

A Study of Second Corinthians

Week Two

2 Corinthians 2:5-3:16

Day One

5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent — not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. 9 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.

v. 5 – Paul referred to a person who grieved both him and the church in Corinth. That must have been the man that was living with his stepmother. Paul addressed that issue in 1 Corinthians 5 where he directed that the man be turned over to Satan. That directive deeply impacted the church. They had to face the fact that they weren't doing anything about the sin or sinner, and then had to face the need to discipline him by turning him over to Satan—whatever that meant. That would have been grievous for any leadership team to deal with, in my estimation.

Church leadership is difficult and requires a great deal of courage and faith. I have confronted sinful situations and had to even discipline people for their behavior. It isn't a pleasant job, that's for sure. That's why many don't even attempt to do it.

v. 6 – Perhaps the Corinthians were so upset and grieved by Paul's reaction that they raised the possibility of taking even harsher action against the man, whatever that could have been. Paul then urged them not to go any further, but to settle on the punishment that he had recommended. Obviously the Corinthians had responded to Paul's rebuke over the sin they had allowed to exist in their midst. Now they were trying to go even further to prove their obedience and zeal.

v. 7 – I think what I call the principle of amplification was in action here. Paul had recommended they take severe measures to deal with the man and his stepmother. The Corinthians received his directive and wanted to do even more! It is like a parent saying to one sibling, "Go tell your brother I want to see him." The sibling then goes and says, "Hey, you're in trouble. Dad wants to see you now. You must have done something really bad." That is what I call the amplification principle and I have seen it at work in churches. Leaders can even amplify God's warnings to His children just like a natural child can do to her siblings.

v. 8 – Paul then urged the church to express their love and support for the man in question, reversing the tone of his first letter. He had created enough momentum and now had to reverse course. This is why it is so hard to deal with a situation by letter. Of course Paul had no other choice. But I never commit anything to writing when a face-to-face meeting can be held. I have always urged someone who is upset with another *not* to

write a letter but to have a one-on-one meeting. When you write, that letter can be kept and preserved for a long time, read over and over again. That is the good thing about a letter—it can be preserved. But if the contents are inflammatory or if you don't quite write what you mean, the letter can take on a life of its own. So I prefer personal meetings wherever and whenever possible.

v. 9 – Paul had written them to see if they would obey and respond. He was concerned by all the factions perhaps and wanted to see if he still had any authority in their lives. Obviously he did and now he relaxed his approach and tone. The Corinthians were going full speed ahead and Paul had to put the brakes on. This is why I stated that dealing with issues like this (or for any difficult interpersonal relationship for that matter) can be so tricky by letter.

Day Two

10 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven — if there was anything to forgive — I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. 12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, 13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.

v. 10 – Paul was now putting the ball back in the local church's court, satisfied that they could and would deal with the problem that existed. If they had disciplined the man, were satisfied of his repentance, and forgave him, then Paul was ready to forgive him as well. I like this approach. There is no trans-local authority that can rule or make decisions from a distance for a local church. The local authorities or those on site must make the final decisions where the local church is concerned.

I knew of a bishop who recently stopped the opening of a school at one of the churches under his oversight. The local team had everything together but the bishop, without so much as a visit, stopped the process and caused a lot of hurt and pain. That is not how it should be done, in my opinion. No one 500 miles away can ever have more insight than the local spiritual authorities, no matter how spiritual that trans-local authority may be. That goes for the pope as well. He should not be making decisions in Rome for things happening in Vancouver, Canada, for example.

v. 11 – There is a possibility that Satan can outwit the church. That is an interesting word. That means Satan can outthink us! He can outmaneuver us! We must not let that happen wherever and whenever possible. So Paul urged them not to overwhelm the brother in question who had been disciplined, so that he would not be lost to the church. Otherwise Paul was concerned that Satan would gain the upper hand.

Are you aware of Satan's schemes for you and your local church? Do you realize that he tries to sow seeds of discord and doubt against leadership and members alike? Do you know that he is a thief, liar and destroyer, and that he wants to

express his nature in the local church? Don't leave someone alone with the church's money, for instance. Satan will try to gain the upper hand. Use wisdom when you are dealing with the affairs of the church. Otherwise we will be defeated again and again by our more savvy and crafty foe. By the way, please don't taunt or mock the devil. He is too smart for you or me. Just make God your focus and leave the devil to Him to deal with.

vs. 12&13 – Paul went to Troas where the Lord had opened a door for him. But he had no rest in his mind or spirit. Why? He was anxious to know how his letter had affected the Corinthians. Titus had delivered the letter and had not returned with a report. It is interesting to me that Paul left the open door in Troas to go and find Titus in Macedonia.

I would like to think that Paul could focus beyond the crisis in Corinth to do the work at Troas, but he could not. Why? Because he was human! Because he cared so deeply for the Corinthians and he was concerned that his letter had pushed them beyond what they could bear. This all gives me great comfort and consolation. There are times when I have been concerned about my advice, about the work that I have done with a local church. I have asked myself, “Did I go too far? Say too much? Did they understand? What if they react or do something foolish based on my advice?”

Time and again, however, I have found that the Holy Spirit is a good overseer. He knows how to build and protect the body of Jesus. Sometimes He does that *because* of me; at other times, He does that *in spite of* me. I am so glad that Jesus is in charge of the Church and that the Holy Spirit is His active on site agent. Remember, I said that no trans-local officer should exercise authority over a local church. That's why the Holy Spirit should reign supreme there—He is always onsite and on duty. For that, I am grateful.

Day Three

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? 17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

v. 14 – Paul gave thanks to God for the truth of what I described yesterday—Jesus is always triumphant in His church when we give Him the room to rule and reign. He always leads us in triumph. This triumph mentioned here is the celebration a victorious general would enjoy in Rome upon his return home after a foreign victory. The triumph was a gala public affair. Our triumph is in Christ, not in ourselves—our smarts or discipline.

I love this image. Wherever Paul traveled, he gave off a scent, a smell that caused people to know about Jesus. God used Paul to spread the knowledge of God; he could not help

doing that just like someone with a particular scent or perfume cannot help but spread that aroma wherever he or she goes.

What fragrance are you? Do you give off the fragrance of the knowledge of God to other people? Does God use you when you aren't even aware that He is using you? Does God vindicate His presence in your life by preserving and protecting your work for Him?

v. 15 – Paul had an impact on everyone with this fragrance that he carried. He touched those who knew God and those who did not, those who wanted to know Him and those who didn't. That is the power of purpose. You tend toward expressing and fulfilling your purpose; it's what you can't help but do.

Have you ever watched the movies where they put dogs on the trail of someone they are trying to find? That is because everyone, every human, has a scent that any dog can detect and follow. Yet dogs that are trained to find dead bodies only have to identify one odor, for dead bodies give off a common aroma. So living bodies have a distinct aroma and dead bodies have a common smell. **Is there is a spiritual lesson here? How can you apply this to your own life purpose and work?**

v. 16 – To those who knew Jesus, Paul was a pleasant smell. To those who didn't know Jesus, Paul and the apostles were a stench. It is a hard truth that some aren't just indifferent about our God. Some hate Him and His servants! They hate what He stands for! Not everyone is going to celebrate you as well. When you are kind and merciful, they will hate that, seeing it as weakness and reminding them of their own lost condition. They may treat you like you smell badly, even though you smell good as you carry God in and with you. Don't despair when someone hates you and what you stand for; they hated Jesus too!

v. 17 – There were some then and some now who peddled the word of God. What is a peddler? The word in the Greek is really “corrupter” and can be explained by the following:

The word has been used, both among the Greeks and Latins, to signify a prostitution of what was right and just, for the sake of gain. . . In short, the word is used to signify any artifice employed to get gain by making a thing look more or better than it is; or mingling that which is excellent with what is not so to promote the gain of the adulterator. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

The antithesis of peddling or corrupting the Word was sincerity. Paul had no motive but to present the word of God in its truest, purest form so that those who heard would benefit from it. I trust that your motives are the same.

Day Four

3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God.

v. 1 – Did someone accuse Paul of commending or promoting himself? Good grief! They should be alive today and see what self-promotion and self-commendation is really like. I have been guilty of it as well—just read my personal bio and see how I trumpet my personal accomplishments in hopes of attracting business!

It is interesting that people then obtained letters of recommendation from those with whom they worked or for whom they wanted to work. I guess those are the testimonies that we all place on our brochures and websites. And those aren't always a bad thing. I save my positive feedback letters and emails to read whenever I am discouraged. I think it is a good thing for you to write those who have been a blessing to you. You never know how God will use that to encourage someone in the ministry.

I heard someone say once that we should work to encourage those who are doing something, not those who are discouraged because they never do anything! So why don't you today write a letter or email, pay a visit to or make a phone call to someone who has been a blessing to you? Don't worry that it will give them a "big head." God will take care of that. You just give credit where credit is due.

v. 2 – Paul didn't need a letter of commendation. He carried the joy of his work in his heart and on his mind, and that letter was obvious to all who knew and worked with him. Paul was a bottom line guy. He was content to have his work among the Corinthians speak for itself and not do anything else to promote or commend his ministry.

Is this naïve or is it spiritual? I don't do much marketing apart from my website and writing. I feel that my work should speak for itself if anyone cares to study it. I also feel that the Spirit will take me where He wants me to go. I am 56 years of age as I write, and I haven't been unemployed for five minutes in my adult life. I don't have a resume and I have never applied for a job that I have gotten. All my jobs have come to me, so to speak. I don't think it's wrong to promote or apply for jobs. It's just never worked for me.

v. 3 – Paul seemed more interested in the commendation that came from the Spirit rather than what could come from the people. He was more interested in matters of the heart where ministry was concerned. When you think of it, Paul did what he did by matter of consistency (he always went to the synagogue first), word of mouth (I'm sure he used the network of Jews in the Empire to go from city to city), and power of the Spirit (he always released the supernatural as the best way to attract an audience).

I need to learn from Paul. In fact, many of us in 21st century ministry could learn much from studying this ancient strategy. God is able to promote those who are His and from Him. I think we should rely in that more than we do.

v. 4 – Paul had confidence in the work that he had done, the work the Spirit led him to do. Do you have that same confidence without being boastful or proud? Do I? There are times when I doubt the way I have gone or the things that I do. Was God in them? Did I get the results that He desired?

The Bible actually speaks to the issue of confidence. **How confident are you of your work in the Lord?**

Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared (Proverbs 3:25-26).

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6).

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Day Five

5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

v. 5 – Wow! I need to remind myself that my competence isn't in my degrees or my studies. My competence is in God! He is the one who enables me to do what I do, and enabled Paul to do what he did. I have no claim to any credit for what I do. It is God who does it in me and through me. Yet, I must work, study and discipline myself to be the best that I can be. God can't get out of me what someone doesn't put in me. I can't quote a verse from memory under the guidance of the Holy Spirit unless I first spend time to memorize the verse. God can't play an instrument that isn't in tune. So I must work, but it is still God who makes me competent. **Is that confusing to you?**

What are you doing with your life to make yourself competent, even though your competence rests in and with God?

v. 6 – The letter kills. What does that mean? It means that religion and legalism are lethal, even if they are carried out using the Bible as the source. Who was more religious than the leaders in Jesus' day? Yet who carried more death with them than those leaders

did? I run into some ministers of the new covenant who are also ministers of death. They use the Bible as a bludgeon, not a source of good news.

This is another potentially confusing issue. We must preach the truth but not use the truth as a club or weapon. We just got word from friends that their young daughter is pregnant. She isn't married and your heart just breaks. This young girl must hear and know the truth, yet we must minister it to her in the Spirit of love and acceptance. I wrote them to say that this isn't the defining chapter of her life—just a painful one. Does that sound like I am “going soft” on sin? Someone once said that you haven't preached grace enough until someone accuses you of preaching it too much.

In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:4-8).

How do you react to this story? That to me is an example of the Spirit of life. Jesus told her to go on her way and sin no more. Yet He ministered life and not death to the woman.

vs. 7&8 – The Law was a glorious thing, given by God to Israel to make us all conscious of sin. The Law was given through Moses and when he received it, he underwent a physical transformation. **How much more should we reflect the greater glory of God's grace in the new covenant? Do you radiate this grace?**

I remember praying when I first met the Lord, “God, let people know I belong to You when they look at me. Let me radiate Your peace and love.” I can remember going to someone's home to minister to them and I led them to the Lord. Do you know what impressed them? Their dog, who always barked at strangers, never barked at me. They said I had to be a messenger of God since I brought peace to their dog! I don't understand that, but that's what I want. I want to carry a glory by my presence that comes from His presence.

Keep in mind that Jesus is our model, not Moses. While it is attractive to emulate the Old Testament prophets in their anger and harsh warnings, that wasn't how Jesus acted—except to those who wanted to be Old Testament prophets, like the Pharisees!

Day Six

9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

vs. 9-11 – The Law was holy but it condemned men to bondage because there was no way out of their sin. The Law was given to make us conscious of our sin. Now the new covenant has arrived in the person and name of Jesus and it is much more glorious than the previous covenant. Yet we see many who prefer to live under new covenant terms but act like the old covenant is still in existence. Rather than have me comment, read what Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Colossians 2:16-23).

So which do you prefer? The former glory of the old covenant or the present, greater glory of the new? Don't answer too quickly.

The modern Church has had to fight this battle. In Paul's day, there were many who wanted those who put their faith in Christ for salvation to put their trust in following the Law to maintain that faith and righteousness. Today there are those who also prescribe a life of works: to prayer, worship, "quiet time," or devotion to Israel.

There is only one loyalty that you and I must maintain and that is to our relationship with Jesus. He is our salvation, He is our source for life and peace. Remember, I am not saying that the spiritual disciplines aren't important—they are. But they don't lead us to salvation or holiness. Only Jesus can do that. The disciplines assist Him as He does His job, but all that is by grace. Earlier Paul said that our competence for anything we do or are is in Christ. **Do you agree with that and see how that truth applies to your life?**

Day Seven

12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

v. 12 – Since our hope is in Christ and not in the old covenant, we are bold. We don't do anything to hide our glory in Christ. Rather we make it manifest so that we can attract others to the same radiance in Him. **Are you bold? Or are you bound with fear? What could you do for Jesus if you weren't afraid—afraid of failure, what others think, missing God, or God's judgment?**

v. 13 – Moses veiled his face to keep people from seeing the afterglow of his encounters with God:

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD (Exodus 34:33-35).

Why would Moses cover his face? I think it was for the same reason that the people at one time said, "Let God speak to us directly." When He did, they were so frightened that they said, "Never mind. Let God speak to you and tell us what He said."

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (Exodus 20:18-19).

Are you afraid of hearing God's voice? Do you do all that you can to make sure that you do? Don't answer too quickly. You can exercise all the spiritual disciplines and still not listen to God's voice, mostly out of fear.

vs. 14&15 – We see here that the veil was symbolic of anyone's condition without Christ. They cannot fully see or apprehend the glory of God. There is still a veil that covers the old covenant. People can hear it but they can't comprehend its significance without Christ. And of course, Christ then introduces them to the new covenant, which isn't veiled, but revealed! Thank you, Lord. We can see the things of God by grace through Christ.