

2 Corinthians – Section 2

A Study in 2 Corinthians 11 weeks

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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.

In the previous lesson we were told - we have a greater Glory than the Glory of the Law - and that the Greater Glory gives us Hope and Freedom from the Law. Does the Greater Glory of Grace give us a License to do things that were not allowed under the Law?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12 and make notes:

"We have such a hope" - What hope do we have? The hope that the grace of the Spirit will not be abolished like the law but that it will remain. We have a hope of seeing glory - not the Glory of the Law - that was on the face of Moses - but the Glory which the three apostles saw when the Jesus revealed himself.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:13 and make notes:

We do not need to cover ourselves as Moses did. In fact, we should NOT! We are actually expected to reflect the Glory. The Glory of the law was fading away, - it was coming to an end in Christ. The Glory of Grace – which we have - is not going to fade!

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

Read 2 Corinthians 3:14 and make notes:

Their minds were hardened through unbelief, and this will not change until they convert and believe in Christ. What happened in the case of Moses - continues to happen in the case of the law. This statement is not an accusation of the law, nor does it reflect on Moses, who veiled himself, - it was – and is – because of the narrow vision of legalist. The law had its proper glory. People today are – just like people in the Old Testament were - unable to see it.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:15 and make notes:

"Until this day" means not just until the time of Paul - but until our time also, and indeed, till the end of the world. The veil is not there because of Moses - but because of the carnal minds of people.

When the Old Testament is read aloud by the Jews - "the veil covers their hearts." They read the law, - but they do not understand because their spiritual eyes are so dim. They are like those of whom Scripture says: "They have eyes but see not; they have ears but hear not."

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

Read 2 Corinthians 3:16 and make notes:

This is a Wonderful Promise - especially in light of how often we hear people say "I just don't understand the Bible." When we turn to the Lord, the Holy Spirit reveals spiritual knowledge. For Christians – the promise is that the veil will be taken away, - and we shall then behold the holy Scriptures and be able to see the glory of the Lord. For All who turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17 and make notes:

This verse does not say - "The Lord is A spirit." It says, - "The Spirit is the Lord." In John 4:24, when Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman, - Jesus says God is a spirit, - meaning that he does not have a body. But in this verse - he is not saying that the Lord is a spirit - but rather that the Spirit is Lord.

The Spirit and God are equal. Moses turned his eyes toward God; we turn ours toward the Holy Spirit. But it is the Same!

Being in the Covenant of Grace - we have liberty! But is this a "liberty to sin?" The Old Covenant – The Law - did not give Liberty! The Law – the Old Covenant – gave limits and boundaries.

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

The New Covenant gives liberty - and because it demands only faith, we are able to be rescued from our condition. The person who has been blessed with the Spirit of the Lord - has been set free from the condemnation of the law. Those who lived under the Law - had to be concerned with obeying the Law - their salvation was closely connected with obeying the Law. In the Covenant of Grace – we have been given liberty from that concern.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and make notes:

Right here is one of the clues - to the question asked at the beginning of this lesson. We are being transformed into His Likeness!

Does God Sin? Does God desire to sin – but just refrains from doing so? If we are fully in His Likeness – would we desire to sin?

We are being changed from knowledge of the law - into the grace of the Spirit. And it must be remembered - the glory of the Spirit working in us - brings us to the glory of our inheritance as children of God.

What are we to take home with us from this passage of Scripture?

The Law produced children of slavery. Today, it bears witness to the New Covenant - and helps us see God's heart. If that were not the case – then the words of this passage would not be true; - "Yes, down to this very day when Moses is read, the veil covers their hearts" - but when any of us turn from the Old Testament to Christ, - "the veil is taken away."

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

When we make the change from the Old Testament Law - to the New Covenant of Grace - we find our deepest aspirations - shift from the Law - to Grace. And when this happens - we find ourselves looking for spiritual happiness - rather than earthly happiness.

There is a veil over the Old Testament, - but it is removed as soon as one comes to Christ. It is not the Old Testament - or the Law - is done away with in Christ. It is - the concealing veil that is done away with - so that The Law can be understood through Christ.

The real meaning - the real purpose - the depth of the Heavenly Father's Love - is all hidden and obscured by the Law without Christ. But when we come to Christ - and accept Jesus as our Savior - that which was obscured is laid bare - so that we can see the fullness of God's Love - we can see the riches of God's Favor - we can see the depth of God's Mercy. Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, - the veil is taken away.

There are 2 principle errors in this area - that are floating around in the Church today. One was addressed briefly in an earlier lesson - where Christians are trying to bring the Law into the Covenant of Grace - it is when Christians are saying that it is not sufficient to be saved - we must Live By The Law - in order to be acceptable to God. And these people work to get Christians back under the legal "works oriented" relationship with God

But the other error is just as bad. It is when Christians say - "the Law" has been done away with. When Christians say "the New Covenant" has no law and under Grace - "we can do anything"

This passage does not say - "The law or the Old Testament will be taken away." It is not true that the Grace of Jesus - took away that which had been covered - or that the Grace of Jesus has abolished it - or even made it useless! Instead of the Law being abolished - the covering that obscured the true meaning of the Law has been removed.

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

Those who approach the Scriptures in the True Sense of Grace - discover the order of events have a real meaning - the reasons for words and deeds have meaning - and the agreement of the Old Testament with the New, - so that not even a single point remains where there is no harmony.

Once we see the true Glory of Grace - once we can see the Law without the obscuring presence of the Old - we begin to see the fullness of God's Love for us - and the Law is not something that compels us "to do or not to do" - but the Law becomes more like "guard rails."

The person who is looking at the Law from the eyes of the Old Covenant - can see the Law as something - that is keeping us from doing what we really want to do. But the person who is looking at the Law from the eyes of the New Covenant - can see the Law as something that helps us see areas of danger.

People looking at the Law with the eyes of the New Covenant - see the Law as if I step over this "guard rail" – I am moving off the safety of the righteous road - and I am moving into the area that can cause me to wreck. I don't want to wreck – I don't want to become damaged, so that I am unable to minister - I don't want to become injured so that I cannot serve the Lord - so I will honor the advice of the "guard rail" – I don't try to drive on the other side.

The Christian who is living and moving in the Life of Grace - looks at the Law and sees helpful boundaries. The Christian living in the Glory of Grace - looks at the things God said "do not do" - and recognizes these are things that cause people pain - and the Christian living in the Glory of Grace - desires to "not cause pain" - it is the Likeness of God.

The person who is not living in the Glory of Grace - but only claims to be - might say it is okay to do the things the Law said was wrong - because the Law has been done away with by Grace. They have little concern of causing others pain - and sometimes even themselves - as long as they can justify doing what they want to do.

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

The person living in the Glory of Grace - looks at the Law where it says "do not steal" - and sees something that - not only causes pain but displeases our Heavenly Father - and lives by the principle that - "I will not take anything that does not belong to me." Being in the Likeness of God – we don't want to hurt our fellow man - or ourselves - and so it is with the parts of the Law that tell us that - we should not lie - should not covet - should not commit adultery - should not use the Name of the Lord in vain, etc.

Let us never be guilty of using the "Life of Grace" as an excuse to sin.

Under the Old Covenant – it was enough to avoid the reality of sin - as long as you did not technically sin – you were okay.

Jesus in more than one place – showed Grace when confronting someone guilty of sin. But Jesus made it clear – in the New Covenant we need to avoid even the appearance of sin. If the Law was completely tossed out in the New Covenant - Jesus would not have needed to say to avoid the "appearance" of sin.

The Christian walking in the understanding and the Law that has been illuminated by Grace - will not treat the Law as something that has been tossed out by God - but while understanding our acceptance to God - comes through Faith. Our Love for Him drives us to use the Law as a guideline of how we can best serve Him and please Him.

The veil that covers the Law - for those who are still trying to live in the Old Testament - is a sad thing to be sure. But for Christians today – if we are not careful – it can be a tragic thing. The veil that covers the heart when the Old Testament is read - can also be a veil when the New Testament is read.

Not only can we fail to grasp the true meaning of the Law - but if we are not careful - this same veil can cause us to fail to grasp the true meaning of Grace. Not only are the Scriptures of the Law and Prophets veiled from us - but also are writings of the apostles and Gospels are covered with a great veil.

Can we tell if there is a veil over our heart as we read the New Testament?

2 Corinthians - 12 - Without The Veil

There is an indication I believe – or at least a symptom. If we read God's Word, and find no zeal – if we find no learning – if we find no deepening of our understanding - then we may have a veil over our heart.

Let's read again - the verse we began with in this lesson – 2 Corinthians 3:12:
Are we Bold?
Is our Boldness evident to those around us?

Jesus said - when He returned to the Father in Heaven - He would send the Holy Spirit to do several things for us. One of those things – .is to help us understand all that Jesus said

Let us be Bold enough to call out to the Holy Spirit - to remove any part of the veil that is still between us and the Word of God.

Let us beg the Holy Spirit - to remove anything and everything that is clouding our understanding.

Let us surrender all parts of our life – all of our heart – and all of our understanding - to the Leading of the Holy Spirit - so that there will be no darkness obscuring our vision of God - or of our understanding of God's Word - or God's plan for us.

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

Paul had not been called to teach the Law - but to teach the Gospel of Grace. Paul viewed his calling in the New Covenant - as something so high on the positive scale - more than all the negative attacks put together were on the negative scale.

Earlier in this letter, it spoke of the "hope" of seeing a greater glory. And because of this hope it said "we are bold." Now it speaks of the hope that is inherent in the ministry that we have been called to.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1 and make notes:

This was not only significant statement in Paul's day – just a few years ago, it was reported that more than 1000 each month quitting Ministry. So, how can it be? When we know that we have been called - we are not as easily discouraged by the troubles that come our way

I have no negative things to say about people who are quitting the ministry. A lot of Christians think it is hard to Live A Christian life in our society. It can be very hard to be a minister.

Most ministers I know – think about quitting frequently. But when we know we are called to a particular ministry - we cannot walk away – just because "it's not fun today."

Paul acknowledges "his perseverance" IS NOT due to his personal strength - it is not because of his personal human merit. The perseverance to the assigned ministry - is All Due To The Mercy Of God.

2 Corinthians - 13 - An Open Life

The Mercy of God - first cleanses a person, - then makes them righteous, - adopts them as a child of God - and endows them with a glory - like the glory of God's own Son. To the casual observer - the Christian who appears to be bold - the Christian who does not appear to be discouraged in the face of a stream of troubles and setbacks - to the casual observer - this Christian might appear to be an extraordinary individual - they might even praise the Christian for their perseverance in the task.

This perseverance "must be" attributed to God's loving kindness, - for not only do we not sink down under the weight of all our trials, - we can even rejoice and speak boldly.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2 and make notes:

Notice the use of the word "we"? This is not "just Paul" - this is meant to include all the Corinthian Believers - as well as you and me today.

There are those who teach that the "Word of God" - Paul mentions in this text - refers to the Old Testament. If that is true - then Paul was concerned with people distorting the Law.

The letters of Paul give us a clear indication - Paul was not concerned with people distorting the Law - Paul was concerned with people distorting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The "word of God" Paul is referring to - is the message of Jesus Christ. Paul was concerned about those persons who are distorting the gospel of Grace - and literally robbing the New Covenant of liberty and freedom.

2 Corinthians - 13 - An Open Life

Some were "walking in craftiness." This is a clear reference to the false teachers. They tried to appear to the people as saints and apostles - but were full of innumerable secret sins.

Paul calls the Corinthians as his witnesses. Paul does nothing wicked and asks them to consider the testimony of his lifestyle - concerning what he is saying. Knowing Christ as the "true light,"

- we are to live our lives being illuminated by the true light. We are to "lay aside the works of darkness," - and "renounce those things which are shameful."

By doing all things in the light, - we can reflect the light itself, - so that it "shines" before others. And if we recognize Christ as "sanctification," - we will let our life stand apart, - in deed - as well as in word.

Rest assured - people who use exciting teaching to deceive the hearts of God's people - will be found guilty on the day of judgment. Even if they are not revealed in our lifetime. Those using the art of craftiness - to corrupt the Word of God - and try to make it say the opposite of what it actually says - will eventually be disfigured and disgraced.

The call for purity and candor in the way we minister - is not so that we can earn righteousness. We get that by grace and faith. The call to purity and to openness - is to make sure we "true ministers" of the Gospel - stand in clear contrast to those who only pretend to be ministers of the Gospel. We need to be clearly differentiated from those who still have their hearts and minds covered by a veil that clouds their understanding of the Scriptures.

Here is the "take home" part of this lesson:

These words are actually an invitation to lead a "better life." "This ministry" Paul was given - is the same ministry we are given today. It is a ministry of the New Covenant - it is a ministry of the Spirit - it is a ministry of Life and Righteousness - it is a ministry of Liberty and Glory.

2 Corinthians - 13 - An Open Life

When we grasp the splendor of the ministry of the New Covenant - it is difficult to become faint-hearted. There certainly can be no place for deceitfulness. And when we have grasped even a portion of the glory of the New Covenant - we cannot help but be Bold.

One of the things that marks the authenticity of a minister of the New Covenant - is the openness that is reflected in their daily lives. The authentic minister of the New Covenant will live what they teach - they are the same every day - they are the same in private as they are in public.

I want to give you a powerful list of suggestions. Every Christian should post in a prominent place in their home - perhaps in a place where it can be see everyday:

I will "renounce secret ways"

I will "renounce shameful ways"

I will "not use deception"

I will "not distort the Word of God" I will "set forth truth plainly"

I will "live privately as I live publicly"

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

Many of our earliest American settlers - especially those called Puritans - understood something that Paul understood - and it is something a great many Christians today - Don't appear to understand. I will share what that is in a few minutes.

Some of the False Teachers claimed the Gospel Paul was proclaiming - was only for some spiritually elite people. They were trying to convince the people - Paul's message was in many ways .obscure to the common people

Surely most of us have recognized that a large part of our population fails to see the Glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul doesn't argue the point that some people fail to grasp the message of the Gospel of Jesus. But he does address the reason why some people don't understand the message.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 and make notes:

If the Gospel is not clear - If the Gospel is difficult to understand - then – it is only so – for those who are perishing - and If this is the case - it is not the Gospel that is lacking - it is not the fault of the Gospel of Jesus that makes it appear veiled. It is completely the result of "unbelief."

This is a good place to remind ourselves - the "blindness of the unbeliever" - does not detract from the clearness of the Gospel. While unbelief Darkens the Splendor of Gospel - and unbelief casts a shadow over the Gospel message - Unbelief does no damage to the Gospel - Only our ability to grasp it.

2 Corinthians - 14 - Let Light Shine

We recognize there is an eventual tragedy for those who walk out their life in "unbelief" - an eternity away from God - and an eternity of suffering. But there is an immediate tragedy of "unbelief." It is finding ourselves subject to the "God of This Age" - instead of the Loving and Merciful God of all gods - the King of all Kings.

It is somewhat ironic - people who push away from God saying "I don't want anyone telling me what to do not even God" - these very same people find themselves falling under the un-loving, abusing, fully controlling, non-merciful, - control of the "god of this age."

There are many today - who know from first hand experience - what I am about to say is true. The one who commits a voluntary sin - comes under the tyranny of the "god of sin" - and then begins to be ruled by sin.

Unbelievers – having been blinded by that "no-good, not-good, not-god" – Satan - are not able to even gaze upon the Light of the Glory of the Gospel. Satan does such an effective job of dimming the sight of worldly people. But his ability is limited to this world. In the world to come - there will be no unbelievers, - only in this world will we find "unbelievers"

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5 and make notes:

Here is one - of a number of places in the New Testament - where we find a noticeable contrast between the Apostle Paul - and many self-proclaimed "apostles" of our day. Paul is never guilty of self-aggrandizing. Paul never claims to have superior knowledge of his own. Paul never claims to have superior spiritual abilities of his own. Paul – always attributes his works - his accomplishments – his abilities, his gifting - everything good in his life - to the power of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians - 14 - Let Light Shine

Paul even attributes the preaching that comes out of his mouth - as being Jesus Christ preaching through him. At most – Paul says of himself - "I am a servant of Jesus Christ" - or "I am a servant for your sakes." How does that compare with so many today - who spend considerable time - trying to convince people of their greatness - in one way or another?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6 and make notes:

The instruction from God - "Let Light shine out of darkness" - does not mean we have any light of our own - that we are to shine into darkness. The light we have is God's Light - that He made to shine in our hearts.

So, it is the Light from God that has been given to us - that we are instructed to - "Let it Shine Out The Darkness" - to those around us. It was God's Light that dispelled darkness at creation. The very Same God who said "Let there be light" and it was so - the very Same God who displaced darkness in the creation of our world - this is the very Same God who places His Light into our hearts and minds - when we accept Him.

The reason Paul preached Christ - the reason Paul was willing to be a servant for the sake of the Corinthians - was because God had dispelled the darkness of his heart and mind - and walking in the illumination of God's light - he simply cannot hold back from sharing the Message of Jesus with those who are still in darkness.

This concept of "God shining His light" into our hearts and minds - is fitting for Paul to use. If you recall Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus - Paul was knocked to his knees by a light that was shining brighter than the noon-day sun on a clear day. Yeah – Paul got it! God's Light !

2 Corinthians - 14 - Let Light Shine

This verse reminds us of what was made at the beginning of creation, - and is greater - in our renewed creation. God wants us to take something home from this text:

It is not we ourselves - but God who enables our faith - accepting us - and judging us by it.

Do we have the kind of attitude – Paul had?

I am a servant - I am a minister - of those who receive the gospel.

Christians today who know the fruits of humility - avoid the penalty of conceit - by imitating the Master - by loving one another – and serving one another. Perhaps because we live in such a litigious society - we spend too much time stressing over the letter of the law. It is good for us to keep reminding ourselves - Love and reverence of the Lord are the fulfillment of the law.

What the early American Puritans understood - that Paul also understood - that I think so many of us do not understand - the part most of us do grasp:

There is a general "Call" of God for every person to accept Jesus for Salvation. In addition to this "Call - there is an individual "Call" - or a personal "Call" to ministry. Most of us will probably acknowledge God "Calls" some individuals to ministry. We think of a "Call to Pastor" - or a "Call to Missionary" - or a "Call to Evangelist" - or a "Call to Children's Ministry" - and the list goes on. Most of us think only in terms of the "personal call to ministry" - as only to those who are called to official church positions of ministry.

What Paul understood - what the early American Puritans understood - what many of those involved in the Reformation understood - the individual "Calling" to be a Christian Mechanic - is just as spiritual as the "call to Pastor"; - the individual "Calling" to be a Christian Business Owner or Executive - is just as spiritual as the "Call to Missionary"; - the individual "Calling" to be Christian Health-care Provider - is just as spiritual as the "Call to Evangelist"; - and this list can go on and on.

2 Corinthians - 14 - Let Light Shine

Every Saved Person is "called" to the ministry. We are not to simply Praise God - that our Homework is finished - we are to be Praising God – Worshiping God - while we are doing the research - and writing the paper for the Homework. We are not to just Praise God - that we finished the assignment at work - we are to be Worshiping God - while we go about the assignment. We are not to only Praise God - when we have completed today's appointments - we are to be worshipping God while we are going from appointment to appointment .

God has "Called" each one of us to our time and to our place. God expects us to use the talents and skills He has given us - to affect the community where we live – work – and visit. It is not just the Pastors – the Evangelist – and the Missionaries - that are expected to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian is to be bringing the hope of health, - the hope of wholeness, - the hope of transformation - the hope of restoration - the hope of a new life - the hope of redemption - to the world around us. So many Christians are going about their daily life - with the attitude of - "I want to get away from my job so that I can minister for God."

Our individual "Call" to the work we do - is intimately connected to our Worship of God. Only when I can go about my job of welding these pieces of metal together as an act of worship to my God - can I be fulfilling my "Call." Only when I can go about my job of stocking these shelves as an act of worship to my God - can I fulfill my "Call." Only when I can go about answering the phone at work as an act of worship to my God - can I fulfill my "Call" - and so it is - with whatever our occupation or our vocation may be.

Students – you are not studying so that one day you can be a minister. You are to be a minister while you are a student. Employees – you are not working so that one day you can be a minister. You are to be a minister in and through your work. Business Owners – you are not investing so that one day you can be a minister - you are to be a minister while you invest.

Whoever we are - and whatever our individual "Call" may be - my "Calling" is not for myself - my "Calling" is not for my own satisfaction - even though we often find some joy in our "Calling" - my "Calling" is for God - and it is for His Glory.

2 Corinthians - 14 - Let Light Shine

The mechanic does not wait for a special occasion or for one day a week to repair the engine. They do that every day – because That Is What They Do. The hairdresser or the barber - does not wait for a special day to cut and fix hair. They do it every day because That Is What They Do. The bank teller does not tell the person who comes to their window - "I can't take your deposit today I'm waiting for a special day." No! - they will take your money every day - because That Is What They Do. I know you get the idea

Let's not wait for some "special event" - or some "special time" - so that we can Let our Light Shine As Christians. Letting God's Light Shine - it's just "What We Do!" Let us be true to our title – "Christian." Let us Let The Light Shine - so that we can help another person find their way "out of the darkness" - into God's marvelous light.

Who was it, that allowed God to shine through them - that we might know God in the face of Christ Jesus? Are we grateful that they did? Are there others out there in darkness that need the Light as badly as we did? Are we willing to allow God to shine through us so that someone else can have the opportunity that we have?

If we Really are a Christian - That is What We Do!

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

I want to begin by asking that we consider a few questions: If we have something we believe to be of great value - where do we place it? Do we take that which has great value and just lay it down anywhere? Do we take that which has great value and try to put it in a place where it will be safe and protected? Don't we typically place things according to the value they hold to us?

Some things we put into special cabinets so that they can be seen and admired - but not touched and handled. Some things we put up out of sight - perhaps so the children won't play with them and damage them - or perhaps so that others won't see them and be tempted to take them.

Some things we put into a waterproof container - to make sure they are not damaged by moisture. Some things we put into a fireproof safe - to prevent damage from fire. Some things we take to the bank and placed in their security vault.

Suppose we go outside - where our small children are playing in the sand - and we discover they are using a spoon, or a cup, or a bowl they have taken from inside our home - and using it to dig in the sand. Would our reaction be different if they have taken things from our "everyday" kitchen utensils - than if we discover they have taken things from our valuable China or our real Silverware?

Earlier in this letter to the Corinthians – we were reminded - the Salvation we have is God's Grace – nothing of our own doing, our worth, or our accomplishment, etc. And we were told that the "glory" that was with the Law - will be even greater "glory" in the Saved People of the covenant of Grace. We were also told to let light shine into darkness - and it was made clear the "light we have" is not our light - it is God's Light - that He has given to us.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 15 - Earthen Vessels

This might be a good place to recall – the false teachers were trying to discredit Paul - and the message of the Gospel he was sharing. One of the ways they were trying to do this - was by pointing out - Paul wasn't displaying the Letters of recommendation from high and prominent people – like they did. Paul wasn't advertising his greatness and superiority over others - like they did. What a paradox!

The in-estimable value of the divine treasure - as compared to the apparent worthlessness of the ministers in whom this treasure is entrusted. The in-describable splendor of the divine treasure - as compared to the relative un-attractiveness of those who contain this divine treasure.

I don't think there could be a greater contrast between the striking splendor of the Divine Glory and the frailty and un-worthiness of the human vessels in which this Glory has been placed. The reference to earthen vessels - is speaking of the weakness of human nature - which can do nothing unless empowered by God.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 and make notes:

The original language of this text - uses terms of gladiators or military combatants - to describe the divine and vivid antithesis - of the reality we experience as Christians.

1. "hard pressed on every side" - But not completely cornered - or moved into a place where we cannot move. We are never driven to surrender.
2. "bewildered" - but never at our wits end
3. "at a loss" - but never totally at a loss

2 Corinthians - 15 - Earthen Vessels

4. "hounded by our foe" - But never left totally to his mercy
5. "knocked to the ground" - But never permanently grounded.

What does this text have to say to us today?

In much the same way - as the real treasures of the average household - are not visible to the typical visitor - the real treasure of the Christian - is not visible to the lost people around us. This connects with the earlier message of the Glory being "veiled" - to those who are lost that which has the greatest value - is not always out in the open for everyone to see. Sometimes – the things of plain and ordinary appearance – actually hold that which has great value.

The term "earthen" - is an allusion to the frailty of our human nature and the weakness of our flesh. It is no better than earthenware, which is easily damaged and destroyed by disease – by death and even - variations of temperature. The utter frailty of the Christian human vessel - highlights the all-sufficient power of God.

The message the Holy Spirit is sharing through Paul in this short text has two parts:

The First Part Of The Message - Both the greatness of the things given and the weakness of them that receive show the power of God.

We generally accept the concept - that to accomplish good things - we have to have good things to work with - "better ingredients – better pizza." We say in order to accomplish great things - we have to have great employees.

How often do we blame our failure on the weakness of what we have to work with or work through? The power of God is most conspicuous when it performs mighty works by using lowly things like human beings.

2 Corinthians - 15 - Earthen Vessels

Consider the act of praying - not to enter into temptation. The apostles – it would appear sometimes prayed and did not receive that deliverance. How many thousand sufferings did they experience in their lifetimes?

There have been many times when one of Christ's servants - has been struck down and their physical life destroyed - and their foe declared - the message has been silenced. But the loss of a Christian's physical life - IS NOT their destruction - at that point – they are in fact better off than they could ever be on this earth. And the message of the Gospel - HAS NOT been silenced by killing a Christian Messenger.

The reality is that on a number of occasions - the message has become multiplied - because several others feel inspired to pick up the message - and follow the example that was set by the fallen brother or sister.

God was with them, like a shepherd, when they were in need. He looked after their interests, so that their enemies would not get the better of them.

Our afflictions come not only from enemies but sometimes even from our own households - and friends. These things are permitted by God - not for our defeat - but for our discipline. If none of these things ever happened - the greatness of God's power would never be revealed.

God delivers us from afflictions not when there are no longer any afflictions - but when in our affliction we are not crushed because of God's help.

The Second Part Of The Message - As a general rule – we don't place things of great value in just ordinary places - do we? Where we place things - says something about how we value the "thing" - OR it says something about how we value the "place."

Consider for a moment the fact that - Divine treasure is concealed in poor and humble vessels. Those coming from a humble point of view - might look at this and conclude - God does not value the Glory. Those coming from a proud point of view - might look at this and conclude Wow! - am I Great – or What!

2 Corinthians - 15 - Earthen Vessels

I submit to you – neither of these views - gives us the message from this passage. This passage speaks of God's monumental Love for us. God loves us SO MUCH – that He gives to us – that which is more valuable than anything on this earth.

In the opening questions of this lesson - most of us probably thought in terms of the more valuable the thing is - the better the location we choose to put it. When our concern is focused solely upon the value of the "thing" - we will focus upon the quality the security – the safety - the protection the location can provide.

However, when our focus is more upon our love - we do sometimes take things we hold as very valuable - and place them in places where they are at risk.

Consider the adult child who asks their parents to give them one of their prized possessions. It might be a family heirloom - it might be valuable china - it might be valuable jewelry. The parent who is focused solely upon the value of the item - will refuse the request if they deem the child's home as not "safe" - maybe they don't believe the grandchildren will be kept away from it - maybe they don't believe the child will protect it - and maybe even abuse it.

The parent who is focused upon their love of the child - will pass it along with a smile on their face - and will have joy in their heart. And if someone points out the danger - if someone points out the child may allow it to become damaged - the person motivated by love will acknowledge the risks - and then say - it is worth the risk - just to see their child experience the joy - of the blessing.

God's Love For Us! That my friends – is why we receive Grace - that is why we receive God's Glory.

Please think about this: God has chosen to Risk Divine Treasure - on you and me! When we find ourselves at the end of our resources and abilities - we are in a place to begin to discover the unlimited resources of God - and His all-powerful ability.

2 Corinthians - 15 - Earthen Vessels

The person who allows God to work through them - even though they themselves are weak - allows God - to manifest His glory. For surely God is great - who can accomplish great things in spite of our weakness and inability. Human beings certainly are not a fitting place for the Glory of God. We are so easily damaged - we are so easily contaminated - there is such a high risk that the Glory of God -will be mis-used and abused. But because of God's love for you and me - He says "it is worth the risk" !

Let's get out there - and live our lives as though we are grateful - for the risks God is willing to take - by placing His glory in such frail vessels.

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

What if you heard someone say - the suffering and the death of Jesus - has no merit – and there is No Glory in His suffering or death? After our initial – and perhaps loud - negative reaction to that statement - could it be true?

In the previous lesson – the measure of God's love for us - is revealed in the fact that He is willing to Risk - His Divine Treasure upon us. In this lesson – our professed Love Of God is going to be challenged - as we show the level of Our Love of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:10 and make notes:

The death of Jesus - which Paul carried with him - is the daily death - which he died. Christ himself shares in the death and the sufferings of Believers. His life is made manifest in our bodies.

What looks like weakness and destitution - in fact proclaims His resurrection. How do we manifest daily in our bodies - the life of Christ? We'll get to that in a minute.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:11 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 16 - Life In Death

In the previous lesson - a paradox was given – contrasting the Divine Treasure - to the Earthen Vessels - in which God has chosen to entrust His Treasure. And we read such things as "hard pressed" - "perplexed" – "persecuted" – and "struck down." Verses 10 & 11 sound like a natural conclusion to such experiences - we are always exposed to "death" - we carry "death" around with us - but we never die!

This too sounds like a paradox – in the midst of constant death – there continues life. Consider how often – the apostle Paul was exposed to - and experienced life threatening danger. He faced perilous dangers on many occasions – and on more than one day – he experienced perilous hazard - hour after hour throughout the day.

Contemporary Christians tend to focus on the "once for all" baptismal identification with Christ. But here – in this text – it appears the Holy Spirit is trying to get us to grasp the attitude - that we are to daily mortify our sinful nature. Several of us have experienced the loss of a loved family member. Not all, - but some of our comfort - has been in the knowing that there is "life after death." Some of us, - because of "life through death" - someone put themselves in death's pathway - so that we could live - or someone donated a vital organ to be transplanted upon their death, - so that someone else could live.

Hopefully, it is the majority of church people - have received the greatest "life through death" experience. Jesus died so that you and I - could have "life everlasting." But this passage isn't really referring to "life AFTER death" - nor is it referring to "life THROUGH death." What this passage is referring to - is what we can call - "Life In The Midst Of Death."

Each time a Christian refuses to give in - to despair in the face of death - and they are delivered – we experience something of the "Resurrection Power." Jesus is the one who said, "a servant is not greater than his master" - "if they persecuted me, then they will persecute you." And history has proved it to be true – there is a certain unity and sharing of persecution with the master and servants - as the master is persecuted – so are the master's servants.

2 Corinthians - 16 - Life In Death

As Christians, we experience a fellowship with Christ by way of suffering. We do not suffer because of doing wrong - but for the sake of the body of Christ, - which is the church. He suffered for us - so that his life, which is eternal, - might be made manifest in our mortal bodies, so that they too might become immortal.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:12 and make notes:

In the first chapter of this letter – Paul told the Corinthians - he suffered for Christ and God comforted him. And because of that comfort - he is now able to comfort the Corinthians in their suffering.

In this chapter Paul is telling them – that while death is at work in him – life is at work in the Corinthian Christians. Paul did not see a casual relationship between his being exposed to the danger of death – and the Corinthians being exposed to life. Paul was convinced - the relationship is proportional - the deeper the apostolic suffering – the richer, the fuller, and the more joyous - are the privileges of the Corinthian Christians.

The thing in the middle – between his experience - and their experience - was the "divine comfort" - he received. The more divine comfort he received from God - the more comfort he could share with the Corinthians. Paul was communicating to them a simple message - when he can see the Corinthians experiencing life - then he knows that his sufferings are not fruitless – or they are not wasted.

Let's look at the message we are to take home with us from these verses:

Paul had managed to attain the understanding - that dying with Christ did not refer to the day of his martyrdom - or the specific day they would take his physical life from him. Paul had come to understand - dying with Christ was a daily experience.

2 Corinthians - 16 - Life In Death

For the Christian today – dying with Christ is a daily experience of denying our physical desires so that the ministry to the needs of others can take place.

I suppose the great majority of Christians - when they hear a statement like this - think in terms of people being physically tortured for preaching the gospel - and this still does happen in some countries today. In our own country – sometimes it means a person loses their job - just because they are trying to live a Godly life – and they have a manager who despises Christians.

For some in our day – it means the wife - works a full time job and then takes care of the home - so that her husband can serve as the Pastor of a small church – and the congregation can have the benefit - of a Pastor who is there for them when they need one. For some today – it means giving up a comfortable living in the secular world - so that they can serve as a Pastor of a church and God's people can have the encouragement and help they need.

For some today – it means giving up - going to the places you want to go - or giving up doing the fun things you want to do - so that you can help a person or family who needs help. For some today – it means not buying the new wardrobe you have been envisioning - so that you can help a person – or family – get the clothes they need. For some today – it means not watching that favorite program on TV - or missing a couple of hours of sleep - just so you can visit with that person who is hurting or discouraged.

Let's be blunt about this: There is nothing meritorious or glorious in death - or in suffering. The glory and the merit are found solely in the reason - or in the purpose - of one's suffering - or one's death. There is no merit in a person dying – for physical death is the eventual end of all of us. There is no merit in a person being hurt – or getting sick – and then suffering because of the injury - or the disease.

However, there can be merit – for the person who died - in order to prevent another person from dying. The merit – or the glory – of their death - is not in the simple fact that they died. The merit and glory is found - in the fact that they made it possible for another person to live.

2 Corinthians - 16 - Life In Death

There are many of us today, who would not be here physically- if it had not been for the sacrifice of life – another person gave on our behalf. There is no glory or merit in a person having a painful and torturous disease - but there can be glory and merit in the way others respond to the hurting person.

In so many cases, - the sacrifices of those who cared for the diseased person - did not change the end - the person suffered and died. But what they did change - is the level of suffering and distress. They made the suffering a little less – they made the discouragement a little less - they did not change the end result - but they did change the journey. What they did change – the person was not abandoned - and did not have to go through it alone or forgotten.

In a similar vain as what Paul was saying to the Corinthians - when we can see a person repent of their sins - and come into the newness of life found only in Jesus - that makes it all seem worthwhile – that we missed something we wanted or that we were in some way mis-treated.

If we can see sinners come into life in Jesus Christ - then we can go on willingly – being handed over to suffering. We can go on – dying daily for the cause of Christ.

Are we willing to Die - so that Others May Have Life?

And while it might be physical death - more often it is dying to my personal wants - so that another can have "life." Oh, sure – we're Christians - but the way so many people live today - we make the suffering and the death of Jesus – wasted, useless, - and count for nothing.

Not only are we demonstrating the level of our Love For God - in how we live our lives - But we are also giving - or taking away - the glory of Jesus' suffering and death!

Can you grasps it? We can take the Glory away from Jesus' death?

2 Corinthians - 16 - Life In Death

Jesus' suffering and His death - has no glory - and it has no honor - and it has no merit - if no one accepts Jesus as Savior - if no one repents of their sins - if no one becomes a Christian in lifestyle - if the eternal life that has been made possible for you and me - does not cause us to be willing to "die daily" - for the help of others.

Where is the glory of Jesus death?

Where is the merit of all Jesus' suffering?

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

Paul is responding to the False Teachers who claimed Paul was suffering because he had little faith. According to the false teachers, faith ought to guarantee that there will be no suffering at all. We still have false teachers today who are teaching this.

Paul teaches - to the contrary, - he has endured all things precisely because of his faith. Not only in Paul's day - but there are teachers today - who proclaim with force - Christians can only be complete – by participating in Circumcision - or in other rites and rituals of their Old Religion – Judaism. Let's just consider one of these tenets:

If this belief is correct - that circumcision served - instead of baptism in the saints of old, what can we say of those who pleased God - before circumcision was commanded? They pleased him by faith, - because, as it is written in Hebrews: "Without faith it is impossible to please God"?

To the false teachers I say: not only in regards to circumcision - but also in regards to rituals - to foods – to clothes - to horns – to language - it has never been these things!

Read 2 Corinthians 4:13 and make notes:

The Spirit who empowered the prophets of the O.T. - is the same Spirit who empowered the apostles of the N.T. Paul reflects on the psalms - where we can find heavenly wisdom - that is especially fitted to encourage us in dangers. The psalmist uttered these words when he was in great danger, - danger from which there was no apparent possibility of escape. Paul found himself in similar circumstances. Just as it had been with David - it was with Paul - both the Psalmist and Paul's expression of thanks - was bubbling up from a vindicated faith - and a trust in God. Because of his faith – he could not remain silent.

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

Read 2 Corinthians 4:14 and make notes:

He who raised Jesus from the dead will raise us also - and we understand from the N.T. That those of us who have received this promise - are expected to do God's will - and to walk in his commandments - and to love the things which he loved, - and to abstain from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking and false witness.

We are not expected to live this way to earn the promise - but to demonstrate that we have been made new in Christ Jesus. We are to be "Living Evidence" - or a "Living Testimony."

Paul had seen the risen Jesus. Paul was convinced the resurrection was a reality. Paul had a firm conviction of personally being resurrected one day. There just wasn't anything the false teachers could say - in fact – there wasn't anything anyone could do - short of taking his physical life - to stop him from sharing about God - and the Good News in Jesus Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:15 and make notes:

God does not want anyone to be excluded from his gift. And yet - not everyone has received the word of faith,

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

Paul knew God's will, and he was not afraid to suffer persecutions and perils - as long as he could preach to everyone - so that more people might believe. God did not raise Christ from the dead for the sake of one person only - but for the benefit of us all.

Being so different from the False Teachers - Paul wasn't preaching and teaching for his own personal benefit - and he wasn't enduring hardships for any personal gain. He was enduring all – for the sake of the New Converts - as the Grace of God would be able to take root in the hearts of New Believers - as the Grace of God would be able to grow and to produce fruit in the lives of New Believers.

How many might be impacted by the Gospel? How much more glory would God receive as the servants – willing to endure for the sake of others increased in number.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16 and make notes:

In times of persecution - our soul advances. Every day that we endure persecution - it adds something more to our experience of faith. As the body decays by being scourged and persecuted, - the inward man is renewed by faith, hope. So very often, it appears the hope of the soul - is in direct proportion to the suffering of the body.

The Holy Spirit – speaking through Paul said, - the inner man is renewed day by day - in order that he may become perfect, - but the false teachers would have us believe we begin with perfection. The false teachers seek to lead the unwary astray - while the true teachers of God's Word - attempt to uplift the weak.

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

Paul wasn't living out his life in denial - Paul was realistic in his assessment - Paul recognized up close and personal - that all this toil and persecution - was in fact taking a toll on him physically. Paul was also realistic enough to recognize - that at the same time his physical body was growing weary and weaker - his spiritual being - and it's powers were continually increasing in strength.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17 and make notes:

All our present afflictions are not light - are they? And far too many of them are not momentary are they? Sometimes they are very heavy – and painful - sometimes they last for months – or years.

Paul is saying that our present afflictions are light - because they are happening within time and space. In return for this light tribulation, - we shall gain a degree of glory beyond measure.

The patient person, who prefers to bear wrongs without committing wrongs in return - discovers two things:

One – they lessen what they suffer in patience. Two – they escape worse things.

The impatient person, who will commit a wrong in an effort to avoid being wronged by another, seldom – if ever – escape their suffering - and usually bring upon themselves even more suffering - and more grievous ills.

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

In yielding to evils that are brief and passing, we do not destroy the good - which is great and eternal. Our present light affliction, - which is for the moment, - prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure. Paul identified things like imprisonment, arraignment, daily peril, - and many other things we might call unbearable hardships. Paul – called them light burdens, - not because they really were so by nature - but because the reason behind their happening produced such an attitude in him - that he would not turn back in the face of these oncoming threats.

Expectation of the glory we are destined to attain, - and of that unceasing enjoyment helps us bear with these hardships - one after another. And helps us consider them to be of little consequence - in the big scheme of things.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18 and make notes:

Paul is saying that people who long for heavenly things - despise the things of this world, - because in comparison with the Heavenly things - these earthly things are nothing. Our present afflictions will be light - and our future will be glorious - if we turn our desires away from visible things - and concentrate on spiritual ones instead. Far from being surprised or troubled, - let us endure developments with complete fortitude and endurance, - having regard - not to the distress - but to the gain accruing to us from it.

People intent on making money - who involve themselves in business transactions - do so - knowing there are dangers . They could lose money instead of making money. There is the danger that they may have to do without some of the comforts of life - for a time – just to get the business going. And yet they are ready to accept the danger with a sense that the hardship is worth the expectation of gain.

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

In the very similar way - we must keep our mind on the wealth and spiritual riches accruing to us in the spiritual- and that will help keep the earthly hardships in perspective.

What are we to take home with us from this text?

We must not lose heart – we must not become discouraged - by the way things look – outwardly. Sometimes a person can appear to be dwindling away - sometimes it can be us – we are sure we are dwindling away on the outside - we can start hearing the little voice telling us "I can't take it any more" - but if we listen to our inner man - we often find him saying – "hey, I am growing stronger."

Somewhere behind the statements of the "seen and the unseen" - is the idea of "the already" and the "not yet." What is seen "right now" by mortal vision - is nothing compared to what is seen in the "what is going to be" by spiritual vision. How many of us have traded our "not yet" - to indulge our "right now" - in regards to financial things- or in regards to a great many physical and earthly things?

I doubt that everyone who has done so - is honest enough to admit it - but I am convinced that most of us who have done so - will readily admit - "we regret" having traded our "not yet" - just to have the "right now." The few years in school is such a short time compared - to the rest of our adult life.

There are those who jump out of school before it is finished - and only some – return later to finish it. Sadly most do not ever finish it if they leave. The proof is clear - those who are not willing to endure the unpleasant restrictions of school - and try to get into the "right now" of life the overwhelming majority will suffer financially the rest of their life because of that trade.

How many of us have traded our future freedom - and gone into heavy debt - just so we could enjoy something "right now?" If we can see that it isn't a good trade in so many areas of earthly life - why do we have so much trouble understanding that it is not a good trade concerning our salvation - concerning our eternity?

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

What excuse have we got - if we choose the temporary things - instead of the eternal? Even if the present is enjoyable, - it does not last. Though the sorrow it engenders - does sometimes last a long time - and sometimes it cannot be alleviated.

What excuse will we have - if we who have been accounted worthy of receiving the Spirit - and have enjoyed so great a gift - grovel and fall down before the things of this earth?

I wonder how many will make a connection between this text - and Romans 10:9, where we are told that - "if we believe in our heart AND confess with our mouth" - we will be saved?

Can we truly and sincerely believe – without saying? As I believe – so do I speak!

Here is a little nugget: It is true for all of us - as we listen to ourselves – or to others - what we speak – reveals what we believe!

Oh sure, we might kid around a little - we might speak differently from our heart from time to time - but as we listen to what is said over the long haul - it reveals what a person believes.

As We Believe – So Do We Speak!

As people we meet hear us speak - what are we revealing - that we believe?

2 Corinthians - 17 - Spiritual Vision

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

Some people are hoping they will live a "good enough" life - to be allowed into Heaven. Others don't believe there is a Heaven.

Some people believe there will come a day - when people who have died - will rise up from death – the resurrection. Others don't believe there is a resurrection. They believe when physical life is over - that is all there is.

These same opposing views existed among the Corinthians. Many did not believe in the resurrection - others were confused about what to believe - and it was affecting their understanding of the gospel - and affecting their Christian walk. So it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to address some of this - through Paul in the letter to the Corinthians.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1 and make notes:

I believe the translations that say "tent" - are more appropriate for our modern understanding - than those which say "tabernacle." In our contemporary language, - "tabernacle" can bring several different types of structures - into the minds of the reader or the hearer. Some of these might even be of substantial materials.

But the word "tent" - brings a very similar picture into everyone's mind. "Tent" causes us to see a structure that is not only temporary, but is also fragile. A tent is easily damaged – a tent requires a lot of maintenance to keep it from falling apart on you. "Tent" sounds a lot more like our physical body - than "tabernacle" - in our modern language.

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

Even if the Christian's "tent" is completely destroyed – even to the point of being so dissolved that you cannot identify its remnants – we have this assurance that our "building" from God - is still ours in heaven. The resurrection body we will receive - will be completely immune to disease or corruption of any kind. The redeemed – or glorified body – will be indestructible.

On earth, our spirit man is clothed in flesh and blood, - which is the visible and organic body. When this body is left behind, - the spirit man will live in a heavenly body. This is referring to the resurrection, - which many of the Corinthians did not understand or accept.

There are many non-Christians religions - which have a belief in some type of immortality that can be attained. But the immortality spoken of in this text - far exceeds the teachings of any pagan religion. The Christian message speaks of the Christian body being redeemed - not just the spirit alone.

When we consider all the frailties of our human bodies - when we consider the strong pull of physical sinful desires - when we consider all the limitations of this body - we can get pretty excited about the promises of the glorified body we will receive.

Some have been troubled by the phrase - "if this earthly tent is dissolved" - thinking this reveals some uncertainty Paul has about God's promise. Some have even suggested - Paul had possibly become discouraged by the apparent delay in Christ's return.

The only thing Paul was uncertain of - was Jesus coming back before Paul's physical body dissolved - or was Jesus coming back after Paul's physical body dissolved. Either way, Paul was certain - he was going to have a redeemed body. If Jesus came back after Paul's physical life ended - then he would get his redeemed body. But if Jesus came back before Paul's physical life ended – then he would immediately get a redeemed body.

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

Read 2 Corinthians 5:2 and make notes:

The heavenly dwelling - is the incorruptible body which we will put on in the resurrection. We are groaning now - because what is to come is far better than what we now have.

As already mentioned – almost every religion has some kind of teaching on an immortal body that can be attained by some. So it isn't unreasonable to read this - "we groan" in our longing to be clothed in a heavenly dwelling - as referring to all of people – not just Christians.

The concept of being "clothed" - is really simple. When we look at one another – we don't see the spiritual person – we see the physical body. The spiritual person lives inside. The spiritual person we are - is "clothed" in a physical body – or tent – at this time. Christians will one day be "clothed" - in a "heavenly" dwelling – or a "redeemed" body – or a "glorified" body.

There are some groups who teach - we receive this heavenly body when we are baptized. If this were a true interpretation – then it wouldn't make much sense for Paul - or any Believer – to be longing for it after we are baptized. And it would very difficult to make the case that Paul hadn't been baptized when we wrote this passage.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:3 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

"When we are clothed – we will not be found naked." Every person will rise from physical death but not everyone will rise to glory. Some will rise to honor and others will rise to dishonor, - some to a place of eternal joy and peace and others to a place of eternal punishment.

Everyone, righteous and unrighteous alike, - will exist for ever and ever. But the lost are consigned to hell, - and there - they will be punished - and will be naked for ever and ever.

When we get to Heaven – we are not going to be a bunch of naked disembodied spiritual beings. This concept of a spiritual being - that is no longer in the physical body – is a naked being – was fairly common among several Greek philosophies of Paul's day.

Some of those philosophies – like their contemporary counterparts today - teach that it is desirable to set the spirit free from the confines of this physical body. Some of them even teach that we cannot be holy - until we do break free from our fleshly body.

While some of this teaching can sound reasonable at a quick glance – it simply does not line up with God's Word - that tells us to discipline and train our physical body - to live a holy and godly life. If it were not impossible to live a righteous life in this body, - then God's Word would not tell us to do so.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:4 and make notes:

Some teach - what Paul is saying here - is that we are oppressed by bodily sufferings and death. This is not the message at all. We don't groan to be free from the fleshly body. Anyone who doubts that - only needs to check into how much effort and how much money - people are willing to put forth - in order to get to stay in this physical body.

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

It doesn't take a philosophy degree - or a theological degree to understand by nature – we don't want to be free from our body at all. What we want – what we desire so much - as to "groan" for it - we want to be free from the corruption and frailty of this physical body.

People in every generation of man's existence - have lost every earthly thing they have - just trying to obtain "immortality. When it comes right down to it – our natural and basic desire is simply not to be a "naked" spiritual being. We groan – and some are even burdened - because we want to be clothed with the "heavenly dwelling." We want to be clothed – and - we want our "clothing" - or dwelling place – to be indestructible – we want it to be immune to disease and death – we want to be clothed with a dwelling that is strong. None of us wants one that is weak and fragile.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:5 and make notes:

The word translated "deposit" - in the original language – had two meanings - and both were in common use in transactions of that day:
the first meaning - was a pledge or guarantee that obligated a further payment -
the second meaning - was a partial payment with a note that gave the payee -
a legal claim to the goods covered by it.

Either one of these definitions sounds pretty encouraging in regards to Christians receiving the "heavenly dwelling." Having given us the Holy Spirit – God has obligated Himself to give the further payment – or having been given the Holy Spirit – this gives us legal claim to the rest of the goods.

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

I like them both – and believe both definitions apply in this case – so we don't have to choose. The Spirit is our guarantee because he is the agent of our adoption. God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. What the Holy Spirit is saying in this text through Paul - shows us that these things were prepared from the beginning.

It is not only "Just Now" - that this has been decreed - but it was from the moment of creation, when God fashioned Adam. God did not create the first man in order that he should die - but in order to make him immortal. And to help us understand how much God wants us to have it - God gives Christians - the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. God is presented as having made a commitment to us - and He is committed to fulfill His promises.

Since God the Creator - foresaw the sin of Adam, - He prepared a remedy for it. God himself has given us - the first fruits of the Spirit, - so that by the miracles which the Spirit does in our midst - we may be reassured - that the promises of future glory are true.

Our groaning to be clothed with the heavenly body - is not "just the desire of our human being." It is because God has made us "for this purpose." And God so much wants us to know and to be assured of this end – that God not only gave us the written promise – But God has also given us a Spiritual Deposit – the Holy Spirit.

Christians not only have the external written promise as an assurance - But Christians also have the internal assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit - the guidance of the Holy Spirit – the instruction of the Holy Spirit – the help of the Holy Spirit – the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

How can we NOT be assured of the coming of the heavenly dwelling for all eternity that awaits every person who is Saved? Once this body, our earthly home, is left behind, - the spirit man of a Christian will enter the heavenly realm. And we will receive a glorified body

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

We do not look toward being delivered from a body - but delivered from the corruption that is in the body of this earth. But an important part of this message is that not everyone will receive a glorified body. Some people will rise to honor - and others will rise to dishonor.

Since God the Creator - foresaw the sin of Adam, God prepared a remedy for it. God has given Christians the Spirit as a guarantee - so that we might know - that he will not allow us – the People of his Spirit - to perish.

If the assurance given to Christians - does not get a person excited about being a Christian - maybe we need to examine our being a Christian. If having been given the Holy Spirit - does not keep a person enthusiastic about being saved - then we can be fairly sure of either 1 of 2 things:

One – they do not know or understand what it means to have the Holy Spirit or

Two – they do not have the Holy Spirit.

Let's examine ourselves - Let's examine our Salvation - Are We Saved? If so, Are we living as though This is All We have?

Or

Are we living as though we have something better?

To every one of us who is Saved - Let us Rise Up - Let us get Enthusiastic - Let us Stop Apologizing for being a Christian - Let us start Sharing Our Hope!

2 Corinthians - 18 - Clothed or Naked

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

In the previous lesson – we were told - people want - to be in a body that is indestructible - a body that is immune to disease and death - and we want it so badly – we "groan." To say that we "groan" for it – refers to how intensely our heart yearns for this indestructible body.

Also in the previous lesson - we were told - God has given Christians - His Holy Spirit as a deposit - to assure us that we WILL receive a heavenly body - when we leave this physical body.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6 and make notes:

While it may not be true of young or immature Christians - mature Christians not only "groan" in anticipation of the glorified body - but at the same time we are "confident" - And We Know!

There are those who so miss the boat on this text - they get caught up in the "away from the Lord" statement - interpreting it to say - this is our lot - "as long as we are in the physical body." So they go on to encourage people to strive to be set free from the physical body - as it is keeping them from God's presence.

Please dear friends – think about this carefully. If God will not be "with us" while we are in a physical body – then how could it be that God was "with us" in Jesus? The Bible tells us Jesus was God incarnate - or Jesus was God in a physical body - when He was here on earth.

When we consider this text carefully - and keep in mind the rest of the Scriptures - and listen to the Holy Spirit - as He instructs us on this passage - it is Very Clear – that we are "away from God" - as long as we are "at home in this physical body."

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

For those who see this physical body as "our home" - these people are not "near to God" – but are away from God. However – those who have drawn near to God - those who commune and intimately fellowship with God - see this physical body as the temporary dwelling place - like the tent we might stay in on a camping trip.

We are not "at home" in this physical body - we are in a temporary - assigned place - we have a permanent - substantial home - and this physical body Is Not It! So as long as someone is "at home" in this body - we know – they are away from God. Not only in this world - but in this physical body as well.

Here - we are pilgrims, - and as wanderers - we should not worry too much about the things of this world. Let us be content with having what is necessary - and concentrate on getting to Our Home with the Father.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:7 and make notes:

This verse is a wonderful defense against those who mis-interpret - or mis-understand verse 6. "Well, since we can't see God then you must be away from God." Those who fellowship and commune with God - know that God Is Present WITH US - even though we do not see Him.

We "live by faith" – that God is with us - that God will provide for us - that God will defend us - that God will guide us. Even though we do not see Him with our physical eyes - we are confident that we will see the results of His interaction with us.

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

I had a person tell me - "I believe there is a God – but He doesn't interact with people in their daily lives." Wouldn't that be like a God who gives birth to a baby - and then tosses it out and says – "now go and make it on your own?" I am so glad to be able to declare - according to God's Word - that God does concern Himself with our everyday lives - and God does interact with His children when we allow Him to do so

By faith we not only hope in God - we believe that we WILL dwell with him - and that we WILL see him. Moses saw God's glory when he was still in the body, - the angels see him in the way that is possible for them - and many of us have seen the results of God moving in our lives
and sometimes in the impossible circumstances that come into our lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:8-9 and make notes:

To be with Christ is greater than having an incorruptible body. Whether it appears that we are living in a physical body or not - our goal must be to please our Heavenly Father.

Some teach that we must put our energy into doing good works - but the truth is that "good works" isn't sufficient. We must put our energy into doing the will of God which most likely will involve some good works - but doing the "Will of God" is so much broader than simply doing good works.

Departing this physical body is not good in itself, - but only if it is in God's grace. Likewise, staying here is not the worst of evils, unless we are offending him.

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and make notes:

"While in the body" – the things we do – they do matter. We are "due" to receive something for the things we do while "in the body."

There are those who quickly dismiss this verse - saying it has no application to Christians. They believe Christians will not be brought before the judgment seat of Christ – so they figure this text does not apply. But this text was written TO Christians! The Holy Spirit did not inspire Paul to say - "some of you" - are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Holy Spirit did not inspire Paul to say - "you unbelievers" - are going to appear. The Holy Spirit said through Paul - "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

All of us – are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We will receive what we are due - while we were in this physical body. Maybe a good question for us to be asking ourselves - are we doing things that merit "good rewards" - or do we insist on doing things that merit "bad rewards?"

I believe it is significant for us to notice - this verse Does Not Say "in the flesh," - because, quite frankly, - the deeds of the flesh always deserve punishment. This verse says - "in the body." Sometimes the body can be used to accomplish things that have - "for God's purpose" results - but sometimes the body can be used to accomplish things that have - "anti-God's purpose" results.

Yes, our body can be used for "good" - and it can be used for "bad." Most of us know that from first hand experience.

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

The judgment seat of Christ - is not going to be a time of forgiveness - it is going to be a time of "judging" - and a time of handing out either rewards - or punishment. The time for forgiveness – is right now. Everything we confess and repent of - will be forgiven – according to 1 John 1:9.

All the things we have been forgiven for - will not be addressed at the judgment seat of Christ. So it is possible – that if we confess and repent all of sins and mistakes - then the only things that will be addressed at the judgment seat of Christ - will be the "good things" we did.

This message is not just something for a future time - this has some relevance – and some bearing on our life today. So, Let's bring this all home to where we live. In the near future – things in our nation - and community - are either going to be better - or they are going to be worse.

Since there is so much concern today that things are going to get worse - Let's look at the possibility that things will be worse. Do you want a son or daughter - or a nephew or niece - to ask you "why didn't you TRY to make things better?" Do you want a grand-son or a grand- daughter - to ask "why didn't you at least Try to make things better?"

I can't say for certain - that things in our country are going to be better for my grand-children. I cannot promise them - the economy will be okay by the time they are grown. I cannot promise them - the crime rate will be small by then. I cannot promise them - the housing market - or the job market - is going to be good by then. But am doing all that I can - to make sure they never have to ask "poppa – why didn't you at least try?"

Did you catch this? Our children and our grand-children are going to judge us - on what we do in our life - whether it is good or bad. It won't be a matter of their loving us - when they judge us!

Since we are going to be judged on what we do while we are in this body - we need to be doing "Good." There may be many things that we cannot change - there may be many things we cannot make better - but we Can Try!

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

On several different occasions - I have either had the task of settling an estate after someone has died - or helping another person in doing so. A selfish person might think - "when I die, it's all over." But let me assure you - it is not all over for those who are left behind.

Sometimes there is a physical mess that someone - has to clean up. Sometimes there is a financial mess that someone - has to clean up. And then sometimes there is a blessing for someone - or several someones. No, it is not always possible to leave behind worldly things to inherit - so it is not that some people "get something" - so they are blessed - while others don't get anything - so they are not blessed. We can leave behind a blessing in that there isn't any kind of "mess" for someone to have to deal with after we are gone.

When our physical life is over - do we care about what we "leave behind"? Will we leave behind a family that is suffering - and asking the question "why didn't you even Try?" Will we leave behind a community that is suffering - and asking the question "why didn't you even Try?" Will we leave behind a church - that is asking "why didn't you at least try?"

As is pointed out in this text - we will "all stand before the judgment seat of Christ: Some might dread being asked - "why did you do those mean things?" - some might dread being asked - "why didn't you repent and ask for forgiveness?" - but here is the question that has been nagging me lately - the question I do not want to be asked when I stand before that judgment seat of Christ - "why didn't you at least try to minister."

I feel certain that it won't be accepted to try and argue - "well you see God, those people were so bad, it just would not have mattered." God knows whether it will matter - or not. God knew people were not going to repent when He told Noah to preach to the people. God already knows who is and who is not going to respond to our efforts - and to our invitations to give their hearts and lives to Christ.

We will "all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." When it is my turn to stand before Him - there are three things I am certain of:

One: I want to be there to receive good rewards - even though few they may be.

2 Corinthians - 19 - Did You Try

Two: I want all my sins already repented of -
so that there are no bad things left to answer for

Three: I do not want to hear Christ ask the question - "why didn't you at least try"

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

God had Paul's letter to the Corinthians preserved - so we could read it today. God did not just arbitrarily pick which letters to have preserved - and it is not just a "random draw" kind of thing among men - as to what letters were preserved. God specifically made sure mankind preserved the letter to the Corinthians - there is something in it God want us to know – and to put into practice.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11 and make notes:

"We know what it is to fear the Lord" - this is not referring to terror - this is referring to "reverence." This verse starts out with - "Since" - and some translations say – "therefore." This tells us - that we must interpret it in connection with the previous verses - which spoke of the "judgment seat of Christ" – and all Believers - will stand before it.

Paul is letting the Corinthian Believers know – and us too – that as he reflects on the fact - that we will all stand before Christ - and be judged for the things we do while in this body - It fills him with an awesome reverence. The word "we" refers to Paul and the Holy Spirit working together - in an effort to persuade Christians to live their lives in such a manner - as to inspire others and it is an invitation for of us to become part of the – "we."

Here is something we don't want to miss - since this letter was written to Believers in Corinth - this "persuading men" is not referring to an evangelistic effort to reach lost people - as much - as it is referring to persuading Believers - to strive toward a level of personal integrity.

A level of authenticity in Christian living - that will keep them from facing judgment - for having failed Christ - and instead face judgment to hear - "well done good and faithful servant."

2 Corinthians - 20 - Respect Not Fear

"What we are - is plain to God" - there is no question where Paul is - in his living - or his attitude - as far as God is concerned. Paul is "hoping" it is plain to the Corinthian Believers as well. Wouldn't that be a great testimony to have!

The best testimony isn't - what we claim to be. The best testimony is - when what we really are is plain to all those in our community - it is plain to our neighbors – plain to the people we do business with - it is plain to the people we work with.

It is because he knows the judgment which is to come - that Paul does everything he can to avoid giving offense in his ministry to the Corinthians.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:12 and make notes:

It has been pointed out earlier in this letter - the enemies of the gospel - prided themselves on their outward appearance – and prided themselves in the important people they knew – and the people who knew them. If Paul's enemies took what was written in the previous verse – they would likely use it to argue that Paul is boasting and arrogant – something - most of his enemies were.

Everyone who has read the rest of the writings of Paul – certainly understands - that personal boasting and bragging - is not something Paul would do. Paul is simply trying to provide the New Believers in Corinth with some means of answering the false teachers. The things which Paul – and all Believers should be "glorying in" - are not the things which the world tends to count - as an advantage - or as something - worthy of boasting - but instead – Paul and all Believers "glory" - in the things that exalt God's power

2 Corinthians - 20 - Respect Not Fear

Paul is saying this because of some people - who take a personal pride in making it known - that they had been taught by men who had always been with the Lord. Paul is concerned to avoid giving the impression that he is praising himself. But, since he was forced to defend himself - he insists that he is doing it for their sake, - not for his own glory. His main purpose was to stop those who were abusing their position - and thereby harming the church.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:13 and make notes:

Unlike the false teachers who were enemies of Paul - and enemies of the Gospel - Whatever state they should find Paul in – it is not one of self-interest - one of the accusations being made against Paul – they told the Believers in Corinth that Paul was "out of his mind." We don't know how often Paul might of had an ecstatic experience - or how often Paul was so awestruck that he couldn't speak. We know something of his salvation experience - because it is recorded - when he was on the his way to Damascus - he was struck down to the ground - and surrounded by a bright light - that surely would have been an awesome experience - but as far as any other episodes – we just don't know.

Maybe his enemies were just making a generalization – "he's crazy – he's out of his mind" - or maybe they had seen him in something like a trance – or perhaps they had heard him speaking in tongues. The person praying our singing in tongues is often seen as being "beside themselves" by those who do not speak in tongues. Which of these things - we don't know – but the technical details will not change the message – regardless of what they are.

2 Corinthians - 20 - Respect Not Fear

Here's Paul's response to those accusations - that "if he is out of his mind." If we are ecstatic – it is to God's glory and for His purpose - if we are sober-minded – it is for the purpose of the Believers. What Paul has said "is sane" from his hearers' point of view, - as long as it is understood - in the sense in which it was uttered, - but if it is thought to have been spoken out of boastfulness, it is insane.

This is true for everyone - pride is a kind of insanity. What Paul means is that even if people think he is mad, - everything he does is for the glory of God.

How much are we concerned about what others think of us? If we are so concerned about what others think of us - that it prevents us from being the Christian God has saved us to be - if we are so concerned about what others think - that it prevents us from sharing our salvation experience - if we are so concerned about what others think - that we try to hide the fact that we are a Christian - we need to re-examine our Salvation!

To care that much is an extreme – and it is wrong! We need to question ourselves - did we actually "get the goods" - or do we just pretend while we run with those who are? But we should care to some degree what others think.

Paul cared to a degree. It wasn't that Paul could care less what others thought - especially these Corinthian Believers. Paul wanted them to understand that what he was doing - was in fact - for their benefit. Whether it seemed crazy or sane - his actions – his ways were to benefit them in their spiritual journey.

Is that something we can honestly say to anyone? Is there anyone for whom we are willing to sacrifice our reputation - just to help make sure they are healthy and stable spiritually?

There is an extreme of not caring at all - and that extreme is wrong. We should care what others think about how we live our lives - so that the way we live our lives - is a cause for them to want to come to Jesus for Salvation. To make sure our lifestyle does not cause them to want to stay away from Jesus.

2 Corinthians - 20 - Respect Not Fear

It is such a wonderful blessing to have people in our local church family that care enough about others - that they want their life in such a way - to be a reason for people to come to Jesus. Those who are making an effort to live such a lifestyle - are in partnership with the Holy Spirit Just Like Paul was.

Are we living our life in an extreme of caring too much? And it is keeping us from helping to minister to others?

Are we living our life in an extreme of not caring at all – and not ministering because we simply don't care about the spiritual eternity of others?

Are we living our life somewhere near a place of balance - where we do care about the spiritual well being of others - enough to try to help them - and as a result we don't care so much about our personal reputation - in fact we will put our personal reputation on the line - if that is what is needed to help ensure others find a right relationship with Jesus?

Let's Live our lives - Free From the Fear of man - and in Reverence to God's Plan.

Are we ready to follow the example of Paul as he followed Christ? If people think we are crazy

- we will just say, "well, I'm crazy for Jesus" - if people think we are sane - we will just say, "well, I'm sane for your sake."

We must break through the "fear of man" - where we are so concerned what others think of us that we don't serve Christ. And then – we must not go to the extreme that we do not care at all. We must care enough about what others see in our lives - that we live our lives as Christ Jesus leads.

Let's live our lives in a way that causes others to want the relationship with Jesus that we have. To "not care at all" - is an extreme that is in error. To "care so much that we don't minister" - is an extreme that is in error.

2 Corinthians - 20 - Respect Not Fear

The place of balance is somewhere between those two positions - and in reality - it is much closer to "not caring." But still caring enough to live a life of integrity for Jesus.

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

I suspect most of us have heard of people who willingly sacrificed their physical life - just so - another person could live. A few years ago, I read an account about a woman named Lorraine.

Lorraine was 4 months into her pregnancy - when she heard the devastating news. She was in an advanced stage of cancer. Doctors advised her to have an abortion and start treatment straight away.

Lorraine insisted on waiting long enough - to give her unborn son a chance to survive. It was explained to her - due the advanced stage of the cancer - if she delayed even a short time - it would mean her death. But if she would start treatment now - she had a reasonable chance of living.

Lorraine knew that postponing the treatment would mean her death. She was willing to give up her life - if that would mean her child could live.

They scheduled surgery to deliver the baby at the 26 week mark. Lorraine went into premature labor a few weeks before that - and delivered a very little boy. She then started treatment for cancer, - but died only a few weeks later - having left her bed a handful of times to cuddle her son beside his incubator.

This is the kind of love we struggle to find the right words to describe.

When this little boy grows up and hears of the sacrifice his mother made - what do you think his attitude will be toward his mom?

There is another story from just a few years ago. Staff Sgt Miller sacrificed his life - so that his buddies could live. Their unit was caught in a hopeless ambush in a valley in Afghanistan. It was obvious they were sorely outnumbered and outgunned. It was also obvious that if they tried to make a retreat - they would all be killed.

Staff Sgt Miller placed himself in a forward position - and began to blast away at the enemy with all that he had. He kept the enemy so occupied with his activities - that all of the rest of his unit was able to retreat and made it to safety.

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

He knew - taking this position and this action would cost him his life - but he was willing to give his life - if it would save the lives of his buddies.

What do you think - is the attitude toward Staff Sgt Miller - by these surviving men of his unit? How long - do you think they will reflect on the sacrifice he made for them?

Neither of the people in these two stories - were "insane" people. Both of them knew what was going to happen to them - for taking the actions they did - in order to allow someone else to live and these are not "rare" accounts! In every generation of man's history - there have been those who have sacrificed their physical life - in order that someone they love - could have life.

If we were alive today - due to the sacrificial actions of another person - what would we feel - that we owed that person?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14 and make notes:

It is the simple fact that Christ died "for him" - that compels Paul to not only live a life that is pleasing to God - but to live a life of sharing the gospel to all he comes into contact with. Because of the love of Christ - Paul was not silent about the gifts He received.

Paul wasn't boasting - but instead - was inviting the hearers to become Christ's disciples. Paul explains - although he is beside himself, - it is the love of God that controls him.

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

All people - without a single exception, - were dead through sin, - original sin or original with personal sin added. Sometimes by ignorance - and sometimes by conscious refusal to do what is right. And for all these dead souls - one living man was willing to die. A man who was utterly free from sin - and he did so - with the intention that those who come alive by forgiveness of their sins - would no longer live for themselves - but live for him who died on account of our sins.

As it was with Paul - "The love of Christ," should "constrain us," - that is, urge – impel - coerce us to share the gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:15 and make notes:

What Paul says here - appears to be one thing - but if we look carefully - we will see that it is two: First, - we live - because of Christ. Second, - Christ died - for us. Either of these would be enough by itself to put us in his debt, - but taken together, - our liability is overwhelming.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

From the moment of Paul's conversion - it was this expressed - confirmed and displayed love that Christ has for us - that compelled Paul to live his life as a display of love to Christ. If Christ loves all these people so much that He was willing to die in their place - so that they don't have to die - then I will treat all these people with love - because I love God - and I want to do the things that please him.

People – cannot be regarded from a worldly point of view – since God is willing to invest so much in the people of this world. Just the mere fact that God would invest so heavily in people - makes them of extreme value to God - so we must regard people from a heavenly point of view instead of a worldly point of view.

What is the worldly point of view? A worldly point of view might revolve around skin color - family heritage - nationality - social status - educational degree - wealth – or title.

A heavenly point of view revolves around one thing only: God thinks this person is worth dying for - and to ensure that this person does not have to die. God thinks this person is worth so much that He wants them to spend all eternity with Him.

Paul confesses that at one time, - he considered Jesus from a worldly point of view. And then Paul said, "But I don't anymore!"

Even if believers are still in their earthly bodies, - we are not to relate to them in a worldly point of view - because the life according to the flesh has been transcended. We have been born again by the Spirit - and have learned a different kind of behavior, - a behavior which is that of heaven.

It is Christ who has brought about this change. Therefore those who are saved must also put aside the ways of the world - and imitate the pure behavior of heaven.

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and make notes:

We ought to live for Christ - not just because we belong to him, - not just because he died for us - and not just because he rose again on our behalf. We ought to live for him - because we have been made into something different. We now have a new life. The old things which have passed away - refers to our sins and impiety. Those who believe in Christ - have entered a new life.

The Old Testament was good, - but without spiritual understanding - it dies with the letter of the Law. The New Testament, - through grace, - restores life.

We are then truly free - only when God orders our lives, - that is - forms us - and creates us - not as human beings - but as good people, - which he is doing - by his grace, - so that we can be new creatures in Christ Jesus. Accordingly the prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

To prevent us from interpreting the text as applying to a visible creation, he stated: "If any man - is in Christ," - teaching us that if any man has gone over to the side of those who believe in Christ, - he is an example of a new creature.

By this - he briefly showed that those who, by their faith in Christ, - had put off an old cloak - the burden of their sins, - those who had been set free from their error - and been illumined by the light of justification, - had put on this new and shining cloak, - a royal robe from God.

This is why he said: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the former things have passed away; - behold, they are all made new." Do you see why faith in Christ and the return to virtue are called a new creation?

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18 and make notes:

Just like the original creation - man played no part in it. God created everything out of nothing. Man provided nothing toward the creation - man accomplished no part of the original creation - man can take absolutely no credit for anything that was in the original creation. It is much the same in the New Covenant. Man can take no credit in the New Creation we are in Christ Jesus.

It is all God's provision. God provided for the remission of sins - God provided for the atonement - God provided the adoption - God provided the Un-Speakable Glory. We owe everything Good - to God's grace and mercy toward us. It is not just that God has been reconciled to us; - we also have been reconciled to him.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:19 and make notes:

Here is one of the Hallmarks of a genuine and true Minister of the Gospel: They proclaim a message of reconciliation! Those who say they are an authorized agent of God's Word - but only proclaim a message of condemnation and punishment - are either – one, not sent by God; or two, have started ministering in the flesh instead of the spirit.

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

Those who claim to be a minister of God - and only proclaim – blessings – abundance - and everything will be wonderful all the time - are simply a "professional prophet." That is one who tells the people what they want to hear.

Before you throw me out for saying that - please consider - if we are always blessed - always bountifully provisioned - then where is the need for reconciliation? It is not just the original sin of Adam. God knew we would slip up from time to time, - and God provided for the sins that are committed from time to time by His People.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 and make notes:

An Ambassador does not go and say the things - they think best. An Ambassador does not go and do the things - they think best. An Ambassador does things - the way the one who appointed him wants them done. An Ambassador says the things - the one who appointed him wants to be said. An Ambassador may have a different opinion. An Ambassador may think a different way is better - but the Ambassador always considers the one who appointed them - and acts like an extension of their hands - and acts like an extension of their mouth. So it is just like the one who appointed them - is actually present and saying the things themselves.

Paul wants to show both his devotion to God's providence - and his belief - that it is his duty to love the whole human race. We are reconciled to God - if we believe in Christ.

The God to whom we are to be reconciled - has made Jesus the sacrifice for sin - by which we may be reconciled. Jesus himself became sin - as we became righteousness - not our own - but God's, - not in ourselves - but in him.

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and make notes:

This just may be the most profound sentence in the whole New Testament. It is the finish to the instruction - "be reconciled to God." It is worth noting -this verse does not say - Jesus became "sinful" - and it does not say - Jesus became a "sinner." It says - Jesus became "sin" - on our behalf - and it does not say - that you and I became "righteous." It says we are made to be "the righteousness of God."

Christ defeated death - by his death - and He brought such benefit to sinners - that now death cannot hold those - who are marked with the sign of the cross. God allowed his Son to suffer as if a condemned sinner, - so that we might be delivered from the penalty of our sins.

This is God's righteousness, - that we are not justified by works - for then - they would have to be perfect, which is impossible - but we are justified by grace, - in which case all our sin is removed. By keeping the law, - we remain sinners. Christ became sin - in order to deliver us from the law. God says to us that we should accept this freedom - by no longer remaining in bondage to the commands of the law.

It is crucial that we come to understand - It was for my sake he was called a curse - and He destroyed my curse, - and it was for my sake He became sin - and He takes away my sins. Jesus became a new Adam - to take the place of the old, - just so he could make my disobedience his own.

I am alive – because Jesus sacrificed His life. What do I owe Him?

2 Corinthians - 21 - Compelled To Live

Paul seems to have fully grasps the concept that Christ Did Not die FOR our benefit - Christ died IN OUR PLACE! Creation sinned against God and did not repent, - so God, who did not want his work to perish, - sent his Son in order to preach through him - the forgiveness of sins - and thus reconcile them to himself.

Can you see how great God's love is for us? Who was the offended party? He was. Who took the first steps toward reconciliation? He did.

We have a life with God - that will last an eternity - because of the sacrifice Jesus made. What should be our attitude toward Him? What should our attitude be toward the life we live?

I submit to you - everyone who comes to know Jesus as Savior AND Lord - and understands what Jesus has done for us - finds themselves "compelled" - to share the reason for the Hope we have!

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

Is it possible – for a person to receive "God's Grace" – and it be received "In Vain"?

We need to be careful at this point - we know what it means when a someone is a "vain" person in regards to their looks, reputation, etc. When we ask the question about God's Grace being received in "vain" - we are not using "vain" in this way - but "vain" as in the sense of it having no benefit.

You may remember the story of the expecting mother - who postponed her cancer treatment in order to allow her unborn son time to grow enough - to survive outside the womb. Her son is alive because of what she did - but she died because she waited too long to receive treatment. You may remember the story of the soldier who put himself into a deadly situation - to make it possible for the others of his unit to make it to safety. It worked – all those men are alive today - but it cost him – his life. We often refer to these people as "heroes" - the person who puts their life at risk for another – and make it possible for another to live - even though they lose their life.

We find their death sad – but usually acknowledge the hero considered the other person's life worth giving up theirs. We love to hear the success stories - where someone placed their life at risk - and was able to save the life of another. But sometimes such risk taking - is not successful at all: A firefighter who runs into a burning building - to rescue someone trapped inside - but falls and dies along with the trapped individual - dies in vain. They risked their life - but failed in their attempt to rescue. The person who jumps into the water to save someone who is about to drown - but runs into trouble and dies in the water. Their death was in vain - the risk they took - failed to save the life of the person - for whom they took the risk.

Back to our opening question:

Is it possible – for a person to receive God's Grace – and it not have a benefit in their life?

Is it possible – for someone to receive God's Grace – and it not produce fruit in their life?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1 and make notes:

This is not a word to the "lost" – or the un-saved. This is a word to all of us - who are trying to help in the ministry in some way. We are urged – "not to receive God's grace in vain." This presents us with a very interesting consideration: if God's grace CAN be received "in vain" - that indicates a person could receive God's grace – and it have no benefit for them.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:2 and make notes:

"In the time of my favor" – it is God's time of favor – not ours. We don't choose when the "acceptable" time is going to be.

I can't think of anyone more suitable – than Paul - to take the message of a time of God's favor and grace to the Corinthians. Paul was aggressively chasing down Christians and killing them. What favor did Paul deserve? What kindness did Paul deserve?

And yet, God showed Paul favor – and allowed Paul the opportunity to turn from his ways. Paul not only accepted God's grace and favor - Paul put God's grace and God's favor to good use – for the rest of his life on this earth.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and make notes:

Everyone who endeavors to follow Christ - will experience "troubles." "Troubles" – are the little things that are thrown into the pathway of our Christian walk - to slow us down. We can step over them – we can walk around them – but we have to be careful not to let them distract us. They are more annoying - than actually able to stop us. "Troubles" are the nagging distractions - and the discouraging things - that come to everyone who is a True Believer.

"Hardships" are the things that come to those who make it past the "troubles." "Hardships" are things we have to strain to overcome – we may have to actually lay aside - something we enjoy - in order to overcome the "hardship."

The "distresses" are those things that cause us - to do more than strain - to overcome them. These are the things that perplex us – these are the things that cause anguish for the Christian - these are the things that very often appear unsolvable – from the human perspective. These are the things that Satan throws at us - in an effort to make us believe he is going to destroy us.

It would be fair to say - Paul was something of an expert on "beatings." We know from the letters of Paul - he endured many "beatings" - at least 5 times he received the "39 stripes" - at least 3 times he was beaten with rods. Many times Paul was imprisoned. Any one of these things is intolerable, but taken together, - what kind of soul is needed to endure them!

"Riots" are those times of disorganized trouble. No one can predict what will take place in a riot. A "riot" is when many people are stirred to anger - and each person is acting on their anger. Frequently in a "riot" there is great damage to property as well as to individuals. No one is safe in a riot.

The Greek word translated "hard work" - can be translated literally as – "fatigues." This is an accurate translation in regards to Paul in the ministry. There were a number of times and places where Paul did not just work hard - Paul ministered to the point of fatigue.

Many of us know what it is to experience insomnia - sometimes a situation concerning someone we love - keeps us from being able to sleep – because we keep thinking about their situation – or ours. This was not the case with Paul in his sleepless nights. Paul often - voluntarily gave up his sleep and his rest - in order to devote more time to the ministry.

Some Bible versions use the word "fasting" - in this text rather than "hunger." The original Greek - lets us know that Paul was not referring to a time of skipping a meal - for some formal religious practice. Paul was referring to times of missing a meal - either because of the situation he was in - for the cause of the gospel - or because he didn't want to stop ministering to participate in a meal. This is speaking of being so dedicated to the cause of the gospel - that he missed a meal – or meals.

This text is probably NOT referring to "purity" - as in successfully living up to the kosher lifestyle. This is more likely referring to the "purity" of conscience - one experiences from being faithful - from overcoming the troubles and temptations already mentioned.

"Understanding" - this is speaking of the saving knowledge that is readily available to everyone who comes to Christ as Savior - and it is offered freely to every sinner. When we receive the "mind of Christ" - we understand things that otherwise we could not.

"Patience" is the ability to endure malicious words - and injuries from the actions of others - and sometimes - just plain evil deeds of others - without being provoked to the kind of anger that seeks vengeance. This is the kind of "patience" - that allows God to decide who needs to be punished. This is responding in "kindness" to everyone - even those who have taken a position of being our enemy - even though we have not made them our enemy.

"In the Holy Spirit" - there are those who argue whether Paul was referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit - or to the presence of the Holy Spirit - or to the workings of the Holy Spirit. I believe the correct position is - "yes" – to all of these. Paul is referring to any and every aspect of having the Holy Spirit present in our lives. Experiencing the joy of seeing the Holy Spirit work through us - being honored by having one or more of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

"In sincere love" - love that is not hypocritical - love that is genuine in it's entirety - love that is not conditional upon the circumstances - love that is consistent - not only love that is toward us but the kind of love we have for others. It is truthful in the spoken word - as well as truthful in the written word.

Paul was not ashamed to admit - he was not that powerful as a teacher - he admitted that he was not a very charismatic individual - but the Power of God worked through Paul. Paul seemed pleased - it wasn't powerful or persuasive words he spoke – but it was the power of God at work through him.

The Greek word translated "glory" – is literally - the good opinion or good esteem one man might hold toward another - not the glory that is God's. It is even appropriate to translate it as "popularity" - and this truly fits what we know of Paul's experiences - as he went from place to place sharing the gospel - sometimes he was very popular – and people held him in high esteem but then other times he was completely dis-honored - in words and in actions.

Sometimes people spoke well of Paul – "good report" - and sometimes they spoke really poorly of him – "bad report." Sometimes people accepted him - as a genuine man of God - and sometimes he was accused of being almost every kind of impostor. Sometimes Paul was treated with regard - as one who is known by the people – and accepted. Sometimes he was shunned and not given the time of day - as one who is unknown.

There was more than one occasion where he was considered as dying – or as good as dead - and perhaps there was a couple of times - even he thought he was going to die - and yet he recovered and continue to live. Sometimes the intent of those attacking Paul - was to kill him - but they were not successful.

Paul knew first hand - what it was to have reasons to be sorrowful - he had been abandoned by those he was training in the ministry - he had been let down by so many people in different situations - and yet, he knew what it was to have the joy of the Lord .

Paul knew what it was like to help others become successful - and even help them become prosperous - and all the while not amassing wealth for himself. Paul knew exactly what it was like to have so little – if anything of this world - and yet have the joy of feeling like one who has everything.

Has anyone noticed that Satan just loves to tempt Christians - to do something wrong – and then Satan loves even more – to reveal this Christian's sin - thereby causing the majority of people - to never listen to the testimony or teaching of that Christian again? Nothing is a more effective stumbling block to the gospel - than when the personal conduct of a Christian - is opposite of what they teach.

The text started out – encouraging us not to put a stumbling block before others. Weapons in both hands – is at the heart of this message - it is not the weapons of "blessings" in one hand - and the "blessings" of prosperity in the other hand.

It is "weapons of righteousness" in the right hand – as well as in the left hand. In the culture - when this was written - "things on the left" - usually referred to things that were painful – unclean - or distasteful – while "things on the right" - usually referred to things that were pleasant – or clean and wholesome.

This might still be appropriate designations for political views today. The weapons of righteousness on the right hand – refers to handling pleasant things in a righteous manner. Weapons of righteousness on the left hand - refers to handling UN-pleasant things in a righteous manner.

Many Christians - may think it is easier to live righteously when we are receiving honor - than when we are receiving dis-honor. But honor has at least as many perils - because the one who enjoys honor - may find themselves failing to live the righteous life – in actions – in words – or in attitude.

These verses – list experiences that are pleasant - and those that are unpleasant - for the Christian. The message is the same - whether we are experiencing the pleasant parts of being a Christian - or whether we are experiencing the un-pleasant parts of being a Christian. We need to make sure - the "Grace" we have received from God - is allowed to produce "good fruit" - in our lives - we need to make sure God's Grace - is allowed - to be of benefit to us.

When we proclaim our "Christianity" - and then live the life of a non-Christian - we place stumbling blocks in the way of lost people. This makes our proclaiming - of our Christianity is as much "in vain" - as the person who loses their own life in failing to save another. Not living the Christ like life - makes our life "in vain" - to those who do not know Jesus as their Savior - and to those who have wandered from the Christian path.

A woman was helping her elderly mother-in-law clean out her attack. She uncovered a never used purse. She asked her mother-in-law why she never used the purse - her mother-in-law looked at the purse for a couple of minutes and then said, - "someone gave me that years ago - I never did like the thing – so I just tossed it up here in the attack."

This crushed the woman – for she is the one who had given her mother-in-law the purse - as a gift. The purse is now so old that it can not be exchanged – and it is brittle and unusable from years of being in a hot attack. She thought to herself – "if only she had told me she didn't like it - we could have exchanged it for one she did like."

2 Corinthians - 22 – Grace in Vain

That gift – was given in love – but the gift of love was received in vain. The gift of love was wasted – and was of no benefit to the one who received it. Let us be very careful that we do not treat God's gift of Grace like that purse.

"Now is the acceptable time" - Now is the time for repentance; - not the next life. At the day of judgment – it will not be a time of forgiveness . At that time - mercy will not justify the sinner, - justice will distinguish the just - from the – sinner.

Now is the acceptable time to receive the gift, - Now is the time of grace. At the judgment – the un-forgiven will be required to give an account for their sins. At the judgment – the forgiven will NOT have to give an account of their sins - the forgiven will enjoy abundant blessings and righteousness.

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