what I do - or what I refrain from doing. "Holiness - that comes from God" - is me understanding – and accepting - that God – in His Mercy and Grace - has taken some of His Holiness - and has placed it upon me. I walk in holiness that God has bestowed upon me.

"Holiness - that comes from God" - isn't my accomplishments - it is what I have received! And received By Grace – Not By Reward!

I have met a number of Church People who are sure that they are more righteous than almost all other Church People. They take pride in their righteousness - and you can hear it in their conversation. They speak down to other Church People.

Those who recognize their Righteousness - is a Graceous Gift from God - cannot take Pride in being Holy or Righteous. And their conversation sounds more like giving Thanks to God - than speaking down to others.

Sincerity that comes from the world - is external sincerity – as much as we can see on the "outside." We can have all kinds of OTHER feelings and thoughts on the inside - but on the outside – we look and sound sincere.

Consider the Scam Artist - to their victims – they sound sincere - and they appear sincere. But on the inside - everything they say and do - is with the express purpose of taking advantage of their victim.

"Sincerity - that comes from God" - is sincerity that goes all the way through . We are as sincere at the core of our being - as we appear to be on the outside. Worldly sincerity has some level of deceit embedded within it.

Since Jesus is "The Truth" and there is NO LIE in any part of him - sincerity that comes from God - is truly genuine sincerity - and there is no deceit and no falsehood about it.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:13 and make notes:

For those who want to interpret this as saying - this letter was written in simple words and terms that even the Corinthians could read and understand - that will be okay – and there is some truth in it. But it is deeper than that. Paul is saying that he is not writing things of which there is no physical evidence to support. He is not simply writing doctrine – or fine teachings. Paul is writing about things that can be evidenced in the way he has conducted his life.

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

As surely as you can read the words in this letter - you can read the supporting actions in my life and these are things you can understand.

Haven't most of us come to understand this simple principle - "we learn more about a person from the way they conduct their lives than we do about what they teach?"

How many times has it happened - that some teacher has offered great and lofty teachings - and some time later it has been discovered - these same people live their personal lives without integrity? They do dishonest - and sometimes disgusting – things. Their lifestyle indicates - they DO NOT believe the things they teach.

For many of us – especially those of us who are aware of such things having happened - we are not so quick to learn from the words a person says - as we are to learn from the way they live their lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:14 and make notes:

Paul has already discerned – or he has observed - the Believers in Corinth were maturing in their faith. The evidence is seen in the way they responded to the previous letter identifying their moral failures. He encourages them by saying - if you will continue to persevere - and hold true to the faith - there is more in store for you!

As you have already come to "understand us in part"- "you will come to understand fully." There is more in store for those who continue faithfully in the Christian walk.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:15-16 and make notes:

I wanted you to have "double pleasure." I was going to visit you on my way TO Macedonia - and then visit you again on my way BACK FROM Macedonia.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:17-18 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

We mentioned in a previous lesson - Paul was delayed in his return to the Corinthians. When someone says they want to do something - and more especially when they say they plan to do something - and then they don't do it - we typically come to the conclusion - they didn't really want to do it. It would have been perfectly natural for the Believers in Corinth - to have come to the conclusion - "sure Paul said he wanted to visit us again" - "but apparently he found something he would rather do and did that instead."

Neither did Paul make this plan lightly - nor did he make his plans according to the way the world makes plans. The way the world makes plans usually involves considerations of "what is in this for me" - "will I enjoy going there." If we don't see where it will benefit us - or that it will be enjoyable to us - then we plan a different trip - a different destination.

Those who make their plans according to the leading of God - might briefly consider whether it sounds like something they would enjoy - or does it sound like a place they would enjoy - but the primary consideration: "is this where God wants me to go" - "is this what God wants me to do." Whether it will be financially rewarding - or financially draining - isn't a part of the decision making process.

The primary driving factor is all about what God is directing me to do. The person who makes plans according to the world system and values - may very likely say "yes and no" - at the same time. The person who makes plans according to the world system and values - may very well change plans in mid-stream - to suit their personal desires or likes.

The person who makes plans according to God's values and system - the person who makes plans according to what God has called them to do - may in fact be delayed - but their plan does not change. Paul was indeed delayed in coming - but his plans never changed. Paul was not delayed because he found something more interesting or more enjoyable to do.

It certainly can seem that way - Paul's message in words - that he wanted to visit again appears to be a "yes" - and then when he was delayed in coming - his message of not coming right away appears to be a "no."

But - as soon as he was able to overcome the evil attacks - he continued in his plan to visit the Believers in Corinth. Yes, I was delayed in fulfilling my plan - but if you look at the overall message - not just the words "that I want to visit with you again" - but also the struggle to overcome the evil attacks - and the message of my actions that as soon as the attacks were overcome - I did come to you again - then you can surely see - my message to you was not "yes and no." My message to you was "yes" and nothing else.

Let's use this short passage from 2 Corinthians to re-evaluate ourselves - re-evaluate our daily lives.

How Do We - Make Our Plans?

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

Do we go about making plans according to the way the world we live in - makes plans?
Or Do we go about making plans according to God's way God's value system?
What about our daily lifestyle?

Does our daily lifestyle contradict our verbal confession?
Does our daily lifestyle contradict the things we say?

And for those of us who have a "Clear Conscience" - we would do well to ask ourselves from time to time - "How is it that I have a clear conscience?" "What is the basis of my clear conscience?" "Do I have a clear conscience" because I am ignorant of God's Word? Because my conscience is numbed? Or because I am doing things God's way?

There is much to be said about having a Clear Conscience. When we do not have a clear conscience - Satan – Can And Will – use it against us. Satan will come to us and bring to our memory the things we know we should have done - or the things we know we should not have done - and he will heap condemnation upon us - and he will keep it up until we are driven to do harmful things to ourselves and to others. The deceiver will tell us we should have done better we should have done more.

When a family member or friend dies without being Saved - and I have had several to die lost - it is so much easier to go on - knowing that we have done everything God asked us to do - We did everything we could possibly do - it leaves us with a Clear Conscience. And a Clear Conscience is something Satan can not use against us.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 04 – Conscience

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

In an earlier lesson – Paul gave an explanation of the situation that led some people to claim Paul had changed his "yes" to a "no." After Paul explained - and shared the evidence - it was obvious - Paul had never said "no." Through a number of things - Paul had remained with his "yes."

Many of us have heard stories like a business person who signs a contract – and then discovers they cannot fulfill the contract without losing money. They work feverishly trying to find a legal loophole - so that they could get out of the contract They are trying to change their "yes" to "no."

It is possible - some of us are afraid – if we make a commitment – we might find ourselves in the position like this example - so we try not to be too specific - we try not to make a firm commitment - we tend to be as ambiguous as we can get away with - and many of us do this with the Word of God!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:19 and make notes:

The Corinthian Believers are asked to consider the Savior that was preached to them. Paul preached Jesus Christ to them - so did Silas - and Timothy. And this Jesus – who is the Son of God - was not "yes and no." Jesus has always been "Yes." Unlike so many people in our world - Jesus has never "unsaid" something he said earlier. Jesus has never "taken back" something he said earlier. Jesus has never said "yes" - and then later said - "I have changed my mind and now the answer is no." We can see – by remaining true to his "yes" - Paul is following the example set by Christ Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20 and make notes:

The preaching of the gospel includes a number of promises that have been made by God. So when the gospel was preached to the people at Corinth – they heard a number of promises from God to the people on this earth. These promises no doubt included things about people being forgiven for their sins - promises about people being given hope and purpose - about people being resurrected. They no doubt included some things about being lifted from corruption - and being made incorruptible.

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

ALL the promises of God had probably NOT been shared with those at Corinth at the time of this letter. So, while they have probably heard a number of promises – they have not heard more than God is able to keep. In fact, it is "through Christ" - that many of these promises have been – and are being – and will continue to be – fulfilled.

The fact of the matter is that Jesus is the "Amen." This is one of the titles given to Jesus in the Book of Revelation. In other words – Jesus is the "Last Word.'

In our world – as it was in the days this letter was written - it was not uncommon that a leader would make a commitment - or a promise to do something for the people - but a new leader would come along and change the promise. The word of the New Leader would take precedence over the word of the Old Leader. Don't worry about someone coming along and over-riding God's promises. Jesus has the Last Word over everything on this earth.

Jesus confessed - He never said anything unless he heard his father say it. When Jesus spoke – He was speaking the words of the Heavenly Father. God spoke through Jesus - and God speaks through Jesus. God's Word has never failed in the Past. God's Word never fails in the Present. God's Word will never fail in the Future. And remember – Jesus spoke God's Word!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:21 and make notes:

For those who read too quickly through this verse - in an effort to get to more exciting verses - they miss something important. Previous to the time of the Early Church - God had made significant promises to the Jews. Paul, the Jewish Preacher of the Gospel - is speaking to Gentiles in his letter. Please don't miss what is said in this verse - "it is God – who makes BOTH us and you – stand firm in Christ." It is Christ that confirms – and affirms - that these Gentiles are now included in the faith promised to the Jews.

Part of the reason this is so - is because God made both the Jews and the Gentiles. It is like two people who were separated as babies - and raised by different families - then as adults – discover they have the same biological father. They were both raised by adoptive parents - who had very different ways of living - different customs and traditions - but the reality is they are siblings - they have common ancestral roots - the same blood heritage. They may have learned to act differently - they may have learned different value systems - but deep down – they are of the same stock - and have the same value or worth.

This would be a significant statement to make to Gentiles in regard to the Jews - but it is especially significant - that it is being made BY a Jew who was raised to be a Pharisee of Pharisees.

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

Another point here: Since it is God who makes it possible for us to stand firm - it is not a matter of achieving some spiritual level to be able to stand firm. "Big Christian" – Apostle Paul was able to stand firm - not because he was on a higher spiritual level - but because God enabled him to do so. That's the same way "Little Christian" - Corinthian is able to stand firm.

We should not be sitting around – waiting to achieve - so that we will be able to stand firm. We need to start leaning on God's ability and God's power to help me stand firm – right now!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:22 and make notes:

God is truly the source of all good things. It is God who has put His Seal of ownership on both the Gentiles and the Jews. God has put the same Spirit – His Spirit – in both the saved Gentile – that He has put in the Saved Jew.

The methods have changed through the centuries - but it is a very old practice for herders of animals - to place a mark upon their animals. They have branded animals for centuries - so that they – and others – could quickly tell who this animal belongs to. A new person might come along who doesn't know the local brands - but when he sees the mark upon an animal – he knows it belongs to someone.

It isn't that Christians were being likened to animals. The same kind of thing was used on people who were slaves. The people did understand about having a mark of ownership - so when it is said that God has put His Holy Spirit upon us - to mark us with a Seal – they understood that means - God claims us as belonging to Him.

The Jews had their mark – they took pride in being circumcised. But the Gentiles didn't carry a mark in their body - and here they are told - that God is marking Gentile Believers by placing His Spirit upon us - and that is only a deposit – one that guarantees we have more to come. Wow!

For just a moment here – let's take time to remember - Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit – if not completely baptized into the Holy Spirit. So, here is this person who is himself - "filled with the Holy Spirit" - and he is saying God has put into the heart of every Christian – Jew or Gentile - this "deposit of guarantee" God's Holy Spirit Read 2 Corinthians 1:23 and make notes:

Paul had deeply desired to return to Corinth. He had even desired to visit with them twice; once going to Macedonia – and again as he was returning from Macedonia - as mentioned in an earlier lesson. Paul was delayed – he experienced interference. Paul had already covered that fact with them. Now Paul wants to share some new understanding he has received.

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

The delay is bigger than evil people simply trying to distract Paul. While it is highly unlikely Paul enjoyed being distracted and delayed - he now understands - it was for the benefit of the Believers in Corinth - that he did not return sooner. This delay was to fulfill God's will.

When we are trying to serve God - we are trying to do something we know is a good thing - and we find ourselves being held back from accomplishing our goal - when we are met with obstacles and delays - it is so easy to start rebuking the devil - to start saying ugly things about Satan - and to denounce anyone and everything - that is standing in our way.

We see the interfering people - and the delaying obstacles - as all about attacking "ME." But what if God is allowing us to be delayed – for the good of someone else? "Oh no, please say it isn't so - surely God wouldn't allow me to have to put up with all this garbage – and painful garbage at that – just for the good of another person." Well, sometimes He does!

Let's consider Paul being delayed from visiting Corinth. The Corinthians had received a painful letter. They were clearly chastised and corrected - they - without a doubt – felt the pain. They set in to trying to correct their mistakes - and started trying to do things correctly.

What if Paul had arrived in Corinth shortly after they had received the letter? The Believers in Corinth might have naturally accepted Paul as the Disciplinarian. Paul wrote the scathing letter - now he must be here to oversee the correcting of the mistakes.

It would have only been natural for them to have placed this role upon him - instead of seeking God for themselves - about how to do things right. They would have probably asked Paul what to do - and they would have probably done all that he said. But that would not have been the best for them.

They didn't need to receive someone to tell them what to do. They needed to develop their relationship with God - so that they would hear from God themselves.

If Paul had returned to Corinth at the time he had planned - it might have been bad for Paul - as well as for the Corinthians in the long run. So, as much as Paul did not like or enjoy the delay - Paul had come to realize that he experienced the delay for their benefit.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:24 and make notes:

Faith is not in any way about compulsion. Faith is every bit about Free Will.

It was not Paul's place to "lord over" any other Believer - in regards to faith - "oh, I'm an apostle I have big faith – you know, apostle faith" - "and if you have any faith at all – well, it is small faith" - "so you had better do as I say."

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

This speaks of the Corinthian situation - the repentance they offered - the efforts to correct their mistakes - the adjustments as to how things were to be done - had to come out of their personal desire to do what pleases God. It was not to come out of legal obligation.

It was so very important that the Believers in Corinth exercise their Free Will. And out of their personal Faith they took the actions they did to make things right. Not because Paul – or any other apostle – commanded them - but because their personal faith relationship with God - was motivating them to do so.

Paul's desire was in alignment with God's desire. It was God's plan that Paul – as the apostle – work ALONG SIDE the Believers in Corinth. They would not likely ever receive real joy - from obeying the instructions of an apostle - who "lorded over them." They would receive "Joy" – by standing firm in THEIR faith - not standing firm in the faith of another person.

Are we too quick to change our "yes" to a "no" - or do we do what we must to keep our word?

Christians today need to stand by their word. We need to be clear about what God's Word says. Too many teachers and preachers today are vague about what is right and wrong - and it is not just the preachers and teachers - every Believer needs to be clear on what God's Word says.

I know it has always been important - but in today's society – it seems imperative! It is dangerous for us to try to avoid being clear on the things God's Word says. Too many of us today are being foggy about sin - too many of us today are waffling on acceptable behavior.

If God's people do not call "sin as sin" – then who will know what is sin. Because God's people have been so vague about God's Word - there are people in our country – who don't even believe anything is sin.

Let's be clear on sin. And let's not be waffling about it.

Are we too quick to condemn every delay - or do we try to examine the delay - to see if God is actually working something good out through the delay?

2 Corinthians - 05 – Delays

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

Is it ever a "good thing" - to hurt another person? What is our attitude toward others – who hurt us - when they know before they do it - that what they are going to do - will cause us pain?

This was a letter written to the Corinthians many years ago. It does have some specific words to them - but it has some things to say to us today. It was not only meant for the Corinthians of old - it was also meant for Believers in our current society. So let's take a little time and feast on the text for this lesson - and see what message it has for us.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1 and make notes:

This is not saying - Paul had made up his mind not to make another visit to the Corinthians - only that he did not want any more of his visits to be painful visits. This is a good place to remind ourselves - that Paul is the one through whom the Holy Spirit said - "when one member of the body suffers, then the whole body suffers" (1 Corin 12:26).

Paul was being considerate of the NEW Believers in Corinth - but he was thinking of ALL the Believers at Corinth – and Paul was considering himself as well – when the Believers at Corinth suffered, so did Paul - because he loved them.

This is a good verse for us to keep in mind - when it becomes necessary to chastise or discipline another person. If we love this other person, - we will discipline them- but we will also not want to pile painful chastisement upon top of painful chastisement. We will want to make sure we work some encouragement - and edification in where it is appropriate and honest.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:2 and make notes:

As already mentioned - Paul genuinely loved the Believers at Corinth. He did not want to cause them pain - but truly loving someone, also means we have to tell them when they are doing wrong - and correcting someone – chastising them – can cause them to experience pain - which in turn causes us to experience pain.

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

This verse sounds a little confusing to some people. They read - "who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved" - and they hear it saying, - "the person I grieved is all I have to make me glad." That simply would not be true - there would be a number of other Believers – in other places – who could help make Paul glad. It isn't the statement that is not true – it is the interpretation that is not true.

Paul not only loved the Believers at Corinth enough to tell them the truth – which included correction when they were wrong - but Paul understood sometimes to do what is best for someone – in the long run – means causing them some pain - or at least some discomfort in the short run.

Most of us would agree - a person who causes us pain - just for the sake of making us hurt - is a bad person. We would consider this person as "our enemy."

But what about the doctor who gives us a painful shot - or gives us a bitter tasting medicine - or causes us pain in the cleaning and repairing a wound? The doctor caused us pain - is the doctor our enemy? Of course not!

The doctor caused us pain – not because the doctor wanted us to experience pain and discomfort - but because the doctor wanted us to experience health and healing in the long run.

However, this statement may not be true concerning Physical Therapist. If you have ever had to see a physical therapist – I'm sure you will understand. It seems as though they really enjoy seeing people suffer - that's just my observation! I'm just kidding – now back to seriousness.

In much the same way that the doctor may in fact cause us to experience pain and discomfort right now- for the express purpose of helping us experience health and comfort later - that is the same attitude from which Paul is approached the Corinthian Believers.

For Paul to tell them they are wrong – and they need to correct some errors - and need to start doing some things differently- did cause them pain. But it was so that they and he - could share joy together later.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:3 and make notes:

This is the verse that helps us understand what Paul was talking about when he said - he could be made to be glad by their sorrow. Receiving the letter from Paul – caused them pain - but can you imagine the increased level of pain - if - instead of receiving the letter - they had heard these corrective words from Paul in person?

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

Paul knew that his pain – and their pain - would be significantly more intense - if he came in person and addressed the errors. By sending the correction in a letter - he did not have to see them - and they did not have to look Paul in the eye. This allowed the matter to be addressed in a more compassionate manner. And if by sending the letter - the Believers in Corinth corrected the errors - when Paul did come to them - they could all share Joy together - rather than pain and chastisement. Paul would be able to rejoice in the Believers at Corinth.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:4 and make notes:

Not every parent – but many parents have had a similar experience. There is usually at least one time in every parent's life - where it is necessary to punish one of their children - and the child may not see it - but the parent cries more – and hurts more - than the child who was punished.

Paul admits to having experienced - "great distress and anguish of heart" - while he was writing that chastising letter. He shed "many tears" while writing it.

When we love someone, - we want to say good things to them - we want to encourage, to edify, - and to build them up. When we love someone, we don't want to cause them pain. So, when we have to say the corrective thing – it hurts us. Many of us have experienced someone – who does not love us - rebuking us - that causes pain for us, - and the rebuking person isn't hurt by it at all. In fact - some of them seem to find it quite enjoyable - to lash out at someone.

We're not talking about these people - but when we love someone - it does cause us pain - when we have to rebuke them. In this verse, Paul expresses his deep love for the Believers at Corinth. Paul was not "less affected" by the chastising letter than were the Corinthians. Paul was "more affected" by the letter.

What is the message to us from this part of the letter to the Corinthians? There are a couple of things:

First: Church is not just a gathering of friends there are Leaders.

And being in a position of Leadership within a Church - is not a place of privilege - where the person in Leadership can take advantage of the people - or the resources. Church Leadership is a place of responsibility - and Leadership in a Church - is a place that invites personal pain.

Those Un-willing to suffer the pain - should not accept Leadership.

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

Secondly: One of the marks of a mature person is that they do what has to be done - whether it is enjoyable - or if it is painful.

Adults do what has to be done - children on the other hand - only do what is fun for them. Those who are not yet mature in the Christian faith - will ignore the things that need to be done - if these things don't look like fun to them. This comes into play in the area of discipline. In 1 Timothy chapter 3 – we are told that we should not put "recent converts" in positions of being an "overseer."

One of the reasons given - is they might become conceited and fall to temptation. But there is also the problem with a recent convert not being mature spiritually.

How often do we see someone today - who is not a mature Christian - and yet they are in a place of spiritual oversight. Perhaps some church group put them in a leadership position - perhaps they put themselves in a leadership position - deciding they should be the head of some ministry.

And let's allow that even though they are immature - they do truly love the people they are trying to lead. But when a situation arises that calls for correction or discipline - they shy away from it – when they consider chastising – correcting – or disciplining the person or the group - the very thought of it is causing them pain. So, rather than cause themselves pain - they choose not to correct or to chastise.

At the moment – it seems they have avoided pain - they haven't caused themselves much pain – and they haven't caused the other person any pain at all. But later it is different - by not correcting early – when the offenses are small - the bad behavior grows and increases - the erroneous doctrines and attitudes increase - and the pain this person experiences in the long run - is very intense - and in some cases – it is fatal.

This is the basis for saying the deepest love - will desire to help the ones we love avoid the greater pain - the deepest love will be willing to suffer personally - in order to help the person we love avoid serious pain later.

When we are not willing to suffer to help another person - the truth is that we do not love them! Jesus said in John 15:13 - No greater love has any person than to lay down their life for another person. That means the deepest love - will cause me to lay aside my desire - not to have pain - if that is what is necessary to help the person I love - to avoid the bigger Pain!

We can easily see Paul's love for the Corinthian Believers in the way he went about correcting them. Paul did not avoid correcting them even though he knew it would hurt their feelings maybe even make them mad. He corrected them in as loving of a way and method as he could but he still corrected them.

Do we love others enough to correct them when they are wrong?

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

Today's churches need to repent of our "make everyone feel good" approach to Church. The Church – The Ministers – and the Believers - need to Love our Neighbor enough - to speak the Truth to them - even if it hurts!

This means telling people when they are in error. We should do so in Love of course - but we **MUST Tell People The Truth!** And that includes telling people that certain things are sin! And if we Really Love our Neighbor - we Will Tell them the Truth! If we Really Love our Family - we Will tell them the Truth!

To refuse to tell someone the truth when they are in error - says that we do not really love them. Jesus said people will know that we are His disciples - "by our Love." It isn't the name of our church group - it isn't the programs we provide - it isn't the kind of food or clothes - it is the evidence of our Love!

Jesus did not establish the Church to be about the Business of giving people a "warm fuzzy" feeling. Jesus established the Church – to tell people the Good News of Salvation by Grace through Faith. And this Salvation is found in No One – or No Thing other than Jesus Christ. And in order to do this - we Must Tell People – Certain Things Are Wrong!

Being politically correct can allow others to be condemned to an eternity without God! It is time for the Church to be about the business of speaking the Truth - to our families - to our neighbors - to our co-workers - to our communities - and to our nation. Dads and Moms – do you hear this? Grandfathers and Grandmothers - do you hear this? Brothers and Sisters - do you hear this? Then – when are we going to stop all this perverted Christianity- and love others enough to tell them – this thing is sin?

Again I say, - we are to Speak the Truth In Love - but we are most definitely to speak the Truth!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 06 - Leaders – What Has To Be Done

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

In a previous lesson - we have seen that we are to speak the Truth to one another in Love - and this includes telling people what they are doing is sin. But what about punishing those who commit sin?

The majority of Christians in America have probably never seen a local Church take actions of discipline toward a member - quite a few have probably heard of some local church asking a pastor – or Elder – or Deacon – or some other person in leadership to leave - but what about one of the members?

Should the Church take disciplinary actions toward those who are part of the church? Or should the church have the attitude "if we discipline them – they might stop giving offerings" - "if we discipline them – they might stop helping."

I submit to you that the church should – when needed - discipline the Believers who are doing wrong and this brings us to the text for today.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5 and make notes:

While many people have speculated upon which specific person – or which specific action caused Paul grief - it seems much more important to take note - no specific person and no specific offense is mentioned here. Paul has moved FROM the position of disciplinarian - and has moved FROM the place of correction of offenses - TO a place of forgiveness and restoration especially restoration of relationship. If a specific offense had been mentioned – it is highly likely - many people would declare what is said in these verses would only apply to that specific offense - and the Holy Spirit – teaching us through Paul – wanted the Corinthians then and us today – to understand this principle applies to all offenses. There is an important message for the Church revealed in today's text.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:6 and make notes:

Again – the crime is not named and the specific punishment is not named. It certainly could be that Paul had some particular crime in mind while writing - but remember – he was writing at the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit - so the way in which these things are written down – has a divine purpose - more so than the personality or the attitude of the one who is writing.

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

An offense has occurred – Paul has experienced grief – the Believers at Corinth have experienced grief - the offending person has been punished . Now it is a time of forgiveness and healing and one of the important things for the Offender to know – as well as for the Church in Corinth to know - since the "majority" had agreed upon a proper punishment and had delivered the punishment.

Paul would not be addressing that individual and their offense any further when he did arrive. It is also worth noting the "majority" agreed upon the punishment for the offender. It was not the decision of one person – not the decision of some designated disciplinarian. It was the majority of the Believers.

Since it was a "majority" – this is an indication of the degree of single mindedness that came into the church at Corinth. "Majority" does leave open - the Believers might not be unanimous – they may not be completely in one mind - but there is more in agreement than there is in division. The individual who can only see their sin is offensive to one person – may not be all that moved to repent - if they believe what they have done is in some way acceptable – or at least not all that offensive – to the majority of other Believers. They can convince themselves this one person who is offended - is just some kind of religious fanatic - but when the individual can see - the majority of the Believers find their actions offensive - they are much more likely to repent.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:7 and make notes:

While it is right for the Church to discipline those who move into sin- it is equally right for the Church to "Forgive and Comfort" that same person when they have repented - and has turned from their sin.

It should never be the desire of the Church to see a person who has fallen into sin - to be continually punished – even after they have demonstrated repentance. This could take a person to the point of "overwhelming sorrow." And not only is the Church to forgive the repentant sinner - the Church is to "Comfort" the repentant sinner.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:8 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

Okay – we handed out the punishment for the crime - the person repented – and we tell them they are forgiven. That alone is not enough - now we must "reaffirm our love for him."

Please notice the choice of words here. Not a suggestion – as if it might be a good idea - the Corinthians are "Urged" to do this. The original Greek word used here *parakaleo* (par-ak-al-eh'-o) - exhort – entreat – pray – call for.

This is an important little note. The word is not one that indicates "an order" or "a command." If the Corinthians were responding toward the repentant person out of "a command" – it probably would not be "love." "Real love" is not something that can be commanded - "real love" is a voluntary action. So the Corinthians were not being "commanded" to reaffirm their love of the repentant offender - but they were being "urged" to do so.

What is the message to take home with us from this text?

First: There Is To Be Discipline In The Church!

I am aware that there will be those who will quickly agree with idea of the Church "disciplining" those who do wrong. And it seems - those who are the quickest to jump on this bandwagon - are those who also will say - that some sins can never be forgotten. Once a Church Member commits certain sins - they must be "forever banished" from the church - and if you ask them - they are sure which sins are the most ugly. They are quick to name the sins for which the person should never be set free. They would see that person walk in punishment for their crime for as long as they live on this earth. And some of them foresee that person going directly to hell as soon as they die - regardless of the amount of repentance they offer before they die.

For those who protest Christians being forgiven when they fall - I submit only 2 – of a great many examples – from God's Word. David was forgiven – after he experienced the punishment for his sins toward Uriah – and he repented. Ahab was forgiven – after he was punished and he repented.

Rather than give a long list – I will leave it at these 2 and say - the Church should Discipline those who do wrong. However - Discipline which leaves no place for restoration following repentance – has ceased to be "Christian" discipline.

The two most common responses to sin in the church in America today have something in common. The most common response to sin by the church today - is we ignore sin - or we try to explain why it isn't really sin. To ignore sin – or to pretend sin IS NOT sin - is not Christian! The second most common response to sin in the church today - punish the person forever with no place for restoration. I've already said it - to punish sin – with no place for restoration following repentance - IS NOT Christian!

Neither of the two most common responses to sin in the church today – is Christ-Like! And this brings us to the second thing to take home with us.

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

Secondly: We Should Discipline In Love!

Read Galatians 6:1. An employer who loves their employees - can actually terminate the employment of one - who fails to live up to the job requirements. They just do it more gently than the employer who does not love their employees. A parent who loves their children - can – and certainly does – punish their child when they do wrong. But they do so gently.

The Church who loves - will punish one of the members who moves into sinful actions - and will sometimes take action when one of their members simply fails to "avoid the appearance of evil." But they will do so gently - and part of "gently" includes affirming our love for them.

It would be rather obvious to the offending person that we do not approve of their sinful action when we hand out the punishment - when we withhold fellowship - when we require them to step down - from their place of leadership - or their place of service within the church. But how do we "affirm our love for them?"

It might include things like letting the person know we do still want to see them - we want to be with them - we even desire for them to return to their place of service - once we can see that they have turned from their sinful way. It might include us offering to help them in their effort to make restoration - not making restoration for them - but helping them make the best choices. It might include our assurance that we will hold a place of service for them. So when they have repented - we can restore them to a place of service. And when the person has completed - whatever has been called for - we gladly and openly welcome them back to their position.

How do we know when a person has truly repented? True repentance will be evident in the life and attitude of a person. Different personalities will display genuineness differently. Different sins may require different displays of repentance. Different people – and different sins – may require different amounts of time to be tested. But true repentance will be evident - true repentance will display true sorrow on the part of the offender - true repentance will display true efforts at restoration on the part of the offender.

The specific actions – and the specific amount of time will vary - but true repentance will be evident. For true repentance to be evident – means it is more than mere words. It means - true repentance will be accompanied with observable actions and these will be actions that are sustained - actions that are not abandoned just because they are difficult.

How much do we love the members of our Church Family?

Do We Love Enough To Chastise?

Do we love them enough to correct them which includes handing out punishment? Or at least chastisement?

Do We Love Enough To Restore?

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

Do we love them enough to help them in their walk through the punishment to walk with them through their restoration?

Do we love them enough to kneel in prayer and intercede on their behalf?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 07 - Discipline

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 08 - Acknowledging Maturity

We have already seen - God expects us to tell the truth to one another. This includes telling a person when they are in sin. We have seen - we are to hand out chastisement to those who don't heed the warnings and walk into sin. We have also seen - God expects us to Forgive them when they repent - and to Restore them when their repentance is evident.

Does God expect anything more of us in this area?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:9 and make notes:

The Believers in Corinth had shown their obedience to set things right. They showed their obedience in handing out chastisement to the sinner in their midst. Now, would they be obedient in restoring the repentant sinner?

Knowing something of human nature - it is possible - at least some of the Believers might have had a less than loving attitude - when the punishment was handed out. But if they will now restore the person in an attitude of love - it will indicate an obedience from a purity of heart. This "restoring" - is one of the major indicators of the reality of "love" in those who claim to be disciples.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:10 and make notes:

This verse reveals a heart in Paul of wanting to be "like Christ." He is trying to practice what he preaches. God forgives a person when they repent (1 John 1:9). Paul has told the Believers in Corinth – they are to forgive a person who has repented. So in short – if God has forgiven someone – we simply do not have the right to withhold forgiveness from them.

Paul is saying, - if the Corinthian Believers forgive someone who has repented - then he isn't going to withhold forgiveness from them. If they, as a church body, - forgive a person their sin - then Paul will automatically extend his forgiveness to that person.

This verse is very special and important. Paul had earlier come down hard on the immaturity of the Believers in Corinth. He had hammered them on their unfaithfulness and their having allowed so much sin to exist within the body of the local church.

2 Corinthians - 08 - Acknowledging Maturity

This little verse – which so many are quick to run past - is a tremendous commendation it is so much more than a mere "pat on the back" - to these people - who had not long before - been treated like little children in the faith.

Paul is saying, "I give you the lead." He is saying, I see you as mature enough to take the lead in deciding who is ready to be forgiven - if you forgive them – then I will too!

That is like a parent taking one of their children aside - a child that has been hearing for years from their parent - you failed here – you didn't do this good enough - you fell short in this area - and now that child is being told - I accept you as a responsible adult - I give you full control of your life - I will help you in your walk - but you get to make all your decisions about your life from here on out.

What Paul did here - is "HUGE"!

Read 2 Corinthians 2:11 and make notes:

In an earlier lesson we were told - the person who had sinned – needed to be restored and reaffirmed in love - so that they did not become overwhelmed in sorrow - and as a result become easy prey for Satan's destruction. Here we are shown that the growing Christian - NEEDS to be told when they have matured and have grown.

The message we are to take home with us?

Read Ezekiel 18:23.

It IS NOT God's pleasure - for a person to die for their sins. His pleasure is to see them turn from their ways and live. It IS NOT God's pleasure that a person suffer forever - and it IS NOT God's pleasure that a person be punished forever. It IS NOT God's pleasure that a person remain immature and to be dealt with as if they are still immature forever.

God's Pleasure is to see Believers grow and mature and to one day be recognized by their leaders as having become mature enough to take charge of their own decisions - and to take control of their own life and it's direction.

2 Corinthians - 08 - Acknowledging Maturity

The person who is always told they are immature and irresponsible - will likely spiral downward - in much the same way as the sinner who is never forgiven and never restored. A person can handle instructions as an immature person - they can handle correction while they are maturing and growing - but if there is never a day when they are told - their maturity and growth are recognized - they are likely to begin a decline into destruction.

An individual – a church – a ministry group - needs at some point - to hear that they have grown - that their maturity is evident. They need to be given recognition as being mature enough to make some decisions.

Those who never hear anything about progress and improvement - become easy prey for Satan.

Paul stated through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - that he was aware of Satan's schemes. I believe many Christians today are in fact Un-Aware of Satan's schemes. It seems the majority of Believers today - only think of Satan being able to take someone down - by tempting them into sinful actions.

So many Believers today do not seem to be aware - Satan can take advantage of the person - who is continually condemned by well intentioned Believers. So many today don't appear to be aware - Satan can take advantage of the person who is never recognized for their growth and maturity.

Allow me to share a word of caution: Back in verse 10, - Paul threw in something we must not miss. Paul said, - "I forgive the person in the full sight of Christ Jesus." In other words, Jesus is the witness to Paul having forgiven a person. Jesus knows what is in our heart - regardless of the words we say - regardless of the tone of voice - regardless of the smile upon our face.

Jesus knows our heart - we might be able to fool some people – maybe even most of the people but no one is able to fool Jesus. Jesus knows full well - whether we have forgiven someone - or if we are simply saying the words.

Far too many Church People today - continue to treat others as immature - and continue to try to control the lives of others. Those who do this - are being used of Satan to destroy Believers.

When someone comes into our life - and they are immature - it is our responsibility to guide them - to teach them and instruct them. BUT – it is equally our responsibility - to tell them when they have grown.

We are to look forward to the day - when we can turn them loose from our guidance - and let them know that from here on out - they are in charge of their life. To do otherwise – we help the cause of Satan - instead of the cause of Christ..

2 Corinthians - 08 - Acknowledging Maturity

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

In this lesson - we are going to see something very few Christians know about the Apostle Paul. We are going to see an important instruction - and we are going to receive - what to me - is an Immense encouragement.

Earlier in the letter to the Corinthians - Paul had explained why he had been delayed. And he shared with them the Divine plan that was involved with his delay. It was in no way – as some had suggested – that Paul simply did not want to come back there.

In the last couple of lessons - Paul left the explanation of the delay and shared some very important principles that every Believer needs to know. In the text for lesson – some believe Paul is returning to talking about his itinerary. He does mention his itinerary - but the message is not about the change in itinerary – or about the delay. All of that has been covered - so let's get into the text - and see what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12 and make notes:

Upon arriving in Troas – Paul discovers God has opened a door for him to preach the gospel. Paul knew first hand what it was like to have people reject him and the gospel he was called to preach. So, to find an open door, - welcoming the gospel, - had to be a good and refreshing feeling.

The metaphor of "an open door" is one Paul used from time to time. He used it in the earlier letter to the Corinthians - he used it in regards to the ministry at Ephesus - and he used it in the letter to the Colossians. Jesus in Revelations – tells one of the seven churches - I have placed an "open door" before you. He also says that He stands at "the door" and knocks. The hope is that the "door" will become an "open door."

An "open door" is a wonderful thing. It is a picture of letting the evangelist in with the Word of God. A "closed door" is a picture of the Gospel being rejected.

I don't believe it is wrong to take notice in Revelation - that God is the One who placed the "open door" before the church. And then to carry that thought to the church at Troas. The "open door" at Troas was the work of God - and not the work of the Evangelist - or any person on this earth.

So, here Paul is at Troas - people are receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ – people are getting saved. What did Paul do?

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

Read 2 Corinthians 2:13 and make notes:

Any preacher would be pleased to find an open door to the preaching of the gospel – as Paul did in Troas. But as inviting as the "open door" is – Paul was unhappy and distressed because he DID NOT find Titus at Troas.

There are those who suggest Paul was concerned about Titus. Since Titus was not with Paul, - there was no way for Paul to know if Titus was okay - no way to know how Titus is being treated by others. They suggest it was Paul's concern for Titus' welfare - that caused Paul to leave in search of Titus.

Paul loved Titus – he wanted to see Titus grow and increase his ministry skills. It could have been the reason - but that simply IS NOT the way the Scriptures read - and I still believe we are safer to take God's Word the way God has it written.

A good case can be made that Paul was expecting to meet Titus in Troas - so that he could get an update from Titus about how things were going in Corinth. It wasn't just that Paul missed Titus so much - that he simply could not go on without Titus.

It is more likely that Paul loved the Believers in Corinth so much - and Paul was genuinely concerned about them - he had a deep "heart felt" need - to hear that they were doing well. I am convinced - Paul couldn't wait any longer to find out about Corinth!

Sometimes, we visualize Paul as being "so big" and "so spiritual" - that we have problems accepting Paul as a mere human being. Those who over-spiritualize Paul – have difficulty understanding how Paul could actually "say goodbye" to the people in Troas and leave them. Especially when the ministry is going so well there! That makes it necessary for them to invent things - to put into the scriptures in an effort to explain such things.

People had opened their hearts to hear the gospel – that's a good thin. People were accepting the Word of God – that's a very good thing. But Paul - was still in a fleshly body – and that sometimes gets in the way of ministering. So, even though the door was open to the ministry of the Gospel – Paul left in search of Titus

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

The evidence that Paul still was a fleshly human being - is seen by his leaving a thriving ministry in Troas. And even if – Paul acted out of fleshly motives - Paul – can see – and openly gives Thanks To God - and is willing to say - "God always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ" - and "God – through us, spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him."

I realize many Church People have never experienced the "aroma of God's presence." I am also aware that some have – and when we are in the "presence of God" – THERE IS a discernible aroma.

Paul was giving thanks that everywhere he went – there was a "fragrance of the knowledge of God." So, how is it that "everywhere" Paul went – the "fragrance of the knowledge of God" also was there?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:15 and make notes:

"Believers ARE THE AROMA!" Where the Believer is – there the "Aroma" should be. So, whether Paul was among a group of saved people - or among a group of unsaved people - "the perishing"- Paul carried the aroma of the knowledge of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:16 and make notes:

To those who refuse to repent – our presence becomes a smell of death - because those who refuse to repent – find no relief from the sentence of death – that is upon all sinners.

To those who repent and accept Jesus – our presence becomes a fragrance of Life - because those who repent – find complete relief from the sentence of death – and death can no longer harm them.

Unbelievers are walking themselves to the death sentence. They don't need Believers trying to drag them there. Unbelievers need to be offered a way of being rescued - and some of them don't even realize they need to be rescued.

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

Read 2 Corinthians 2:17 and make notes:

I know it has come up in conversations often today - about certain people who appear to be ministering the way they do - just to increase the money they receive. Folks, this is not something new! It is not okay – and it is not acceptable - but it is not new.

Paul recognized in his day – there were those who "peddled the Word of God" just to make money. Paul doesn't give these people his focus. Paul focuses on the people who are lost – and who need to hear the gospel message.

We need to take our cues from Paul. Instead of spending so much time, energy, and resources - railing against the "professional ministers" of our day - let's just focus on getting the Word of God to the Lost - and let's do it with sincerity - as if we were sent by God.

One of the signs that corruption has taken place - a person begins to sell for money - that which is intended to be given freely.

I wonder sometimes, if certain people ever remember - "freely you have received freely give" – in Matt 10:8 - or do they think that only applied to the original 12?

Here is the "take home" message from this lesson:

Think about this for a minute – have you ever been somewhere, when freshly baked bread comes out of the oven? Or arrived just minutes after it was removed from the oven?

When fresh baked bread is present – there is an aroma! We may not be able to see the bread – but it's aroma tells that it is present! Even when the bread is not in our line of sight - the aroma of that bread – keeps on moving until it finds our nostrils - and lets us know that it is near.

Is there a time – when bread can actually be present – but there is no aroma? Yes, when we are in the presence of "old bread"! The older the bread – the less the aroma.

I realize many Believers today - want to make the case that the evidence of our being authentic Christians is in the power we display - God works miracles through us - God gives prophetic words through us, etc. But perhaps the best evidence of our being authentic - might be the "aroma of the presence of God."

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

In much the same way as bread may not be seen, - but the aroma lets people know that the bread is present - people may not see God - but the "aroma of the Presence of God" - will let them know that God is present.

If we come to people - shortly after having been in the Presence of God - don't you think there will be an "Aroma of His Presence?" A person speaking the Word of God - and it leaves people hurting - ashamed - afraid - a person speaking the Word of God - and it leaves people with a legal set of rules - and nothing but religion - may not be the "authentic" presenter of the Word of God. Maybe they have not been in the "Presence of God" recently - perhaps it has been a long time. As they are sharing what they say - is the Word of God - there simply is no aroma of God's presence.

The Person who speaks the Word of God - and who themselves are in - or at least have recently been in the presence of God - will likely have an "aroma of God's presence." Maybe we cannot see God - maybe the way they say it is not all that exciting - but there is this "aroma of God's presence."

The person who makes all kinds of wrong assertions of the Word of God - tends to leave a bad taste as well as a bad smell.

The person who presents the Word of God in Love - certainly may cause some to feel pain as they are convicted of their sins - but these people time and again - leave a sweet and loving aroma as well as a good taste.

There is a way to tell people that what they are doing is wrong and it is sin according to God's Word - and leave them with a good taste. Unfortunately, a great many have experienced people trying to share God's Word from their own point of view - and they have left a bad smell AND a bad taste toward Christians.

The person who prays to God - telling Him how awful this other person's sins are - and asking God to punish them for their sins - becomes a bad smell before God. The person who - from a proud and religious heart - tells others there are in sin - becomes a bad smell to the people.

Those who have sinned - but then bring their sacrifice and prayer of repentance to God in a right heart - become a beautiful aroma to God. When we present God's Word from a repented heart - instead of a proud and pompous heart - we become a beautiful aroma to the people with whom we share the Word.

Let's not allow ourselves to get distracted by those who are selling the gospel. Our Goal - or at least one of our primary goals - needs to be - to stay in the Presence of God - so that we will carry the "Aroma of the Presence of God." And while it would be better if we never respond in the flesh - let us be encouraged by Paul - that if we stay in the Presence of God - even if we should at times make fleshly decisions - at least we will carry the "Aroma of the Presence of God" - because we have just come from God's Presence!

2 Corinthians - 09 - Aroma Of God

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

For those of us who have ever applied for a job – we are familiar with a usual request by our perspective employer. They want references – they want to be able to contact people who will tell them that we do a good job - or will tell them we are competent, or talented, or trustworthy, etc.

Some of us - have asked for references from people we are considering to do work on our house – or car - but sometimes we don't ask for references, - because we have seen the person's work. The concept of references – or a letter of recommendation is something familiar to us.

There are a number of Bible Scholars who believe - false teachers had begun to accuse Paul of trying to commend himself. The False Teachers always made sure that they had - "Letters of Commendation" from prominent people - and much like a negative political ad in our day - they were trying to say Paul was commending himself - saying he didn't have anyone of importance commending him.

You may remember - in the earlier part of the letter, - Paul said he was not like those who "peddle the gospel." That is an interesting way to refer to the False Teachers - rather than spending time and resources - pointing out the things that are wrong with the false teachers.

The Holy Spirit, - speaking through Paul, - points out the things that are right with the authentic teacher.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1 and make notes:

"Some people" – this is that anonymous group that is responsible for so many things. You know – "they say" - "well brother Bob, it's not me, but there are "some" in our church who just don't like the way you handled that" - "brother Bob, I'm hearing "some people" say negative things."

The anonymous group of "some people" – or "they say" - simply isn't worthy of our time and resources. If a person is not willing to put their name on it - then it doesn't deserve to be considered. I've said it to others - and I will share it again - don't read any letter or note that does not have a name indicating who wrote it. Just consider how much of Paul's time "they said" gets in this letter and let that be our guide.

Because we have such a tremendous communications network today – a letter of introduction – or a letter of commendation - doesn't have the importance or impact - it had in Paul's day. However, back then - a letter of introduction – or a letter of commendation – was important as teachers traveled to a new area.

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

Paul begins this section of the letter by asking a couple of questions:

"Is it necessary that we bring a letter of commendation to you in order to be heard"?

"Do we need to take a letter of commendation from you to others in order that our ministry in Corinth has any significance"?

The Corinthians appear to be un-aware of the significance of their faith – and their living for Jesus. Their obedience is much more important than just the fact that they are saved and will be with God for ever and ever. There is some earthly importance to their faith and it impacts the apostle Paul.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:2 and make notes:

How do we know another person is in our heart? When we think of them often - when we find ourselves praying for their success and happiness.

The Corinthians must have come to Paul's mind frequently. The Corinthian Believers – and how they live and conduct their lives – is the letter that is most important to Paul. And how they live their lives is a letter that is being read by the everyone with whom they come into contact.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:3 and make notes:

Consider the contrast Paul is expressing here: things "written with ink" – things "written in stone" - they are temporary. Things written in ink must be protected from the things that will cause the ink to smear – or the ink to fade. And the thing that the ink is written on – must be protected from the things that will cause it to deteriorate - paper, papyrus, etc – all are damaged by sunlight, moisture, folding and bending.

Even messages written on stone tablets are temporary. While they are likely to last longer than those written in ink upon paper – they still must be protected - wind, sandstorms, being dropped, being hit by other objects – all damage the stone tablets - not to mention the many ways in which the letters carved in stone can be damaged so that the letters are no longer recognizable.

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

Neither of these types of message systems were used to write the letter to which Paul was referring. But a letter – written by the Holy Spirit – and He has written it upon the "hearts" of those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

This portion of the letter reminds me of what is said in Hebrews 10:16. God makes a covenant with Believers - "God will write His laws upon our hearts and in our minds." This has been so encouraging to me - even if I can't remember the chapter and verse – I can rest assured that I will just know that some things are right and some things are wrong - because the Holy Spirit has written God's Law in my heart and mind.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:4 and make notes:

"Such confidence" – this is a confidence that the old testament prophets probably did not know their salvation was based upon the belief that the Messiah would come – and that when He did – He would make restitution for all their sins - but they were still required to live according to the Law until the Messiah did come. So, the old testament prophets lived their lives - "hoping" that they were being faithful enough – and "hoping" that they were obeying the Law well enough to be acceptable.

Paul – and all Christians – can have this confidence because we no longer live by the Law – but we live by Grace - through faith. "This Confidence Is Ours" – Through Christ – Who Is Before God!

Before you start saying "this is just a bunch of stuff about a people that lived a long time ago" - please consider the appropriate timing - this letter to the Corinthians has to our day. It was only a few years ago when "Christian People" starting showing by their lifestyle - that it is really "okay" - to make babies outside of marriage.

Oh sure, we said with our mouths - that it was a sin - but our lifestyles showed everyone - "it is really okay - and not really a big deal." Our lifestyles began to broadcast to everyone - "we will actually help you" - and our "help" was not "helping them to get right with God" - our "help" was in living and maintaining their sinful life.

Of course it did not stop there. Once we started communicating - that we don't really believe what the Bible says about sin - and about the importance of living a Holy Life - our children started improving on their sin.

Today, you can ride around and see large signs on the side of the expressway advertising - "who's your daddy." DNA Paternity testing to see who is the biological father of a baby.

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

A few years ago when Christians started accepting sin in the lives of our children - we all knew who the father was. Often is the case today, when a woman finds herself expecting a baby - she has had so many partners - she has to have DNA testing to find out which one fathered the child. A man sees several women expecting a baby - and has to wonder which one of these he fathered.

Please – pay attention - this IS NOT Okay With God! There are serious consequences for this lack of morality and righteousness. There really is a Heaven where some to spend eternity with God. There really is a Hell where many will spend eternity away from God!

This is a desperate plea - to Everyone who claims to be a Christian - please be aware that our life is a letter - and everyone we come into contact with reads this letter - and no one reads this letter more often - and more thoroughly than our family.

I have been told - by "good church people" - that this is "old fashioned thinking" - that this just doesn't apply today. I understand this and expect it from Lost People - but from people who claimed to be saved?

God has not changed - God's Word has not changed - God's expectations have not changed! We have to stop living our lives - as a bunch of Christian Atheist. A "Christian Atheist" is a person who professes to believe in God with their mouth - but live their life as if God does not exist.

Here is an important principle for us to take from this text:

A letter of introduction might open the door and get someone to listen to us. A letter of commendation might get someone to give us a chance. Either of these kinds of letters - usually only get us the opportunity to apply for a job. And if there is some kind of testing before the job, and we cannot perform satisfactorily on the test - even though the letter speaks highly of us - and expresses confidence in our ability - If we cannot perform as the letter indicated – we lose the job.

However, when the work we have done – and the results of that work are visible to others - no written letter is needed. People can see the results we have attained – and they don't ask for letters.

It is like this in sharing the Gospel. Once people have witnessed our lifestyle - and how we interact with everyday things of life - a written letter isn't needed - and usually is not accepted - and it is the same with our words!

Our professing to be a Christian might get someone to listen to what we say we believe - but if our lifestyle does not line up with what we say - they simply are not going to listen to much else we say.

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

Our life – our lifestyle – is a letter that is read by all we come into contact with. Regardless of how often we say with our words that we are a Christian - the way we live our life - is the letter others believe - and it is the letter that is true!

Oh yes, we need preachers - oh how we need teachers - but the best preachers - and the most gifted teachers - cannot overcome the message of the letter - of our lifestyle before the community.

What we need more than anything else - is people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior - who live out their life as best they can – as if Jesus is living through them. We need people who profess to being a Christian - who do not accept sin – as "okay!" We need people who profess to being a Christian - who do not allow sin to continue in their homes. We need people who profess to being a Christian - who not only ask others to live according to God's Word - but apologize and repent when they fall short! We need people who present "the letter of their life" - that expresses the reality of a person trying with all their might to live a "Holy Life."

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

2 Corinthians - 10 - Living Letter

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 11 - New Covenant or Law

In the previous lesson from 2 Corinthians - we mentioned the Letters written on paper or on Stone - as compared to the Letter written in Spirit upon our hearts. The "Law" was written in Stone - it was a legal code.

There are those who teach - the Law was given for the express purpose of bringing death. Is it the Law that brings death? The Bible tells us - if we don't live up to the Law - the penalty is Death. So does that mean the purpose of the Law was to bring death?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:5 and make notes:

In Philippians 4 - we are told I can do all things – "through Christ who strengthens me" - but on my own – I can do very little.

I am a competent minister – I am a competent Pastor - but the competence I have – the competence I exhibit - the competence with which I go about my duties - this competence comes from God.

Within the human intellect - that I was born with - within the human intellect - that I have attempted to cultivate, nourish, and train - within this intellect - is NOT the ability to be a good, and effective minister.

When someone says they have been helped by the ministry I have performed - that accomplishment is not from "my ability" - nor from "my competence." That accomplishment is because God chose to work through me - to affect that person – or those people – in that way.

Whether it is the ministry within the Church – or it is the ministry of our daily occupation - or it is the ministry to our families - our competence does not come from "us" - our competence comes from God. If we are being more successful than others who are doing the same thing we are doing - it is not because of our superior intelligence – even though we may be above average in that area - it is not because of our superior abilities - even though we may have tremendous talents and skills.

Our success – in our family - in our work – in the church - is God working through us – it is God blessing us - it IS NOT US!

If we are honest- we recognize there are other people who are just as intelligent - there are others who are just as talented – etc - and they are not experiencing the success we are. We are "Wrong" - to take credit for whatever good we manage to accomplish - we are "Wrong" - to take credit for whatever success we are allowed to experience.

2 Corinthians - 11 - New Covenant or Law

Read 2 Corinthians 3:6 and make notes:

God has made every Christian – a competent minister of "a new covenant" - and this "new covenant" is not one of "the letter" - but instead is a covenant of "the Spirit." And as a whole in a very real sense - today's Christians are guilty of neglecting the "New Covenant."

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-8 and make notes:

The Law points sinners toward death – but Grace receives sinners who repent. What Moses was inspired to write on stone tablets was legal code – it was not Spirit. What Christians have written on our hearts is Spirit – it is Not Legal Code.

The Law did not cause Sin – The Law simply showed sin for what it is. The Law identified Sin – The Law revealed Sin. The Law – as it was given – was intended to be beneficial - to help people recognize sin. What the Law became to people was the Law of Death.

People came to understand they were not able to fulfill the Law - and since the consequences of failing to live up to the Law is death - to the people - the Law – became the Law of Death.

The Law had a "glory" - that "glory" shown on Moses' face – for a time - but the "glory" - shown on Moses' face diminished with time. What an appropriate display for the "glory of the Law!"

When the people first received the "Law" - how brilliantly the Law appeared. Now that we have the Law – we can tell what is sin. We no longer have to debate and wonder if this is wrong - or if this is right. What a wonderful thing – to receive the Law - but wait – as we walk with the Law – as we try to go about our daily lives with the Law - we come to realize - "the Law" not only identifies sin - the "Law" also prescribes Death to those who fail to keep the "Law." And alas – we fail the Law on so many counts – and occasions.

The Glory of the Law begins to fade – we move from being excited and glad to have received the Law - to the place where we understand that the Law makes no provision for the sinner to be saved from the death sentence. walking under the realization of a sentence of death - the Law loses its apparent glory - and becomes to a great many people – a very sad thing.

2 Corinthians - 11 - New Covenant or Law

But wait – we Christians have been given the Glory of Grace - wherein we not only find forgiveness for sinners – but we find the provision to make sinners become righteous. Whoa baby – now this is what I call "Glory" - and this Glory does not fade with time.

For me – the longer I live on this earth - the more I realize I fall short of the Law - the more I realize how hopeless I would be - if we were still under the Law - the more brightly the Glory of Grace appears to become!

Read 2 Corinthians 3:9 and make notes:

Those of us who are saved – certainly would agree - there is more Glory in Salvation than in Death.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:10 and make notes:

A small flashlight turned on in the middle of a moonless night will certainly appear to make great light - but that same flashlight turned on at noon on a cloudless day – will probably go unnoticed. That light looks bright in the presence of darkness - but cannot compete with the brilliance of the noon day sun.

Such is the comparison between the glory of the Law - and the Glory of Grace. Now that Grace has been given to man – in the presence of Grace - the Law does not appear to be glorious at all.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:11 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 11 - New Covenant or Law

It is not denied - the Law had glory when it first appeared – only that it's glory did not endure. Ah-h-h, but the Glory of Grace does not diminish! So, why are so many Christians today - trying to re-instate the Law into their Christian Life? Why are so many trying to bring the symbols of the Law - back into our Worship and Praise of God? Why are so many trying to bring the practice of the Law - back into our Christian Life?

To bring the practices of the Law and the symbols of the Law into our Christian – New Covenant – Living - would be to bring that which no longer has glory into our walk - in an attempt to displace that which has Glory that will last forever. Not an all inclusive list – but some of these things are:

having to worship on a certain day of the week eating only certain foods

wearing certain clothes or head wear blowing the shofar

reading the Scriptures in – or praying in - Hebrew and there quite a few others.

I do believe certain people have well intended hearts in trying to bring these things into Christian – New Covenant – life. I am equally convinced that Satan is behind such ideas. Yes, I did say - I believe Satan is behind these things. It is just like Satan – to try to get people who have received a New and Better Covenant - to bring in the practices and symbols of the Old and Lesser Covenant - to try and cause the present Glory - to somehow become diminished.

Think carefully about this - bringing symbols of the Law into the life of Grace - does that enhance the Grace - or diminish the Grace?

Now consider personally:

the things I am saying -

the things I am doing -

the way I conduct my life -

Am I enhancing the Grace - or am I diminishing the Grace?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: