

2 Corinthians – Section 4

A Study in 2 Corinthians 10 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.

2 Corinthians - 33 - Waging War

Most serious Bible scholars agree - there is a noticeable change in the tone of the letter in this last section. There have been some through the years that have suggested the rest of the second letter to the Corinthians beginning with chapter 10 - should be dropped. Their argument starts with the idea - Because of the change in the tone of the letter at this point - they conclude - Paul did not write the last part of the letter - so someone added it later.

I flat out disagree with this conclusion. As we dig into the first few verses of chapter 10 - the reason for the change in tone becomes quite clear. And I will add this - the relevance of this last part of the letter to our culture and society - is of such great importance - it is easy to see why Satan has urged so many people to ignore it. Satan knows Christians will be much more easily defeated - if they do not know this section of the second letter to the Corinthians.

On the other hand - the Holy Spirit knows we will be much more victorious - if we do know it. So He has made sure it is still available to us.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1 and make notes:

Among other negative things they had said - the false teachers accused Paul of sounding "bold and strong" when he was away - but being meek and even weak when he was there in person. Paul is referring to their accusations. There have been a number of people through the years - and there are still some today - who teach - gentleness and meekness - cannot exist with firmness or sternness. They have the idea that a person can either be stern - or they can be gentle - but they cannot be both. A person can be firm - or they can be meek - but they cannot be both.

Not only does Paul refute that teaching, - but Jesus himself refutes that teaching. The Jesus who could turn over tables - and take a whip to people - while chasing them from the temple they were violating - was the very same Jesus - who could gently lift a small child upon his lap, - and command his disciples that they should not keep children from approaching him.

The Paul who could speak so firmly - and sternly to the false teachers who were trying to lead the young Christians from the path of Grace - and into legalism - was the very same Paul who could deal with those young Christians with great gentleness and meekness.

The severity of the rebukes handed out to the false teachers - in no way nullified the genuineness of the gentleness and meekness handed out to the Believers. The very same apostle could do both - and he did both.

2 Corinthians - 33 - Waging War

Think of the most loving and gentle mother you know. Have you got that image in your mind? Do we not think - a mother who loves her children - a mother who can speak to them in loving and gentle tones - a mother who can gently touch them - to help them feel safe and go to sleep at night - a mother who can kiss away a hurt - a mother who can console and encourage the fallen child - is the very same mother who can pick up a stick - and beat an animal to a bloody pulp - until there is no life left in it - when she thinks it is trying to hurt one of her children?

Yes she can! And when that threat to her children is gone - that same mother can return to being gentle and loving! That mother believed one thing needed to be communicated to the one who was threatening her children - and another thing needed to be communicated to her children. And each message required a different means of delivery.

There have been those who have in the past - and there are those who do so today - it is a grave mistake to see someone being gentle and meek - and to interpret that to mean this person cannot be stern or firm - when it comes to dealing with a threat to the ones they love.

The reason this is being addressed in this letter - is that the false teachers have accused Paul of being a different person when he is away from the Corinthians - than he is - when he is with the Corinthians. One of the things False Teachers have in common with Satan - is they will take part of a truth - distort it - and then teach it - as truth.

It was true - Paul had sounded one way when he was away from the Corinthians - and he sounded differently when he was with them. That part was true - but it was not true that he was a different person - and this is important.

This is the kind of mis-guided truth that has convinced some parents - they cannot punish their children - "if they really love them." Paul is declaring - he is in fact the very same person - when he was away from the Corinthians - and writing the letter - he was addressing the false teachers - and that situation called for sternness. When he was with the Corinthians - he was addressing the young Believers - and that situation called for gentleness

It was NOT that he would be "bold when away" - and turn into some "meek mouse when with them." It was all about who he was addressing and what need to be communicated..Paul is saying - he is the same person whether present or absent.

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

2 Corinthians - 33 - Waging War

Paul acknowledges that he walks "in the flesh" - but declares - he does NOT walk "according to the flesh." This means that although we are living in the body - we are to act - to live - to respond - in a spiritual way. Although we are surrounded by the world, we do not give in - to it. There should be a clear distinction between existence "in the world" - and conducting our lives according to worldly conduct and worldly techniques. This certainly does apply to us today.

Do we live in a physical body? Yes we do! But - as Christians - we do NOT have to live according to the fleshly body in which we live!

Do we live in a physical world? Yes we do! But, as New Creations in Christ - we do not have to live - to act - or to respond according to the physical world's methods or it's techniques.

When someone offends me - my fleshly and natural desire might be - to have that person's nose to fall quickly onto my fist. But the "new man" I am in Christ Jesus - would have me respond according to the Word of God - and NOT according to the fleshly desires. Because I CAN do something - does not mean I SHOULD do it!

When someone offends you - your fleshly desire might be to contact everyone you know in the community - and to "tear them down" so badly - that no one will have anything to do with them ever again. But the "new person" you are in Christ Jesus - would have you respond according to the Word of God - and NOT according to the fleshly desires.

Dear Friends - are you listening to this? We live in a really bad economic time! It is not just our community - or our state - or our nation - the whole earth is in a bad economic time. But the "new man" - we are in Christ Jesus - means - we can live according to God's Word. We do not HAVE TO live according to the economics of this world.

We do live in this economic world - but as Christians - we do not live according to this economic world. We do live in this morally corrupt society - but we do not live according to this morally corrupt society. We just might live in a hateful, noisy, unfriendly neighborhood - but we do not have to live according to that neighborhood. Because of the "new creation" we are in Christ Jesus - we CAN live according to the Spirit - and NOT according to the neighborhood.

I don't know about you - but when I was growing up - I was taught - you fight fire with fire. I was taught - not to ever start a fight - but if someone else started one - I was to make sure I finished it strong. And if the person who started the fight - was bigger or stronger - well that's what sticks are for. If I did it right - few, if any,- would start a fight with me in the future.

I was taught that you give back to people what they give to you. I don't know why - but I confess that it makes really good sense to me - to treat people they way they treat me. I said it makes sense - it just seems like the right and appropriate thing to do. But the new creation I am in Christ Jesus - makes it possible for me to respond according to God's way - and not the world's way.

2 Corinthians - 33 - Waging War

I have learned - I do NOT have to fight fire with fire. I can fight hatred with love. I can fight hopelessness with hope. I can fight darkness with light!

What are you fighting today? And more important than - "what are you fighting?" - Is "what are you fighting it with?" - "What weapons are you using?"

Let's be honest - are we looking at our circumstances - and our situation - through the eyes of the world - or through the eyes of the Kingdom of God? If we look at things through the eyes of the world - we will see so many limitations - we will see so many "no hope" circumstances - we will see doom and gloom more than we see hope.

However, when we look at things through the eyes of the Kingdom of God - we will see - God brought water out of a rock when His people needed water - we will see God brought quail in - special delivery - when His people needed meat - we will see - God caused an overwhelming army to turn and run away - leaving all their supplies behind - we will see - God healed incurable diseases - we will see God providing for His people - when there appears to be no means of supply.

None of this will bewilder us - because we will remember - God is the one who created everything out of absolutely nothing. And while we may not "see how" GOD will meet our needs - we will "see" that He CAN meet our needs - and we will "see" God can make a way - where there seems to be no way.

Are we walking out our lives according to the world- or walking our out lives according to the Kingdom of God? Yes - we are "in this world" - but as Christians - we are not obligated to live our lives - according to the world's methods - according to the world's techniques - and certainly not according to the world's limitations.

As Believers in Christ Jesus - we have all the power of the Holy Spirit available to help us fight - we have all the wisdom of God available to help us fight - so, why would we choose to fight with the methods of this world?

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

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

The summary of the previous lesson from second Corinthians is found in chapter 10 verse 3. Contrary to the common message of the world - as New Creatures in Christ Jesus - we do not have to fight "fire with fire." Instead of fighting according to the methods and techniques of this world - as Christians - we can fight with "Kingdom of God" methods - and Kingdom of God techniques.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:4 and make notes:

A person who engages in warfare must have weapons appropriate for the warfare. The person going out with a stick to do battle against an enemy who has a sword - has little chance of winning. The person going out with a sword to do battle with a person who has a gun - is likely doomed to lose. The person going out with a fine rifle to do battle against a person with a tank - has little or no chance of winning. And the analogy could go on and on.

If we are forced into battle - it is important that we have weapons sufficient to win against our enemy. Following the message - "we do not have to fight fire with fire" - we are told that we do not have to fight with the weapons of this world. We are assured weapons with Divine Power are made available to Christians - and these weapons with Divine Power can actually demolish strongholds.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 and make notes:

This verse identifies some of the most powerful evil strongholds we face. They are the strongholds of "Intellect" and of "Will."

There are a number of historical events which illustrate the inability of the weapons of this world and the methods of this world - to break down the intellect of a person - or to break down the will of a person. Sure, torture has broken a few people - but there have been many more who have chosen to die - rather than give up to the torture of the enemy. Some of you may be thinking military - but I am referring to families.

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

I don't know if any of you did - but we had a child with a will - that could not be broken by the methods and techniques of this world. When she was punished for a behavior violation - it was if she thought - "well I have already been punished for it - I might as well go back and finish what I started."

We could not spank it out of her - we could not fuss it out of her - we could not get it out of her by taking away privileges - it took the Divine Power of God. And He did not break her will - He put her will in a proper direction.

And I am sure - God changing the direction of her will - is the reason we didn't kill her. I am convinced - she would have chosen death over giving up to the enemy!

The intellect of a person - and the will of a person - are both very powerful strongholds. There is no weapon on earth - that can bring down the stronghold of a person's will - when they set their will not be taken down. But the weapons given to us by the Holy Spirit - have Divine Power to demolish such formidable Strongholds. Yes they are Mighty!.

The stronghold of the "arguments" and the pretensions that set themselves up against the wisdom of God - are indeed - like high towers of a mighty fortress. But the weapons provided to us by the Holy Spirit have Divine Power - and this Divine Power can demolish the arguments of evil reasoning. We cannot argue or debate well enough to cast them down - but the Holy Spirit provided weapons most certainly can.

It is interesting - and at the same time it is very sad - how often the wisdom of this world ridicules the Wisdom of God - when the wisdom of this world is noticeably failing in it's efforts to win over evil - and yet, it still - not only rejects the Wisdom of God - but it ridicules it.

If what you are trying is failing - why not try another way. Even if it looks dumb to you - if what we are doing - isn't working - why do we insist on continuing to do it?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:6 and make notes:

Paul says that he will punish in due time - those who deserve it. But first he wants to make sure the Corinthians have been properly counseled. Paul explains why he is being patient. He wants to try to persuade as many as possible to amend their ways.

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

This is an indication that Paul has a Pastoral Heart toward the Believers in Corinth. They are being told - every act of disobedience will be punished - but this punishment will start ONLY after their obedience is complete. In other words - it is acknowledged that they have not yet become completely obedient - and Paul is going to allow sufficient time for all of them to come around.

They will have time to consider things - they will have time to make the necessary changes in their lifestyles - and when there has been sufficient time for all of this - and when those who are going to be obedient have had time to demonstrate their obedience - then the punishment will be handed out - to those who are still being disobedient.

God is not so anxious to punish disobedient people - that He sits around with a giant flat swat - ready to smash someone as soon as they mess up. No! - He loves us so much that He allows us sufficient time to confess our sin - to repent of our sin - and to demonstrate our change in direction of lifestyle .

This is what is called a "Pastoral Heart." The person with a Pastoral heart will punish those who do wrong - but will try to allow sufficient time for them to repent and to demonstrate their change - in which case there is no need for punishment. The punishment is reserved for those who do not repent on their own - and Paul had this kind of heart for the Believers in Corinth.

Take Home With Us?

#1 - Take Every Thought Captive

Can you imagine how our daily lives would be different - if we took every thought captive - and then we let that thought run free - only if it was obedient to Christ?

Try to imagine how our daily life would be different - when the thoughts that are not obedient to Christ - we do not set free – they remain captive. How good our life will become - how much more productive our life will be - how much more peaceful our life will be - when we keep captive those thoughts of rebellion - those thoughts of revenge - those thoughts of anger - those thoughts of sin.

2 – Use The Weapons Provided By The Holy Spirit!

The finest weapons of this world do not intimidate Satan. The most brilliant military strategies of this world do not even phase Satan - let alone impress him. The weapons and the methods of this world are not sufficient to win against Satan and his forces. The weapons of this world are no match for the power and might of satanic forces.

However, the weapons and the methods of Satan and his followers - are no match for the power, the methods, and the weapons of the Kingdom of God! If we choose to fight against evil with the weapons and the methods of this world - we will not win.

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

When we choose to fight evil using the weapons provided to us by the Holy Spirit - We Will Win! The weapons provided to Christians by the Holy Spirit - have Divine Power. And they have Divine Power to Demolish Strongholds.

The Church that tries to fight against evil forces - using the weapons and the methods of this world - are going to fall! The Church Leaders who use the weapons and the methods of this world - in their battle against evil - are going to fall! The Christian who uses the weapons and the methods of this world in their battle against evil – is going to fall!

When God's people - pass up the weapons of this world - and pass up the methods of this world - and instead, we use the weapons provided to us by the Holy Spirit - we will see their Divine Power at work - we will see evil spiritual strongholds demolished - we will gain victory over evil - over Satan!

3 – Do Not Try To Debate Evil Reasoning !

The Christian that sets out to cast down evil reasoning - using the weapons of this world - or the methods of this world - is going to fail.

Friends - it really is that simple. It is why so many drug treatment facilities have a high failure rate - it is why so many anger management courses make no change in the people who attend them. There are some physical aspects to these issues - but the foundation of the either of these issues is a spiritual problem - and until the Weapons with Divine Power are used - these things will never be overcome.

Most of the worldly agencies have come to the conclusion - "once you are an addict - you will always be an addict." They have come to the conclusion - if you have a violent side to your personality - you will always be a violent person. So all they really hope to do – is to help a person learn to "control their addiction" - or to "control their anger."

When we are made a "New Creation" in Christ Jesus - we are given a whole new kind of hope. Instead of working to CONTROL our addiction - we can actually GAIN VICTORY OVER the addiction - and can become a person who is no longer an addict. Instead of working to control our anger - and control our violent outburst - we can actually gain victory over the anger - and become a person who does not get angry quickly.

Now that we have that picture in our minds - it is exactly the same - with all those "secret sins" that are continuing in the lives of Christians. The reason so many Christians continue their lives battling a secret sin - is they have only battled that sin with the weapons, the methods, and the wisdom of this world. This secret sin has become an evil stronghold in our life - and we can have victory over it - when we start using the weapons provided to us by the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

Our stronghold might be an addiction to an activity rather than a chemical. Our stronghold might be a behavior. When we are ready and serious about getting victory over it - weapons with Divine Power are available from the Holy Spirit. Are we even trying to take every thought captive - or do we just let every thought that comes into our mind run free?

If we think it - we say it? If we think it - we do it? How are we trying to combat the attacks that are being waged against us? Are we trying to battle with the weapons of this world - with the methods of this world - with the techniques of this world? If so, without intending any condemnation - that explains why we keep losing the battle.

Christians - isn't it time to pass up all the world's weapons and methods - and begin using the weapons provided to us by the Holy Spirit. These weapons all have Divine Power - and they can not only win over the evil attacks - they have the power to demolish the strongholds of the evil that is coming against us.

Haven't accepted Jesus as your Savior? Why not ask Jesus to Save you - and then you too - will have access to weapons with Divine Power?

I want to see you winning of the devil and his schemes - I'm tired of watching people being taken down by evil schemes - how about you?

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

2 Corinthians - 34 - Proper Weapons

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

In order to help us keep a proper perspective regarding WHY Paul is writing many of the things in this section of the letter - allow me to share a quick reminder of the characters who were making false claims and accusations:

These false teachers can be called "intruders" - they needed letters of commendation to introduce themselves to the Corinthians - they made special claims to superior authority.

They were legalist - trying to take the Christians back under Old Testament law.

They were contradictory - while they insisted on being under O.T. Law - they claimed Christians were free to have promiscuous relationships - that certainly would not be allowed under the O.T. Law. In other words - they would pick and choose which laws to obey - and which could be ignored.

They glorified in fleshly wisdom - some of them even claimed to have special knowledge that was superior to God's Word - some of them were in the "ministry" for financial gain.

We find from some of the writings of the first century concerning Paul - he was un-impressive in looks - and he didn't have a strong or pleasing voice.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:7 and make notes:

"You are looking only on the surface of things." The Corinthians are told that they are looking at things in a superficial way. If they would look at the facts instead of the accusations - if they would look at the actual lifestyle of Paul - instead of the accusations - if they would consider that all that he has said so far - has been "right on" and consistent - which was not true regarding the false accusers. Considering all these things -the accusations do not line up with the actual facts!

Things are not always as they appear to be. Judging a book by it's cover - we can be dead wrong. "If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ" - it may be that some of the false accusers - were making a claim that "they had been taught and commissioned - by one of the men who had actually walked with Jesus when He was alive" - "you know - a real disciple - instead of this "Paul guy."

Paul's response to this is - "that person should reconsider I am just as much in Christ as they are." No one is more foolish - than the person who thinks he alone belongs to Christ.

There are two types of people who cause harm to the local church: The one who thinks they never have anything to repent of - and the one who thinks they have no need of being taught.

Those who imagine they belong to Christ must consider who Paul belongs to. If the answer is also Christ, then they must listen to what he has to say to them.

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

Read 2 Corinthians 10:8 and make notes:

Paul admitted to occasionally boasting to some degree. But Paul's boasting was never self-centered. The substance of His boasting was always - the Word of God - and the Work of God. Paul did not merely have authority bestowed upon him by man - or any organization of man. Paul had encountered the risen Lord Jesus Christ in person - and it was Jesus who had given Paul Godly authority. This authority was given to Paul - for the purpose of "building up" and "encouraging" - rather than authority for tearing down.

Paul understood authority for tearing down. Before Paul was saved - he had been given authority by the Sanhedrin - to go out and tear down those Christ followers. When we consider the authority of the false teachers that came to Corinth - it is apparent that their authority is all about tearing down. They were tearing down the grace and freedom that had come to the Christians - they were tearing down the gospel as had been preached by Paul - they were tearing down the reputation of Paul personally.

Sometimes - to the casual observer - it might be hard to tell the difference in these two authorities. There is a subtle but important difference - in the authority to tear down - and the authority to build up. The authority to tear down - takes down - pulls out - and puts nothing good in the place of what was taken down. The authority to build up - may have to tear down some things before they actually build up the good.

First consider the vandal - they go into a house and just tear up - break - damage things - and leave the house in an un-liveable mess. Then consider the person who remodels a house. In the first stages - the house may - not only look like a mess - it becomes a mess - as things are taken down - or taken out. But the next stage - is to put in the better - more efficient - more comfortable - more usable - and the end result is that the place is actually build up.

This is a good analogy of what the minister does sometimes to "build up" God's people. At first glance it can appear that they are tearing down people. They might not sound as exciting as others would like - we might not like what the minister says - as far as fun - and being down right enjoyable. It is a lot easier to work with people who have no church background - for they don't have "faulty teachings and doctrines" that have to be overcome - before being taught the "more perfect way."

Paul ascribes his gift to God - and points out that it was given for the common good. Remember while Paul wasn't much to look at - he was at the top of his field academically. His work of answering arguments, - detecting what is unsound - and laying the proper foundation - is all intended for the up-building of the community.

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

Read 2 Corinthians 10:9-10 and make notes:

The false teachers were saying - Paul was trying to frighten people by the things he wrote in the letters. Some might have concluded - Paul must not know what bad things have been said about him. Paul was not ignorant of the negative criticisms - Paul was very aware of the accusations against him.

Many times a minister who is trying to be faithful and obedient to what God has told them - will continue in the ministry - as if nothing negative has been said about them. This does not mean - they have not heard - it does not mean - they do not understand - and it does not mean - it does not hurt.

In the same manner - that Christ did not stop in His obedience to what the Heavenly Father had given Him to do - we must not stop in our obedience to what God has given us to do - just because others come against us - hurt us - or try to destroy us - or the work we are about.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:11 and make notes:

As I studied on this verse - I couldn't help but see Paul in one of those western movie situations. The ones where the bad guys are talking trash and dismissing the the guy who is coming to clean things up. Paul saying, "if you think my letters were strong just wait until I get there in person. I could almost hear the music playing in the background of one of those western movies when the "good guy" is arriving on the scene.

While they were considering only his outward appearance - and thinking this guy don't look so tough - they are forgetting what he was doing before he was saved. Paul was going around killing Christians - for no other reason than they were a Christian. Yeah, this little guy can be tough!

Do you remember in verse 2 - Paul declared "I will not be ashamed" of the authority God gave to me? People who have bold talk - but don't have the power to back up that talk - are put to shame - when someone challenges that talk.

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

When we have the power of God behind what we say - it certainly does not stop negative accusations - but we don't worry about being shamed. This is especially true for those who are always the same - same out of the pulpit as they are behind the pulpit - same on Monday through Saturday as they are on Sunday - same in public - as they are in private.

When we have authority from God - and we know the authority God has given us - and we work within that authority - we may be hurt and disappointed by others - but we will not be shamed.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12 and make notes:

Some time ago - I received an email with a link to a video. When I watched the video - it was a man who claimed to be the "World Champion." He claimed he was the fastest person in the world at drawing his pistol and shooting a target accurately. He stated the name of the organization which had given him the title - "World Champion." And of course he gave a demonstration - he quickly drew his pistol and popped balloons.

Since we had a person in our congregation who has been quite successful in that sport - the next Sunday, I mentioned the video to him - thinking surely he knew the "World Champion" of the sport. As soon as I mentioned the man's name - I noticed a smile appearing - and then I was told that there were only about 4 people in that organization. They were all relatives of this man. He was the only one who was competing against him. In other words - he was comparing himself with himself. Of course - he was the fastest and the most accurate. Not only was he - the only competitor - but he was shooting buckshot from his pistol - of course he always popped the balloon.

The member of our congregation - who has won a number of tournaments competing against other people - explained that he had no respect for that man - and did not respect his ability. Well, after hearing - the man only compared himself with himself - I don't have much respect for his "so called" abilities either.

It's kind of like the person who bestows upon themselves - a title such as "bishop" or "apostle", etc. Paul was personally called to the ministry by Jesus - Jesus is the one who imparted ministry authority to Paul - and yet, Paul did not attest to his authenticity. Paul presented himself to the other apostles - and presented what he was teaching and preaching.

We can easily conclude that if Jesus calls us and Jesus anoints us - why in the world do we need the approval of man? Because flesh can get in the way - and what started out as Holy Spirit led - can gently and slowly slide over to being fleshly and self-serving.

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

God is not only our source - but he is our standard. However, when we get to the place that we don't see the need to be examined by others - we have become dangerous to the local church and will harm the cause of Christ.

I suggest to you - that just like Paul did - every minister who is being led by the Holy Spirit - will willingly present their ministry to other trusted ministers - to measure and evaluate the ministry.

People who commend themselves - are those who wish to dominate, - claiming authority for their own name. A person who is sent on a mission lays claim to power, - not on his own behalf but on behalf of the one who sent him. To use the words of the apostle, people who "compare themselves with themselves," - end by understanding nothing - they are not wise.

What are we to take home with us:

#1 - Don't Look On The Outward Only.

Israel chose their first king based upon the outward appearance - and that did not turn out well. Making decisions based on the outward appearance can be fatal. The Philistine giant named Goliath - judged David by his outward appearance - and that turned out to be a fatal decision.

How often have we missed what the Lord had for us - because the person God put into our life at a particular point in time - simply wasn't all that impressive - and we dismissed them before evaluating the substance? Let's be a little slower - and more careful - about who we write off or dismiss - because they don't look like or sound like - what we think they should

#2 - God Looks At The Heart.

Typically - the reflex response to this statement by Christians is "oh, that's good." And it is - on one level - but we need to reconsider this: Are we spending so much time on our outward - that we are neglecting the part that God is looking at? Do we dress up our outward vocabulary while we neglect the sinful attitude?

Christians become quite skilled at dressing up our talk and our public actions. Knowing God looks on the inward - or on the heart - can be a little scary when we stop to think - God isn't looking at what we do - He's looking at our heart and attitude.

The reality is this - Christians commit many more sins on the inside - than they do on the outside.

#3 - Examine Our Purpose

2 Corinthians -35 - Judging Rightly

Be Careful - our purpose is to "build up" - and not only to "tear down" - before we set in to do any particular ministry work. Let's try to look at what the outcome is likely to be. If it is only to "tear down" - then maybe we should step back - or at least wait - but if the end result is to "build up" - then we can proceed - with caution - and with love

#4 -Be Faithful To God's Word - To You

Don't let hurtful criticism stop you and stop the ministry you are called to do. I know what it feels like to "know you have heard from God" - and to say what God has given you to say - and then have someone look right at you and say "I rebuke that" - and sometimes to say "I rebuke you." It hurts to be rebuked - and rejected - but try to keep a couple of things in mind:

First - they are probably responding to the idea - that it wasn't what they want to hear more than rejecting you.

Secondly - we get rewarded for obedience to God - not for telling people what they want to hear.

Are we the kind of person who only wants to hear what we want to hear? Or do we want to hear what God says?

Are we making some fatal spiritual decisions by dismissing someone based upon their appearance - or because they simply are not impressive?

Are we missing God's best for us - because we dismissed His un-impressive package?

Have we stopped doing what God has given us to do - because someone has criticized us? Or rebuked - and rejected us?

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

2 Corinthians - 36 - A Mature View

The text for this lesson - is very much a part of the text from the last lesson. Just as the previous verses are often skipped over - so are these. I understand - when we read these verses quickly - there doesn't appear to be anything there for us in our contemporary world. But I beg you to join me as we dine from this table for a few minutes. There is an important message for today's Christians - in these few verses.

As the gospel spread throughout the world, - there were people who went and preached in areas that had never heard the gospel, - and there were people who went to places and tried to build on the foundation of what others had done. Some people in this second group - had moved in on Paul's foundation, - and that in itself was not necessarily bad - but they were boasting about a work which they had not even started - and trying to take the credit that belonged to Paul.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:13 and make notes:

"The field God has assigned" - this is so important in today's culture. Too many Christians are comparing themselves to other Christians - too many Churches are comparing themselves to other Churches - too many ministers are comparing themselves to other ministers.

Instead of boasting about having met - or exceeded - some measure provided by other people - Paul said he would only boast in what God has laid out for him. Not only can it happen - it frequently does happen - people take pride in and they openly boast about - having reached or exceeded measures of accomplishment - as laid out by other people - or by organizations - when at the same time - they have side-stepped or only partially completed - what God has laid out for THEM.

Is it really something to boast about - to accomplish what is considered great among people - while we fail to do what God has given us to do? Isn't it enough to boast about having been faithful and obedient - to what God has given us - even if we never accomplish those things the world calls great?

Let's read the rest of the Scriptures for this lesson – and then digest them as a whole.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:14-18 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 36 - A Mature View

Paul did not go too far in what he was doing. He stayed within the limits as set for him by God.

When someone takes pride in their own work - it doesn't necessarily mean they are being excessively proud of themselves. A prudent man doesn't rely on the labors of others. This is why Paul doesn't claim any credit for those who have come to faith - by the preaching of other evangelists. At the same time Paul accuses the false teachers - not merely of boasting too much - but of claiming the credit for the labor of other people.

What Paul personally wanted to do - was to preach the gospel to people who had not yet heard the gospel - so that God will be glorified by his labor. Paul declares - even his assurance and pride are to be given to the Lord, - because it is by God's favor that he has - the assurance and success that he has experienced.

Paul didn't seek the praise of people - but when he was accused of boasting - he defended himself. Paul had learned something that many Christians today - need to know. Please listen carefully to this: It is possible to do harm by ill-timed modesty - and it is also possible to do good - by saying something admirable of oneself at the right time.

Paul didn't claim any bragging rights for himself - he left that to the Lord. Paul is modest, but not to the point where he neglects to tell the truth about himself.

What are we to Take Home?

#1 - A Mature View!

Do We have a mature View of ourselves? We need a Mature View of ourselves as a Christian - and a Mature view of the Gospel Purpose. Paul says - his great desire is to preach the gospel in "regions beyond you." Paul's vision - sounds a lot like the church Jesus spoke about - a church that reaches Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

As a local church moves into maturity - it will be concerned with much more - than just the four walls of the local church or the local community. It will find ways of reaching out to "regions beyond".

The mature Christian view - is to see a church planted in areas - where it has never been planted before - instead of simply making our church bigger. Until we grow and mature, - our sphere of influence will be small. As a Christian's faith grows, - their circle of influence for Christ, - will grow larger.

A local church - with only one person ministering - witnessing - teaching - mentoring - will have a small sphere of influence for the cause of Christ. But as the people of that local church begin to minister to those they come into contact with - co-workers, - neighbors, - clubs, - organizations, etc.- the sphere of influence that local church has for the cause of Christ - grows larger.

2 Corinthians - 36 - A Mature View

When someone from that local church begins a Bible study in their home - and invites people from other areas - the sphere of influence - grows larger. When someone from that local church - is part of starting a Church in another community - the sphere of influence - grows larger. And when we consider the Great Commission - it is evident that Jesus intends for our Circle of Influence to grow larger - Jerusalem - Judea - Samaria - the world. I am grateful - that Jesus did not put a time schedule on the growing process.

#2 - Know Our Assignment

Do we Know Our Assignment? Here is an important thing for us to consider. Paul didn't just preach anywhere he desired - and he didn't devise his own plan as to where he would preach next. Paul strived to stay in constant fellowship with God - and to remain submissive to the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

Paul knew he was called by God to preach the Gospel. Paul was instructed by the Holy Spirit - not only as to where he should go - but also as to where he should NOT go. In Acts 16:6, we are told - the Holy Spirit kept Paul from preaching in Asia - even though Paul wanted very much - to go to Asia and preach there.

Paul didn't doubt he had a divine commission to preach the Gospel. But Paul also understood that this divine commission - could only function properly according to the calling.

Christians are to be servants of God. This means we are to do what he says - and we are to be submitted to His directions - and His timing in our lives. This also means we should not go beyond our gifting and calling. If we go beyond divine calling and gifting - if we go beyond divine timing in our lives - if we go beyond the word of God, - then we will not produce the fruit that God desires for us.

We have some who have gone out - without being sent by God. And we have others who have gone out - that were divinely sent out - but they experienced little apparent success from their preaching. So they set out to devise plans and strategies - to make their preaching more successful - according to the standards of what people call successful.

In many cases, these people not only go beyond what God has called them to do, - but they go beyond the limits of what the Scriptures teach - and they go outside the order - which the Scriptures give for the ministry.

In much the same way that the desire to get high - will drive the addict to steal - the desire to attain success - according to the world's standard - will drive the Christian to go beyond the limits set by Scripture - and the limits set for them by God.

2 Corinthians - 36 - A Mature View

Is that what we want to do - or is that what we want to guard against? Yes, just like any human being who still lives in a fleshly body - I like to be able to see - that the ministry is having some good effect - but the reality is that our desire to be faithful to What God has given us to do - and to be faithful to do it the Way He is leading us to do it - and to be faithful to do it Where He is leading us to do it - and to be faithful to the When He is calling us to do it - this desire must be the one that directs our life - and not the desire to appear successful by the world's measurement of success.

Do we need to ask God to help us take on a Mature View of our calling as a Christian? - as a Church?

Do we need to ask God to help us stay within our assignment?

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

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

We are moving into a section of the letter - where some suggest - Paul was writing out of a wounded pride. Ministers certainly can - and most do experience a wounded pride. In the previous section, Paul said - it is not self-commendation that counts but the commendation of God that counts. It would be inconsistent - that he would turn right around and begin commending himself - even if his pride was wounded.

I submit to you - it was not out of a self-esteem issue - that Paul writes this next section. The Holy Spirit is the one telling Paul what to write. Paul's self-esteem or wounded pride ISN'T the motivation. What motivated this section of the letter is the danger these false apostles - is bringing into the community of the Believers in Corinth.

They have come into the congregation of Believers in Corinth - claiming spurious authority - and proclaiming inflated self-importance - they have intruded into the Faith Family that God used Paul to bring about -they are spewing out erroneous teachings - and they are impersonating apostles.

This still happens today. Many churches have experience people coming into their midst - impersonating ministers - and the results are never healthy.

It is the loving concern the Holy Spirit has for these Believers in Corinth that has motivated this section of the letter. Paul also has a loving concern for them so it is easy to see why the Holy Spirit chose Paul to be the one to write this letter.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1 and make notes:

It is obvious - Paul finds it distasteful - to have to write or say positive things about himself. Paul had much rather be saying positive things about others. Paul says that he is being foolish when he starts to talk about himself - but - he is forced to do so because the Corinthian Believers - have had false teachings planted within them - and now they were harboring unworthy thoughts.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

Paul uses a word here - which is far stronger than mere love. "Jealousy" presupposes a strong affection. Jealousy speaks of a "burning" for the one whom we love. Paul admits to having some jealousy - but his jealousy is not for himself. Paul's jealousy is on behalf of God. Paul's attitude toward the Believers in Corinth - is a lot like that of the parent of a young woman - the parent wants to protect their daughter from harm - wants to keep her clean and pure - so that she can one day be presented to her husband - as a pure virgin.

In that culture it was the right of the father - to give his daughter to an approved bridegroom - and the father could even betroth his daughter - to an approved bridegroom years in advance of the actual wedding. Paul had betrothed this group of Believers to the Divine Husband - Jesus Christ - and he was greatly concerned at the threat of these false teachers contaminating his child.

In that culture - when a woman became betrothed - she no longer was free to do what she wanted to do - and certainly not free to choose - with whom she would do things. From the time of her betrothal - everything she does - every decision she makes - should be preparing herself for - "that day" when she will be married.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:3 and make notes:

Paul does not say that this WILL happen, - but he is afraid that it MIGHT. He knows that it CAN - and he is hoping - they will do the right thing.

The serpent deceived Eve by lying to her about God, - saying that God merely threatened men with death, - but would never actually kill anyone. These false apostles were saying the gospel was merely added to the Old Testament - and it was therefore necessary to go on keeping the law of Moses.

In our own time, we have false teachers. There are those who say they same thing about it being necessary to follow the O.T. Law. There are those who claim hell is merely a threat, - either because it does not exist - or because it is not an eternal punishment. Both of these notions are contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:4 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

I don't know how much of a play on words was intended here - but I can't help but notice it. The phrase "someone comes" - is a clear reference to the false apostles - and it is quite the opposite of an apostle. The word "apostle" - means - "one who is sent'." Paul is the one who - "was sent by God" - to the Corinthians. The false apostles are those who - by their own choosing - came to the Corinthians.

One was sent - the other came. This difference may not sound like much at first glance - but it is like the difference between the shepherd who "leads" the flock - and the butcher who "drives" the flock.

This is a good place to add this little "rule of thumb." A true teacher of the gospel will attempt to lead the people of God - but allow them to choose. The false teacher will attempt to "drive" the people.

What probably happened - was that false teachers appeared - and added to what the apostles had already taught. Their claim would have been that the apostles had NOT said all that there was to say. They were suggesting - Paul has not shared the whole Gospel - or that he has not told the whole story.

This verse expresses something of a disappointment - and it provides the reason why Paul is so concerned that they might be led astray. If someone preaches another messiah - you put up with it easily enough - if someone brings you another spirit - you put up with it easily enough - if someone teaches a different gospel - you put up with it easily enough.

It has been too often - to give you an accurate number - but it has happened many times - I have watched as a young Christian - who loves the Lord deeply - and desires to live for God - allows a false teacher to impart errors to them - impart distortions of God's Word - and before long - they depart the path of Grace and Mercy - and often lose their personal and intimate relationship with the Heavenly Father.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:5 and make notes:

You bear with these intruders well enough - you bear with these false teachers easily enough - at least bear with me - for a little while. There are some who believe the phrase "super-apostles" refers to the authentic apostles - but I am convinced - it refers to these false apostles. The ones who have tried to convince the Corinthians that they have superior knowledge and superior authority. Thus - the title "super-apostle" seems fitting - but in a derogatory way.

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

Read 2 Corinthians 11:6 and make notes:

The Greek culture of that day valued oral rhetoric and philosophical musings. It is likely these false teachers - were making use of some of these verbal techniques in an effort to impress the Corinthians - especially those who are claiming to be superior apostles to Paul. It has already been pointed out in this letter - how artificial eloquence and human philosophy - simply are incompatible with Christian teaching.

However, in that day - much like today - to the lost person - the gospel is seen as mere foolishness. Paul was a sincerely committed minister of the Gospel. He did not employ persuasive words of philosophy or tricks of oratory. Instead he preferred to strive for the purity of the gospel message.

Paul understood that which seemed like foolishness to the lost - was in fact the greatest wisdom true wisdom. Paul concedes - he sounds foolish compared to such great orators. He also concedes - his message is simple compared to the complex thoughts of these great teachers - as they see themselves.

Paul does not try to compete with the false teachers - by polishing his words - or polishing his teaching techniques. After reading the writings of Paul - it would be a big mistake for anyone to consider Paul a clumsy or poor teacher.

Some of the common characteristics of Oral rhetoric:

- entertaining, - formal, - attractive to the listener, -
- but frequently superficial and artificial -
- no real meat to sustain life.

Some of the common characteristics of gospel preaching:

- direct, - serious,
- directed to the heart more so than the mind related to eternal issues
- and has much that can be applied to daily life.

While it might be admitted - there are some deficiencies in his speaking - there certainly is no inadequacy in Paul's knowledge of God's Word. Paul is personally familiar with the inner witness - the leading - and the directing of the Holy Spirit.

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

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

In the materialistic world - there are products that try to copy others. They are usually referred to as "counterfeits" of some Name Brand. These products - even though they are inferior in quality - try to take customers away from the authentic product. It is like this in the Christian world - there are "counterfeit" religions trying to take people away from Christianity.

There are many spirits at work in our world - but there is only "one Spirit - Jesus Christ." These counterfeit spirits work really hard - trying to take Christians away from Christ . There are a number of "gospels" being proclaimed today - but there is only "one authentic gospel." There are many doctrines being taught - but there is only "one true doctrine."

We are being told today that "holiness" just doesn't matter anymore - we are being told that living a lifestyle of "godliness" simply isn't required - "all you have to do is BELIEVE" - "Just Believe" and it will be alright.

Religious Spirits have brought division to the Church - Religious Spirits have brought division into families - Religious Spirits can be recognized by those who know God's Word - Religious Spirits lead false teachers - they teach - Jesus was "not God in the flesh" - they teach Jesus was just one of many good teachers or prophets.

God's Word teaches us - there is Only One God - and He came to earth - and lived in the fleshly body we know as Jesus.

They teach only a portion of the Word of God - and usually the part they teach is distorted. Those being led by Religious Spirits teach "another gospel" - often built upon emotionalism or pride or sometimes "self-believism."

The teacher that we choose to listen to - do they teach the true biblical plan of salvation? Do they teach - we must repent of our sins - and then be baptized? Do they teach a lifestyle of holiness?

Friends we are surely living in dangerous times - Spiritually and economically - but these are also very promising times. The pressure of our times is causing a growing number of people to become hungry for God - and their hunger makes them easy prey for the counterfeiters - they can easily fall into one of the traps of the false teachers.

But! Those that are really hungry for the truth - will quickly discover the lack of substance in the false teachers - they will look for the authentic Gospel - and they will be looking for Authentic Christians.

Will you and I - be authentic in our lifestyle - so that we can be found? Or will we only be authentic in private - while trying to keep our Christianity hidden in public?

If we hide the light - how will those in darkness find their way to "The Light"? What are we to do in such dangerous times?

2 Corinthians - 37 - A Mature View

#1 - Do We Allow Ourselves To Be Deceived?

Let's examine ourselves from time to time - to make sure we have not been deceived - or that we are not in the process of being deceived! A constant referring to - and comparing to - the Word of God - and a daily personal relationship with Jesus - is the only way we can know we are not deceived!

#2 - Do We Easily Receive False Teachings?

Do we put up with those who proclaim erroneous teachings? Teachings that go against the things that Christ teaches us in the New Testament? Do we readily accept every teaching - or do we check every teaching against what the whole Word of God says - before we accept it?

Let's make sure we don't allow ourselves to be drawn away to false teachers - and let's make sure we are authentic - for the sake of those who become hungry for God. During these times when so many are divided - over so many doctrines – let us do what Jesus said - "Love me by loving one another - and love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus said they will know we are Christians - "by our Love" - not adherence to law. During these times when so many are claiming to be a Christian - and so many claim to Love Jesus - but they are hammering people to live within the limits of a legal code – let us not be seen as one more group of legal religious people – but instead be seen as a group who loves one another and loves others.

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

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

A couple of Common Questions - from immature Christians:

Why support foreign missions (or ministry) when we have so many needs here?

Why don't foreign missionaries - just get jobs when they get to the country where they want to be missionaries?

And - it is not only foreign missions - sometimes it is a question of financially supporting a ministry in this country - perhaps helping to establish a church in a community that needs one.

I have in years past - and a very large number of ministers have also - worked a secular job to support their family - while pastoring a small church - that is not able to provide for the Pastor and their family.

A question that is asked by a fairly large number of immature Christians - why don't All Pastor's work a job and provide for their family? Why don't they do "tent making like Paul" - and not take any finances from the church?

First, Paul was not a pastor - he was planting churches - establishing congregations - and then moving on to a new place to start another. When he installed a pastor - he instructed the congregation to provide the finances for their Pastor. Paul was quite clear - the local church should provide financial support for their lead Elder - especially if they were a Teaching Elder.

Secondly - it was true - Paul made tents for a while to provide for his own personal finances. It is NOT true - that Paul did that for the rest of his ministry years. There came a time when Paul had established several churches - and it was a sufficient number to provide his financial support. So, he no longer made tents - and instead devoted his full time to preaching the gospel. That is the situation Paul was in when this second letter to the Corinthians was written.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:7 and make notes:

Paul presents the Corinthians with an interesting question- "was it a sin for me to give the gospel to you without charging?" If they respond that it WAS a sin - then that will present them with a problem – every time someone gives them a gift of any kind in the future. If they respond that it was NOT a sin - then they have to re-evaluate the concept of a "teacher's worth being determined by what they charge." They have to re-evaluate their contemporary culture's value system.

Those who responded to the gospel Paul preached among them - found themselves being raised FROM death - condemnation - and guilt - and raised TO life - freedom - and being made innocent - how could anyone call this "a sin"?

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

In the Greek culture of that day - those who were able to impress the crowds with their oratory skills - were considered worthy of pay. Professional philosophers who sold their wisdom for money were a familiar feature. People had become accustomed to paying money to those who would come into their town and speak with eloquence - even if they had come without invitation.

Today, we tend to think - "a worker's value is indicated by the pay they receive." The Greeks would tend to think - "a teacher's value is indicated by how much they charge for their teaching."

Paul was different from the false teachers in so many ways. Here is one of the ways he was different: the false teachers were putting the Corinthians in debt - the more the false teachers taught - the more the Corinthians debt to them increased. Paul was not putting the Corinthians in any debt what-so-ever. Paul's attitude was that he was discharging HIS Debt.

In Romans 1:14 - Paul declared he was "obligated to both Greeks and non-Greeks." The more Paul taught - the more he sounded like Jesus. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 10:8 - "freely you have received - so freely give."

Read 2 Corinthians 11:8 and make notes:

Paul makes it clear - not only did other churches encourage him in his ministry to the Corinthians - but they also gave him significant financial support. When he used the phrase - "robbing other churches" - Paul is clearly exaggerating - for effect, - but we must remember - he warned the Corinthians at the beginning of the chapter - to bear with a little foolishness as he made his point.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:9 and make notes:

Paul accepted contributions from the Macedonians - because they corrected their faults. But was not receiving anything from the Corinthians - because they were not ready to correct theirs.

To those who were paying attention - this is the greatest condemnation of the Corinthians imaginable. While he was benefiting the Corinthians - Paul was being funded by Believers - in other churches. In other words - the Corinthians were not paying their own way.

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

Read 2 Corinthians 11:10-11 and make notes:

Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand his love for them was beneficial, - it was not harmful. It was a giving love - instead of a taking love. With love as the motive for his behavior, Paul makes his admonition even more serious.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:12 and make notes:

This was the point on which the false apostles felt they could attack Paul. The false teachers wanted to be considered at the very least - to be equal to Paul - but most of them wanted to be considered - superior to Paul.

Paul is offering them an opportunity to prove they are as good - or even superior - they can start offering their teaching - without any associated charge - "I'll just keep on doing what I am doing preaching the gospel to the Corinthians without charging them" - "here's your opportunity to show you are equal" - "you can start doing the same."

This principle is still in use today - a missionary will get churches and individuals in this country - to support them financially - then they will go to a foreign country - and preach the gospel without charge.

What are we to take home with us – or What's the "App" we are to download from this text?

#1 - The Value Of Our Salvation

There is something within us as human beings - that causes us to struggle in this area. The worth of something being somehow connected to what we pay for it. There have been a number of examples - someone tried to give an item away - for Free - and no one would take it. Then they put a small price on the same item - and offer it for sale - and it sells right away.

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

There is something within our thinking processes that tells us - "if they are giving it away - it must not be worth having" - there was something within the thinking processes of the Corinthians - "if a teacher is not charging for their teaching - it must not be worth listening to."

The false teachers were taking advantage of this way of thinking - saying something along the lines - "the teaching of Paul is so worthless - that he doesn't dare take any payment for it"

It is interesting - the words used in verse 8 - "robbed other churches." The original Greek words do not refer to one who has broken into a home and stolen from it - but are the words that refer to a military conquering a village or town - and then pillaging the conquered town. It was accepted - everything of value in a conquered town belonged to the conqueror. Not only had the Corinthians received the Gospel without being required to pay for it - but others who had already surrendered to the Gospel - were in fact paying so that the Corinthians could receive it without having to pay.

This makes the message - different from being FREE. The Gospel IS NOT FREE - Someone Else HAS PAID For It!

If we refuse to allow the enemy to bring fog and distortion into our thinking - we can easily grasp this concept. When a man gives a woman a ring and ask her to marry him - the woman does not think - "he isn't charging me for this ring - it must not be worth anything." She understands the ring is not free - she understands - He Paid For It!

A parent gives their teenage child a car - the car isn't free - the parent paid for it. When the parents pay for the adult child to attend college - the college education is not free - the parents paid for it - or the scholarships and grants paid for it - but it IS NOT Free! While the child may not realize this - the Parents Do!

Just because you and I do not have to pay for our Salvation - in no way indicates our Salvation is worthless - or worth very little. It was paid for by Jesus - and what a tremendous price He Paid!

What value do we place on our Salvation? Do we treat it as something cheap - or something of Great Value that has been given to us?

#2 - The Pressure Of Our Culture

The false teachers were more like parasites. They arrived without invitation - and drained the Corinthians of sustenance. Paul - while it can be argued - also arrived without invitation by the Corinthians - did not drain the Corinthians - instead he offered life - forgiveness - and freedom.

The false teachers were trying to incite Paul to start accepting payment from the Corinthians - even if it meant intimidating him - or even trashing his name or reputation. They were infuriated at Paul's approach - and they wanted him to become more like them.

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

The pressure was - this "preacher of the Gospel" - simply must start acting more like the culture of our times. The pressure was put upon Paul to start acting like - and looking like the more popular teachers of that time. Paul refused to change his method - because Paul knew he was being directed by the Holy Spirit.

Are we giving into the pressure of culture? Or - following the Direction of the Holy Spirit?

Do you and I treat our Salvation - as though it is a costly and valuable gift that someone else paid for - OR - do we have the attitude that resembles the confused attitude of the Corinthians - since it cost us nothing - we treat our Salvation as if it is worth very little?

Today, how many Christians - how many Ministers - give in - to the pressure to look more like the culture - give in - to the pressure to use the methods of the culture - instead of following the direction of the Holy Spirit?

It is a serious issue - and far too many of us do not consider it. We are more concerned about following "the popular" thing of the moment - than we are concerned about being obedient to the Holy Spirit.

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

2 Corinthians - 38 - Perceived Value

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

In the previous lesson from second Corinthians - we were challenged to consider what value we place on our Salvation - or do we - value it at all? And we were asked to consider how we are responding to the pressure to be more like our contemporary culture - at the expense of being obedient to what God has called us personally to do. This lesson presents another important question.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:13 and make notes:

The false apostles who have come to Corinth - are not simply confused or mistaken. These are people who have invaded the territory with the express purpose of usurping the genuine apostolic authority and to take the life out of the gospel message. They have come to Corinth with the intention to perform destructive work - and this they are doing with treachery and deceit.

Since the Holy Spirit is the one telling Paul what to write - if these men were simply confused or mistaken - then that is what Paul would have said -but that is NOT what he was told to write. Again - these are not men who are confused and think they are apostles when they are not - these are men who KNOW they are not apostles - and they are intentionally masquerading as Apostles of Christ Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 and make notes:

Since Satan masquerades as something he is not - it is not a surprise - those who are being led by Satan - will masquerade as something they are not. Ministers of darkness - masquerade as ministers of light. Ministers of division - masquerade as ministers of bonding. Ministers of wickedness - masquerade as ministers of righteousness.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

Paul asked earlier - indulge him in a little foolishness - for those who still think Paul is a fool - he is here - renewing that request. Paul is not really boasting - he merely wants to show that others who boast - have nothing more to show for themselves than he has, - so that if they are worthy of praise - then so is he.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:17-18

When Paul says he is - "not talking as the Lord would" - he is not saying - he isn't speaking with Divine Authority - nor is he denying Divine Inspiration. This is referring to the process of boasting - or of self-commendation - and any human being that commends themselves - or boast about themselves - Is Being Foolish. What can any of us do - that has any consequence at all - without God's direction - without God's help - and God's strength?

Some Jewish believers were claiming superiority - as children of Israel. The Jews claimed this because they are the children of Abraham - and the Corinthians are NOT.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:19-20 and make notes:

Paul speaks quite frankly and directly to the Corinthians. They have thought themselves to be "so wise" - that they "gladly put up with fools" as a result - they have put up with being "enslaved" - they have put up with being "exploited" - they have put up with being "taken advantage of" - they have put up with being "pushed around" - they have put up with being "slapped in the face."

We understand this kind of language. Some of us - have heard someone speak about us - to others - and sometimes speak to us - with words - or a tone of voice - that we considered a - "slap in the face." To be moved from the "Gospel of Grace" to the religion of "Legalism" - is being "enslaved." To be taken from the freedom of a life in Love into the ceremonial life of religion - is being placed into "bondage."

Read 2 Corinthians 11:21 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

The false apostles have been accusing Paul of being "weak." Some interpret this verse as Paul admitting - they are right - but that is not what is being said here. Paul is using the false accusations made against him - as a spring board to continue his satire against these false apostles. Paul is saying - "I admit that I am too weak to place you into bondage" - "I am too weak to take advantage of you" - "I am too weak to slap you around" - "I am too weak to abuse you in any way." -

These fakes have been boasting about being an apostle. Paul - confesses it is foolish behavior - but he - "dares to boast about being an apostle." Let's admit it right away - Paul's track record of being an apostle - is second to no one. There is not even one of the original disciples that walked and lived with Jesus - who has a track record of ministry as an apostle - that out-shines that of Paul.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:22 and make notes:

This verse lets us in on a little fact - these false apostles were not a group of gentiles - they were Jews - and apparently proud of their Hebrew roots. The first two statements of this verse are not a repetition. Not all Hebrews were Israelites; Ammonites, and Moabites were Hebrews as well.

This also helps us understand why they were so adamant - that the Gentile Christians needed to become Jewish Christians. However, they seem to be unaware - Paul had been a Pharisee of Pharisees - no one would be able to "out Jew" Paul.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23 and make notes:

Some have interpreted this verse to say - Paul is acknowledging these intruders are in fact - ministers of the Gospel - "servants of Christ." Paul has already called them what they are - they are impostors. What Paul is saying in this verse - is that they "call themselves servants of Christ" - but "Paul is even more a servant of Christ."

In a similar vane - as their claim to being Jewish - can any of them out-shine Paul as to being a servant of Christ? Has any of them been in prison for preaching the Gospel? Has any of them been flogged for preaching the Gospel more times than Paul? Has any of them faced death for the cause of the Gospel? Which one of them - has gone to as many places to preach the Gospel?

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

No one can "out Jew" Paul - and neither can anyone "out servant of Christ" Paul. What Paul is saying would sound something like this today: while I don't like to brag - and in fact I admit - boasting is down right foolish - but if this has to boil down to a bragging contest - "bring it on."

Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and make notes:

If we were writing this today - we would probably place these verses into parenthesis. Basically - Paul is saying: "if you want to make this a bragging contest - here are some of the things you need to be ready to compete with - are you sure you want to go there?"

Read 2 Corinthians 11:28 and make notes:

"Do you really want to compete to see how you measure up in this area?" Now that we have all of that boasting about outward things - out in the open - which none of it amounts to a heap of beans - it's not about works - is it? So with the outward things out of the way - Let's talk about the heart!

Read 2 Corinthians 11:29 and make notes:

Paul is so sensitive to the needs - and to the cares - of the Believers in the Church. When they suffer from being weak - he suffers with them, When one of them gets led into sin - he feels the pain of their burn.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:30-31 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

Paul refuses to seriously boast about anything thing he has accomplished - or even what he has endured for the cause of Christ. Paul insist that any boasting he does - will be boasting on the Power of God to sustain the weak man that he is - he will boast on the Power of God to protect the weak man that he is. So in short - Paul's boasting will be toward God - and never toward himself. Paul calls God as his witness in order that what he says may be readily believed.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 and make notes:

The governor of Damascus, - seeing that the Jews had set a trap for the apostle, - wanted to bring this wicked scheme to pass - by a wrongful use of his power. He intended to capture Paul - both in order to keep the Jews happy - and to demonstrate that he was doing his job properly.

This took place at the very beginning of Paul's ministry. The point being - that even this escape was not due to Paul's power - cunning - or skill. Some might brag about evading capture by royal forces. What a humbling method of deliverance but it was provided by God!

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

#1 - Be Alert For Counterfeits

This isn't just about a church of long ago in a far away place. The history of the Church - has many examples of a loving, Godly people - standing quietly by - as false teachers take their freedoms away from them - and place them into a prison of religion.

The false teachers do not stand by the gospel - or the discipline and law of Christ, - but they call themselves Christians. Tares do their best to look like wheat, - but however close to wheat - they are in appearance - their taste reveals them for what they really are. The proof is in the fruit.

There are many wolves going about "in sheep's clothing," - they wear the coats of sheep, - they wrap themselves in the appearance of a gentle creature - they disguise themselves as being innocent - but they possess sharp teeth - and when it is least expected - they inject the deadly poison of their religion.

There are some who occupy the office of pastor in order to care for God's sheep, - but there are others who take that office in order to gratify themselves - at the expense of the church.

Here is the real test of being a true apostle - true minister - true Christian - "concern for all the churches." The false minister's - primary concern - is for themselves - for their own personal welfare.

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

Paul - as do all true ministers - have a primary concern for the churches - for their welfare - before his own. The captivity of our brothers and sisters in Christ must be thought of as our captivity. The sorrow of those in danger - must be considered as our sorrow. We must never be tricked into forgetting there is one body - of our unity.

What wonderful love Paul had for the Believers! When others fall, he says, I feel their grief, when others suffer from the obstacles they encounter - I feel the fire of their suffering.

All those who are entrusted with the leadership of God's people - MUST imitate this - and truly care for the people of God - more so than for themselves. And while this is a great place for a hearty "amen" - this isn't only for the Pastor or the minister - this should be the case for every Believer!

We need the grace of God, to help us have a sober mind and watchful eyes, - so we are not tricked into eating the tares - instead of wheat - and as a result - come to harm for not knowing better; - we need God's discernment - so we do not mistake the wolf for a sheep - and be ravaged; - and so we do not take the death-dealing devil - for a good angel - and be destroyed.

Satan works to draw us into a maze of deceit. He snatches people away from the church and, just when they think they have drawn near to the light and escaped the world, - he plunges them into a new darkness.

#2 - What Is Our Boast?

What were the things Paul boasted of? His birth, his wealth, his wisdom, his being circumcised, his Hebrew ancestry? Paul knew - none of these things mattered in the slightest, - which is why he called this way of speaking foolish.

Here is the important question for us: What will be boast of?

Do we boast of the occupation we have? Do we boast - of our title or degree? Perhaps we boast in the things we can do better than others? The fact that we can send a text message faster than anyone else in the county? The Great Christian parents or Grand-parents we had? The well known or famous Christians we have been with? The bad things we don't do? The good things we do? How many hungry people we gave food? How many people we gave clothes? How many people we brought to church? How many we brought to Salvation? And the list can go on and on.

But, Oh What An Important Question! Do we have a heart and a concern for all Christians - or just for ourselves? Are we being alert and watchful for the counterfeits that Satan will surely send our way?

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

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

2 Corinthians - 39 - What Is Our Boast

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

It is fairly common to hear someone tell another person - "you can do anything you want." And they might add - "just make up your mind" - or "just set you mind to it." That is only half true. It falls into the category of half truths like: "in this country you have the freedom to do anything you want to do."

I have strong personal feelings about individual freedom in this nation. I tend to vote against anything that takes away individual freedom - but that statement is only half true. The whole truth is - "in this country, you have the freedom to do anything you want to do - as long as it doesn't interfere - with another person's right to do what they want to do."

Do you see the Important Difference? There are a lot of Christians today who are going about their lives - with a half truth - and the text of this lesson speaks directly to that half truth.

In the previous part of this letter - Paul had pointed out - the false teachers - could not measure up to the specifics of living up to the Jewish Law that he had done. Paul - pointed out how he had preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ - and had taken no pay for it - as compared to the false teachers. He pointed out all the different places he had preached the Gospel - compared to the false teachers. He asked the Corinthians to compare all the different dangers he had faced - just to preach the Gospel - to that of the false teachers. He pointed out how he had been on the edge of death more than once - just for the sake of the Gospel. He pointed out his heart's concern for the Corinthians - compared to the self-interest of the false teachers.

In summary - Paul said they cannot "out Jew" me - and they can't they "out sacrifice me" - nor can they "out serve me" - but just in case the adherence to the Law - or the taking the Gospel to so many places - or the facing danger and even death - and feeling the pains and the joys of the Corinthians - if all of this is not enough - then I ask you to compare the false teachers to me in the area of visions and revelations from God.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1 and make notes:

Paul has already stated that "boasting is foolish" - and "commending ourselves amounts to nothing." So to continue in this - well there is just nothing to be gained by it. It is not so much the good deeds themselves are the cause of pride, - it is our telling of our good deeds to others. The more we tell of our good deeds - the more our pride grows.

I feel sure Paul understood this principle - and knowing this principle played a large part - as to the "why" Paul did not want to keep telling "what good things I have done."

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

Read 2 Corinthians 12:2 and make notes:

Some interpret this as Paul referring to another person who has had the experience - and Paul has heard their testimony. Others - and I am one of these - interpret this as Paul referring to himself. Seeing Paul's discomfort and even dis-taste of boasting - perhaps talking about it in a third person - makes it easier for Paul to talk about the experience. There are some things he is still ignorant about. This fits with Paul saying: "We know in part and we prophesy in part."

Read 2 Corinthians 12:3-4 and make notes:

Again - Paul admits there are things that he does not know. AND each time Paul admits there are things he doesn't know - he proclaims - "But God Knows." There is a great deal we don't know - but there is "No Thing" - that God does not know!

It is worth noting - Paul DID NOT spend any time - building up the experience of being shown Heavenly things. This is especially important in our day. There are several people who claim to have had an "out of the body experience" - and they have written many pages into a book - just to tell "all about it." They have become celebrities.

Compare this to Paul - when he had such an experience. First - he left it at - "things man is not permitted to tell." Secondly - it motivated him to serve the cause of the gospel even more. The experience did not motivate him to desire to be a celebrity.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:5-6 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

Paul was embarrassed at having to boast. Saying it in this manner - helps Paul avoid suggesting that he is in some way - more special than other Christians. It is obvious that Paul was talking about himself, - but he says this in order to show that none of this matters to him in the slightest. AND - He would prefer not to talk about it at all.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7 and make notes:

It might be impossible for us to count the number of different suggestions as to what the "thorn in the flesh" was. The Holy Spirit did us a big favor - by having Paul write about it in such general and vague terms. I have noticed - people have a tendency to want to elevate an experience to a place that sometimes borders on worshipping a specific experience. This is especially true when someone we hold in high esteem spiritually - has had that experience.

Without initially setting out to do so, - in no time we start setting that experience as some type of standard. We start hearing people say things like - If you want to be really spiritual - then you must have "this experience" - and until you have "this experience" - well you just need to keep growing - and trying "a little harder."

The other side of that coin is - we have a tendency to totally excuse certain behaviors - especially when someone we hold in high regard. It goes something like this - "we know this person is the most Godly person there is - so if they do it - then it is certainly okay - and not a sin."

If the Holy Spirit had directed Paul to identify specifically what his thorn in the flesh was - I suspect that it would not have been long before Christians who were having the same trial - would have started ignoring it - considering it to be of no significance. "It's the same thing Paul had to endure - so just ignore it and go on."

Since the Holy Spirit didn't inspire Paul to identify the thorn in the flesh - since the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about it in such general terms - this account has been a tremendous encouragement and help - to a very large number of Believers fighting against a large variety of "trials."

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

Paul begged that the thorn be removed from him. But Paul was denied the fulfillment of his prayer. Paul shares something in common with Christ Jesus. Jesus prayed in the Garden - asking that he NOT have to experience the beatings and the crucifixion. Jesus pleaded for God to make some other way. Although Paul asked three times, - his request was NOT granted. It wasn't that he was disregarded - or ignored by God - but he was making a request - which was against his own best interests.

Paul sought to be delivered from the trial. But "the thorn" - was what Paul needed in order to become what God wanted him to become.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9 and make notes:

Concerning this thorn - Paul asked the Lord three times that it might depart from him. And God said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you: for my power is made perfect in weakness." The greater the weakness of the human - through which God is working- then the greater the Divine Power of God is highlighted.

If others had seen me lift 200 lbs before - and now I am trying to lift 220 lbs - and it is obvious I can't do it - then God reaches down and helps me - God would get the glory for helping. Those watching would see that God helped me with the 20 lbs beyond my ability.

Now consider that those watching - see me trying to lift 1,200 lbs. I can't even make the weight move - let alone get it off the floor. Then God reaches down and enables me to lift the 1,200 lbs. Those watching - give God glory for helping with 1000 lbs beyond my ability.

The greater my weakness for the task at hand - the greater my weakness for the temptation before me. The Greater the Glory to God - when I make it through and accomplish the goal.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:10 and make notes:

Humility like this - does away with frailty. Paul wanted to be delivered from these things, - but when God told him otherwise - he accepted it and was even glad about it. Paul doesn't say that he enjoyed these things - but that he had learned to cope with them. For the person being obedient to Christ - there is consolation in affliction - and there is grace in the consolation.

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

What Are We To Take Home With Us From This Text?

First: OUR PRAYERS -

Always Answered - Not Always Granted!

There are two major camps on this topic: Those who teach - "you just proclaim and claim it - then God has to do it." Some of them wait a long time to discover it - but they all eventually find out "we can't control God or make Him do anything." The other camp tends to think - it seems perfectly reasonable to us - that we don't deserve to have our prayers answered. It just might make sense to us - that we have been so bad - that it is right that God should ignore anything we say.

To the second line of thinking - I ask you to consider the apostle Paul - AFTER Paul was saved - and AFTER he had been serving God for several years - AFTER Paul had actually been really obedient God. It was after years of being "really good" - that Paul was praying and asking for this thorn to be removed.

So this prayer - not being answered - isn't about Paul's unworthiness - and just in case there is someone who is thinking - "yeah, but Paul was bad before he was saved - and he deserves to be ignored for his past sins" - without even saying how wrong that line of thinking is - I ask you to consider Jesus praying in the Garden - asking the Heavenly Father to "please let this cup pass from me." Surely no one thinks there was sin or un-worthiness in Jesus!

While I am certainly willing to admit that sin in our life - CAN be a hindrance to having our prayers answered - Just Because we Do Not get what we pray for - Does Not mean there is sin in our life.

Not receiving what we ask for in prayer - does not indicate we are not acceptable to God. Not receiving what we ask for in prayer - does not mean there is sin in our life. Not receiving what we ask for in prayer - does not mean God did not hear our prayer. It means nothing more than what we have asked for in our prayer - is not what is best for us - at least at this time.

It might be that if we should get the thing we are asking for - if we should get the deliverance we are asking for - it could interfere with us becoming the wonderful person God has designed us to be. Whether we have our requests granted or not, - let us keep on giving thanks - not only when we get what we ask for - but also when we don't.

Even though Paul asked God several times to remove the thorn in the flesh - the thorn remained. But something else ALSO remained with Paul - it was God's Grace - and God's Power.

I don't think any of us in our right mind - would want to continue in a time of trials and temptations - a time of troubles and sufferings. But if we have the assurance of God's Grace and God's Power also remaining with us - then we will have the confidence - that as long as God's Power and Grace are with me - this trial - or this temptation - WILL NOT WIN.

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

Second: RESPONSE TO TRIALS -

Can't Control What Comes Our Way - Can Control How We Respond!

It is true that we CAN NOT control what kinds of trials and temptations come our way. But it is equally true that DO have control over How We Respond to the trials and temptations.

Paul did not ignore the thorn in the flesh. Neither did he curse the thorn in the flesh. When Paul finally settled it in his heart - that God is not going to remove this "thorn in the flesh" - instead of whining and complaining - Paul took the attitude - "this is what I have to deal with - so with God's help I will deal with it."

Paul used it to grow stronger. Paul used it to grow in spiritual stamina - and that is what we should do - with every trial that is allowed to come our way. The trial may happen in order to humble us, - this sort of thing is not permitted for our humiliation - but for our strengthening. When some infirmity - or some weakness attacks us, - our power can be made perfect, - our faith can be crowned.

Who could love us more than God does? Yet he continually teaches us - as well as chastises us for our good. After all, God who knows better than we do - what is for our benefit - and He also knows what steps must be taken for our salvation.

Not only did God NOT free Paul of the troubles afflicting him, - but he even allowed Paul to persevere in them. Listen to Paul's own words when he learned what the Lord had decided: "I will gladly boast of my weaknesses." Not only, he says, - do I no longer seek to be rid of them, but I even boast of them with greater satisfaction.

God has tried the patriarchs, even good and devout ones, by famine; he has chastised stubborn people with heavier punishments. And none of that was just to be mean to them or just to make them suffer. It was to make them better.

God did not take away from the Paul the thorn in the flesh, - though Paul asked three times. God did this to strengthen Paul by way of Paul's weakness.

When some infirmity and weakness and desolation attacks us - Christ gives us the power to endure these - so that what previously appeared to be painful and loathsome - comes to be seen as the avenue of how our faith was made strong. We learn from this that even a wrong prayer - will receive an answer, - even if it does not get what it wants.

Paul did not need exemption from danger or from fear, - Paul did not need complete freedom to preach without any form of hindrance. Indeed, when these troubles come, - God's power of deliverance is shown, - and the gospel triumphs in spite of persecution.

The more the trials increased, - the more grace increased as well. God's power is made perfect in persecutions and sufferings. Paul wanted to make it clear - his affliction was not a natural property of the body. It was something which was intended by God for a higher purpose.

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

Recognizing our weakness - guards against pride. That strength and virtue by which one is not proud in this life - where he could be proud is made perfect in weakness. For the weak things of the world are chosen by God - that the strong may be put to shame, - and the foolish things of this world put to shame its wisdom.

When we boast in our strength - when we boast in our endurance - when we boast in our knowledge or wisdom - or any other thing of ourselves - the glory of the boasting is directed toward US! By boasting only in our weakness - we keep the glory of any boasting directed to God.

For those who do not run around whining about their problems - the most common response to trouble and problems today: we just pretend they are not there - we pretend we are not suffering we pretend we don't have a problem - and if we do admit we have a problem - we pretend we don't need help.

When we find ourselves facing a trouble - when we find ourselves facing a painful situation - please don't ignore the trouble - and please don't curse the trouble. Let's acknowledge our weakness - and turn it over to God - and we can see God being exalted - as He brings solutions and even deliverance.

Back to the beginning statement that I said was only half the truth - "you can do anything you want." Would you like to hear the whole truth? The whole Truth is found in Philippians 4:13; We can do all things - THROUGH CHRIST who strengthens us.

Remembering that the emphasis is to be on the "through Christ" - those who maybe have been begging God to get you out of this painful place – ask a fellow believer to join you and pray with you about it. Those who have been complaining and "cursing" the hard place you are in – ask a fellow believer to join you and pray with you - and seek a new attitude toward your struggle.

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

2 Corinthians - 40 - Response To Affliction

(this page for additional notes)

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

In the previous lesson - we pointed out - no one really knows - what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. We do know that it tormented him. We know that it was the kind of thing that disturbed him so much - he asked God three times that it might depart from him.

Paul received the response from God - that he would not remove the "thorn in the flesh" - but would give Paul the Grace to deal with it. Paul accepted that response and said, "if I can't be relieved of this distress - then I will just brag on my weakness and - on the Glory of God."

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11 and make notes:

Did you notice that Paul said - "you drove me to boasting?" It wasn't the foolish boasting of the false teachers - it was the way the Corinthian Believers had conducted themselves - that drove Paul to boast.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:12 and make notes:

Not only had God worked "signs, wonders, and miracles" through Paul - Paul had shown "great perseverance" in the ministry to the Corinthians. He talks about his patience because for a long time he put up with them as if they were sick people.

It wasn't that Paul didn't notice - or that he was unaware of their sins - He put up with it - allowing time for them to grow and mature. Notice - Paul says - these things were done in great patience, - because bearing all things nobly - is the sign of an apostle.

We understand - God looks upon our heart - so our heart is more important - than our deeds. In a very similar way - "perseverance" is more important than signs, wonders, and miracles. I will get back to this statement in a few minutes.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:13 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

If we recall an earlier lesson from second Corinthians - the false teachers were trying to convince the Corinthians - that Paul wasn't really an Apostle - at least he wasn't a "Real Teacher" because he did not charge a fee for his teaching. Paul now refers to this "lack of charging a fee."

He was saying - the only way he treated the Corinthian church differently from all the other churches - is that all of the others were expected to provide financial support to Paul - while the Corinthians were being ministered to without any fees - having to be paid.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14 and make notes:

This concept does not fit into all the cultures of our world - but it fits quite nicely into the culture of our nation. We don't generally think in terms of children working and saving - in order to leave an inheritance for their parents - or children saving to "take care of" - their parents. Instead, we generally think of parents trying to leave an inheritance for the children. Even when a parent is in financial need - they would rather have the attention and time with their children - than to have the finances of their children.

Paul was very clear - "what I want is not your possessions - I want you." Paul's desire was to gain the Corinthians themselves - and not their money. Paul is telling the Corinthians - if he had more to give them, he would be do so, - just as any loving parent desires to give more to their children. And withholds no good thing from them. He will not be a burden to them when he comes. On the contrary, - he will give them far more than he will take from them.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:15 and make notes:

This is a far cry from desiring finances from the Corinthians. Paul states - he would gladly spend everything he has - in an effort to meet the needs of the Corinthians. Now Paul is openly expressing the love and affection which he had for them, - since he is prepared not only to spend lavishly on their behalf - but even to die for the salvation of their souls.

As a minister - Paul had a right to receive financial support from them, - but he chose - not do so. The depth - and the tenderness of Paul's love for the Corinthians - can only be exceeded by God's love for the Corinthians. While there are harsh places in this letter - the tenderness and love expressed in these few verses - surely outshines all of the hard sayings of the letter.

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

Let me just go ahead and say it right here; Ministers today - should imitate Paul's behavior!

Read 2 Corinthians 12:16 and make notes:

This is another place where Paul uses the false accusations of the false teachers - as a spring board - getting the important message across to the Corinthians. The false teachers had tried to convince the Corinthians - Paul was being "crafty" - and Paul was tricking them into giving him their money. Paul said - "being the crafty fellow that I am - I caught you by trickery" - "I tricked you right into NOT giving me money - aren't I just the craftiest guy you have ever met?"

The truth was - these false teachers - were the ones who wanted the Corinthian's money. They were actually afraid if Paul kept ministering for free - he might start getting the money instead of them. The attacks on Paul were not out of concern for the welfare or safety of the Corinthians. It was out of concern for their own welfare. It is the customary practice of those who are being led by the evil one - people working toward a wicked purpose - will accuse God's people of doing the very thing that the wicked - themselves are doing.

In summary - when someone falsely accuses one of God's children - it turns out - that in the large majority of cases - the one who is making the false accusation - is guilty of the action or deed - that they are falsely accusing another of doing.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:17-18 and make notes:

Paul is saying - the people whom he sent to them - never even suggested - that if they wanted Paul's favor - they should offer him more money. Have I exploited you in any way? Has Titus or any of the others - I sent to you - have they exploited you in any way? The honest answer to these questions - "no, they were beyond suspicion." It is obvious - since nothing like this was done by any of Paul's colleagues, - the unanimous verdict on him has to be - he and his colleagues were of good character.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:19 and make notes:

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

If anyone is thinking that what I have been doing is trying to defend my actions - if that is what you think - then think again. I haven't been trying to defend myself - I have been trying to strengthen you!

Read 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 and make notes:

Paul expresses a three part fear: First - both he and the Corinthian Believers will be mutually disappointed. Second - the sins that had become so prevalent among the Corinthian Believers would still be going on. Third - he would experience humiliation under God's hand again any of us who have ever been humiliated understands - not wanting to be humiliated again.

Some of the Corinthians had truly repented but others have not. Repentance of sins is of no real effect - unless it brings about the conversion of the heart. We are talking about those who have been converted by divine aid - through the exercise of their own freedom of choice - and whose lives are genuinely changed for the better.

True converts will still occasionally sin, - either through ignorance or through the stubbornness of their will. However, if they have truly experienced Salvation - They do NOT stop asking for the forgiveness of their sins.

Those of us who are truly Saved - Those of us who have been genuinely Converted - Never - Ever try to excuse our Sins! The reality of a person being Saved - can usually be seen in the depth of their pain - when they discover they have sinned.

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

Use Proper Criteria When Evaluating A Minister. (or Ministry)

As I read and studied this letter to the Corinthians - I found myself wondering - why they ever allowed themselves to be duped by these false teachers - especially when it seems so obvious their intent from the beginning was to exploit the Believers at Corinth?

Were the Corinthians ashamed of the apostle Paul? Were they ashamed of his apparent cheapness? Were they ashamed of Paul because he didn't speak with eloquence? Was it because he did not sound like a great expounder of the Truth?

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

The men, who came in and pronounced themselves to be great apostles and great servants of God, - evidently expected the individuals in Corinth to support them. In fact, they even exploited them, when they could. How blind can a person be - that they prefer the exploiter - rather than the apostle that has given them the pure word of God? Then it dawned on me - the Corinthians were just like Christians today!

Why did I say earlier "perseverance" is more important - than signs and wonders? Think back to the account of Moses going before Pharaoh - and asking him to release the Israelites? The magicians who were part of the false religion of Egypt - performed signs and wonders - they mimicked what Moses did.

False teachers CAN PERFORM signs and wonders that look very much like the signs and wonders the true minister of God performs. False teachers however, seldom persevere - when there does not appear to be any financial gain coming.

The Corinthians used the wrong criteria in evaluating and assessing ministry. They used the love - of power and love of supernatural displays, - in assessing their leaders. They were attracted more to those who could make a flamboyant outward appearance - and could make great claims for themselves. That simply is not the proper way to assess ministry.

To do ministry with great showmanship is one thing. To minister in the context of enduring suffering, - not showmanship, - by faithfulness to the Lord and to his word, - that's another matter entirely!

It's clear - the false teachers were exploiters. The Corinthians liked - even people who would take from them - as long as they spoke with authority.

Paul stated in verse 20 of the previous chapter: "you bear with anyone - even if he enslaves you - even if he devours you - even if he takes advantage of you." In other words, - this is the kind of person you want. You want someone who will really speak authoritatively - even though he beats you and steals from you.

The Corinthians used the wrong criteria in evaluating and assessing ministry. Do We ?

If 2 Corinthians is not a book which is relevant for our day, - then there isn't any book in The New Testament - that is written for our day. The way in which most Church people evaluate ministry and ministers in our day - is not the best way to evaluate ministry.

If we study church history - we will see it repeated over and over and over again - individuals who have large mouths that glorify their own work - prey upon the church, - upon the true believers, - and it is still happening to the present day. This Is why we need to study Second Corinthians.

2 Corinthians - 41 - Judging Ministers

Yes, it is still the reality today - True ministers of the Gospel teach God's Word in the local Church. Then people who have listened to the ministry of the word of God - go home and turn on the television - and then they listen for hours to teachers that could hardly, at times, even be called ministry. So much of it is of the most shallow kind - and sometimes - is even opposed to the Gospel truth.

This was no petty power struggle at work in Corinth. This is far from the simple idea that both Paul and the false teachers were contending for the Corinthian financial support.

While the false teachers were there - with the express purpose of getting as much of the Corinthians finances as they could - Paul was there for a whole different purpose. Paul wasn't there to simply refute slander and to attack the false teachers. Paul's aim was to build up the Corinthians. To build up the Believers - is the goal of every true minister of the Gospel.

What is the criteria by which WE are judging the ministries and the ministers around us? Are we so focused on showmanship - that we will allow ourselves to be exploited? Are we so focused on being entertained - that we miss the invitation to accept Jesus as our Savior - and miss the very real opportunity to be forgiven for our sins?

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

2 Corinthians - 42 - Accusations and Punishment

After many lessons - we have come to the close of the Second letter to the Corinthians. I am aware - most people will either quickly read over this last chapter - or just skip it all together. But I beg you - join me and let's take a close look at it. God has something important for us - even in the closing statements of the letter.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-2 and make notes:

There are several interpretations as to "two or three witnesses." Some believe it refers to the number of visits Paul makes to the Corinthians - some believe it refers to the legal code and the gospel - some believe it refers to the Paul, Timothy, Titus, and the others Paul has sent there.

I believe the best interpretation is to keep it simple - consider the whole of chapter 13 - and keep it in context with the rest of the letter.

There are those Corinthians who say they are Christians - and yet they are continuing in a lifestyle of sin. In verse 2 - Paul reminds them they have already been warned twice - then he says - on my next trip - I will not spare them any more.

This statement of "two or three witnesses" - fits very well with the overall message of the letter. "I am coming a third time - no more warnings - those who are continuing in their sinful activities - I will not spare them any further - But having said this - everything must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

In other words - don't bring a bunch of accusations - don't bring every juicy bit of gossip - but I will deal with those who are sinning - when it can clearly be established by witnesses.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:3 and make notes:

The Corinthians are seeking proof that Christ is speaking through Paul. Since people in those days were just like people in our day - it is entirely likely some of them want to test Paul just to see whether he will dare to punish anyone. Paul will not punish the Corinthians - just to prove that he has the power to do so. His patience with them doesn't stem from weakness - but instead it springs up from love.

2 Corinthians - 42 - Accusations and Punishment

This is another place where the immaturity of the Corinthian believers is seen. They are more impressed with arbitrary shows of power - than they are with Christ-like gentleness. The Believers in Corinth have mis-interpreted the Christ-like gentleness of Paul - as weakness. To misinterpret Paul's character may not appear to be all that serious - but that probably means they are also misinterpreting God's gentle and patient character - for weakness as well - and that can be a fatal mistake.

God IS NOT weak - and we need to be careful that we do not allow this attitude to take root in us. "Just because God did not strike us down the very minute we sinned - must indicate - God is okay with our sin." That is a very dangerous - and often deadly - conclusion to draw.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:4 and make notes:

This is a difficult passage - it causes problems for a lot of people. What is meant by "weakness"?

In Scripture - weakness can refer to bodily illness, - and it can also mean not being securely grounded in faith. "Weakness" - might only be in perception - and not the reality. However you wish to interpret it - Christ was not weak in body OR in spirit, - but he was - persecuted and put to death.

When people were able to capture Jesus - able to torture Jesus - to crucify Jesus - and he died - it is natural earthly logic to say - "Jesus was weak as compared to the Government." The world's logic says: "if Jesus had been stronger than the government - then he could have prevented them from taking his life" - "but since they were able to do with him as they wanted to do - and they continued to abuse him until he died - then Jesus was weak."

This logic - appearing to be sound logic on the surface - is failing to recognize - a very important piece of information. This worldly way of thinking overlooks the fact that Jesus - "allowed" them to do those things to him. Jesus loved you and me SO MUCH - that he was willing to take on our sins - Jesus loved you and me SO MUCH - that he was willing to die in our place - so that we - would not have to die - Jesus loved you and me SO MUCH - that he did not resist. He lovingly and willingly took my place.

When we consider this aspect of the events - instead of Jesus being weak - we come to realize just how incredibly strong Jesus was - AND IS!

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Read 2 Corinthians 13:5 and make notes:

Paul instructs the Believers in Corinth to "examine" themselves - and then to "test" themselves. What kind of "examination?" What do you mean "test?" And what does it mean "unless you fail the test?"

A person who has faith in his heart knows that Jesus Christ is within him. Look into yourselves and you will find that you have Christ in you. "Fail the test" - does not mean - failing to measure up to some performance standard. It refers to examining ourselves and discovering that we are not saved. "Fail the test" - means finding that we do not have Jesus "in us" - it means that we discover we are only religious - we are doing "Christian Things" and Christian activities - but we have not accepted Jesus as our Savior.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:6 and make notes:

After the examination of themselves - and realizing that Jesus is "within them" - they will surely recognize Jesus is also "in Paul." Contrary to the accusations - contrary to what the false teachers are saying - contrary to how Paul may appear to the average person - Jesus living in the Corinthian Believer will authenticate Jesus living in Paul.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:7 and make notes:

It isn't that Paul is wanting people to see - Paul stood the test - or passed the test. Paul wants the Believers in Corinth to always do the right thing - even if they hear the accusations being made against him - "even if I seem to have failed - at least YOU make sure you do the right thing."

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Read 2 Corinthians 13:8 and make notes:

Wouldn't this be a wonderful testimony for every Christian? That we simply CAN NOT do anything against the Truth! Regardless of what comes our way - regardless of how difficult things become for us - regardless of how much we are made to suffer or struggle - we cannot go against the truth - no matter what! We can only do those things - we can only say those things - that are FOR The Truth!

Read 2 Corinthians 13:9 and make notes:

Of course - no one enjoys being humbled - or being humiliated. No one enjoys having their weaknesses revealed - or highlighted for everyone to see. Paul is more concerned for the Corinthians to grow in the Faith - than he is concerned for his reputation. So - if the Believers in Corinth show themselves to be strong in the Faith - walking the Christian walk - then Paul will be glad even if everyone thinks he is weak!

Read 2 Corinthians 13:10 and make notes:

Paul would rather his authority be seen in his words - and not have to be demonstrated in deeds. But he is allowing the Corinthians to decide for themselves - would they rather put things right, or - have Paul come - and do it for them. Paul would much rather they make things right. Paul does not want to punish or chastise anyone there. Paul prefers they hear the love in his words of correction - and simply out of love - just go and to the right thing!

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Read 2 Corinthians 13:11-12 and make notes:

The peace of God is one thing, - but the peace of the world is another. The peace of Christ is being free from sins. A person who has this peace will also have love, - and the God of both will protect him forever.

What is a holy kiss? It is one that is Genuine - not hypocritical. The kiss of Judas - was a hypocritical kiss. Those "hollywood kisses" are hypocritical kisses.

A "kiss" is understood by almost every culture in the world - to be a sign of affection. Judas was not showing "affection" - but was showing betrayal. When people "kiss the air" on each side of the person's face - this is not a show of affection - it is merely a show of ritual.

Our Greeting of one another in the Church should never be ritual - it should always be genuine.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:13-14 and make notes:

All the saints sent their greetings, - not just the leaders. Paul closes his letter with prayer, - taking great care to unite them all with God. We can see the intertwining of the Trinity - and the unity of power - which brings salvation to fulfillment.

The love of God - has sent us Jesus the Savior, - by whose grace - we have been saved. Where fellowship - is of the Spirit, - it is also of the Son, - and where the grace is of the Son, - it is also of the Father and the Spirit.

What do we take home with us?

Two things: FIRST - Handle Accusations In The Church

Local churches today could benefit from following the approach Paul used! It is such a common occurrence today - someone will bring an accusation against another person in the local church. Before any evidence can be examined - before any corroborating testimony can be heard - before the accused person even has the opportunity - to respond to the accusation - they are chastised by the church - or the church leadership.

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It is obvious - Paul is fed up with the continued sinful lifestyle of those claiming to be part of the church - their continuous sinful activities are hurting the church - they are hurting the cause of the gospel message - but even being fed up with all this - Paul still takes the position - we must have at least 2 witnesses before we will punish someone. Or - we must have credible evidence.

Let's make sure we deal with facts and evidence - not with accusations. I know most people would rather not have a confrontation. It seems a great majority of people would rather just move on - than to face a confrontation with another person. People should be given an opportunity to make things right - we should not only encourage them to do so - we should help them to do so - but when sufficient time has been granted - and they have not made things right - there must be a showdown.

If medicine has failed to bring about the cure - the surgeon's knife must come next - or there is death. Many local churches have died - because no one would take on the uncomfortable task of confronting sin.

The discomfort of smelling and seeing a messy diaper - as you change it - is not nearly as bad as leaving it on the baby. The discomfort and pain of dealing with a sinful situation - is not nearly as bad as the church dying - because no one would deal with it.

SECOND - Patient - Loving - Delay

Recognize God's patient and loving delay - in punishing - as being given the opportunity to repent - not as God being "okay with us sinning." There are so many examples in the Bible where a person - and sometimes the whole nation or tribe - sinned and then noticed - God did not send punishment immediately. And it appears they took it as a sign that either - God did not see it - or that this sin must be "okay" with God. So, they did not repent - and in many cases they continued in the sin. Not one time - did that ever end well.

There are two things we need to make a note of concerning this:

A: When God delays punishment - it is only because He loves us so much that what He really wants - is for us to repent and apologize - so that He will not have to punish us. But rest assured - there will come a time of judgment - there will come a time when the sins which have not been repented of - will be punished.

So, please - as soon as we become aware that we have sinned. Repent - apologize - make things right with God - and if appropriate - make things right with the other person.

B: If we want to be more like God - then we as individuals - and we as a local Church body - should not be overly quick to punish sin. We should be quick to point it out when it occurs - but then we should allow a little time for the offender to repent - and make things right. And remember - God's plan - is to tell a person in private when they have sinned. We don't make a public announcement every time we see someone has "messed up."

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Only after - appropriate time has been allowed and the offender does not repent - only then - do we take action; first - to punish and secondly - when appropriate - to make it public.

We have spend many weeks slowly dining - on this second letter to the Corinthians. God has revealed some important principles to us through this letter. Even in the closing statements of the letter - we find another "important" and "loving" way - that we can be - the kind of Church God wants us to be.

What are we going to do with what God has said to us?

Some of us need to repent - not only of our sin - but for ignoring God's gracious patience in allowing us time to repent.

Some of us need to pray for that person we love - who has not taken advantage of the time God has granted them.

Some of us need to apologize for being so quick – in desiring to punish others - when we experienced God's patience and long-suffering toward our sins.

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2 Corinthians - 42 - Accusations and Punishment

(this page for additional notes)