

A SECOND LETTER

It's been said, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." But that adage doesn't apply to Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. In his absence a rift occurred.

Paul was in Ephesus when news arrived that problems had erupted in the church at Corinth. From Ephesus he penned his first letter to the Corinthians.

The reaction to Paul's rebuke was mixed... Some people *repented*. A godly sorrow led to repentance. But other believers *resented*. They bristled up at Paul's letter, "How dare Paul? Who does he think he is?" They began to question Paul's authority – and cast doubt on his integrity, his honesty, and his courage. Paul's critics

launched a mudslinging campaign.

News of their reaction to 1 Corinthians came to Paul in Macedonia. It was there he wrote another letter to the church... and its name... *Second Corinthians*.

Here Paul defends himself and his ministry. He confronts his accusers. Raw feelings are exposed. 2 Corinthians is definitely an emotionally-charged book. Paul shares his heart and pleads his case as he does nowhere else in Scripture.

2 Corinthians is an instructive book for those who serve the Lord. Ministry is not always easy and hassle-free. Helping hurting people can get downright messy.

Devotion Box - Father Of Mercies And God Of All Comfort

In 1:3 Paul introduces our Father in heaven by an interesting name. Paul calls Him, "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort". What a wonderful name for God to choose to reveal Himself to His children. God is full of mercy and comfort.

The Greek gods threw down thunderbolts, and inflicted curses. The Greeks attributed natural disasters and sudden calamities to the capricious whims of the gods. What a pleasant surprise to hear the true God called, "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort". In times of trouble...the Greeks ran *from* their gods. We run *to* our God.

Paul says of God in verse 4, "who comforts us in all our tribulation..." The English word "*comfort*" is from two Latin words, "*with strength*". Understand, God's comfort is not a commiseration – He doesn't help us throw a pity party. When we get knocked down, God dusts us off

and nurses our wounds - but He doesn't coddle us. He pats us on the back and sends us back in the game.

My high school football coach had a rule. If you were seriously injured, stay on the ground. Someone will assist you off the field. But if you just got the breath knocked out of you, or pulled up with a cramp... you needed to get off the field on your own. He didn't want anybody clapping for you just because you got hurt.

Sometimes we think we deserve a round of applause just because we got hurt.

Understand, the Lord Jesus refuses to assign permanent disability. His goal is to limit our sick days. He's called "*the balm of Gilead*" - a poultice that sucks out pain and poison. Jesus is more concerned with healing our hurts and getting us back in the game. We've got a battle to win, and we need all hands on deck.

Devotion Box - The Reasons God Allows Us To Suffer

In chapter 1 Paul gives us four reasons why God allows us to suffer....

The first reason is in verse 4, "that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Sufferings prepare us to help sufferers. It produces empathy.

Empathy is one of the most powerful forces on earth. It can reach into the deepest depression and lift up a sagging spirit. Just to know you've *been there* makes it easier for me to *be there*.

The second reason is in verse 5, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ." In other words, sufferings carve out in our hearts a greater capacity for experiencing God's love. I like the Living Bible on verse 5, "You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more He will shower us with His comfort and encouragement."

Here's a poem, "Until I learned to trust, I never learned to pray; and I did not learn to fully trust till sorrows came my way. Until I felt my weakness, His strength

I never knew, nor dreamed 'till I was stricken that He could see me through... Who deepest drinks of sorrow, drinks deepest, too, of grace: He sends the storm so He Himself can be our hiding place. His heart, that seeks our highest good – knowing well when things annoy. We would not long for heaven if earth held the only joy."

The third reason is they teach us to lean on Jesus rather than ourselves. According to verse 8, while in Asia, Paul and his party was "burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." That's a biblical way of saying they were under some mega-serious stress...on the verge of giving up.

Note what Paul learned, verse 9, "we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God..." We learn faith only when we reach the end of ourselves. It's at the end of our rope that we find God.

The fourth purpose for our sufferings is stated in verse 11, "you also helping together in prayer for us..." Troubled times force us to pray!

Bible Scan - 2 Corinthians 1-7

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WHEN A BROTHER REPENTS...

Paul writes of his first letter to the Corinthians, in 2:4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears..." One of the issues Paul addressed in his first letter was the need for church discipline...

1 Corinthians 5 mentions an incestuous relationship the church had tolerated. Paul told them to excommunicate the culprit in hopes that he'd learn a lesson. The Corinthians were obedient, and their action resulted in the man's repen-

tance. Now Paul is concerned that they restore this repentant brother. He says in verse 8, "I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." Paul was quick to judge sin, but just as quick to extend forgiveness to a repentant person.

Hey, Satan will always try to bury a forgiven person under a mountain of condemnation. If we're reluctant to forgive, we play right into Satan's hands. Paul was always first to kill the fatted calf when the prodigal came home.

Devotion Box - Body Odor

When a Roman general won a military campaign, he would parade through the city with plunder and prisoners. On the parade route people burned incense in honor of his victory. The fragrance let everyone know the conquering hero was home.

In 2:14-16 Paul uses this picture of the conquering general to describe our purpose in life. We're the plunder and prisoner in Jesus' victory procession. Our lives are the perfume that scents the air with the news of His triumph.

As Christians, we are the body of Christ, and we all give off a *body odor*. Are you a sweet smeller, or a stinker? Are you a perfume, or just a noxious fume? Verse 14 says, "through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."

EPISTLES OF CHRIST

Like most professions, pastors also are known to have resumes. When a church is looking for a pastor they read over, and pray over, a man's resume.

Here's a list of statements a pastor would be better off excluding from his resume... "In the five churches I have faithfully served over the last two years..." or, "I've learned to cope with financial crisis at every church I've served..." or, "My extensive counseling of church members provides me a rich source of sermon illustrations..." or, "My personality has provided me ample opportunity to develop conflict-resolution skills..." or, "My hobbies are pit bulls and automatic weapons..." or, "I require Sundays off."

It was common in Paul's day for traveling ministers to carry with them letters of recommendation. Paul's critics in Corinth were questioning his credibility because he lacked these formal letters. Never mind that Paul started the church - that they owed their own salvation to Paul's preaching. The Corinthians wanted to see his resume! In chapter 3 Paul tells these Corinthians that *they are his resume*.

In 3:3 Paul refers to them and to us as "an epistle (*or let-*

ter) of Christ".

Under the Old Covenant, God's Law was written on stone tablets. The Law was God's will - His heart for mankind. But when a principle goes from a man's heart to a tablet we run the risk of it being lost, or misinterpreted, or misunderstood. That's what happened to the Law. The Law never changed, but over time man's interpretation of the Law no longer resembled its original intention.

When God established the New Covenant He took no chances. He put His will back into man's heart. Rather than write it down on stone, He now writes it in our hearts. We're born again, and God writes His Law into our new, spiritual nature.

The Old Testament was a list of directions to lead us to God. But you can botch even the best directions. That's why under the New Covenant, rather than give us a road map, God planted in our hearts a homing device. Just follow the Holy Spirit!

Verse 6 puts it this way, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The written Law leaves us alienated from God, but the indwelling Spirit brings us home.

Devotion Box - A Metamorphosis

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-17 describes how the glory of the Old Covenant paled in comparison with the glory of the New Covenant.

Verse 18 is important, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." God has stripped away the veil of guilt and separation, and has invaded our hearts with His glory and presence.

And as we look to God, something happens... we become like Jesus. Under the Old Covenant, you conformed to the Law. Under the New Covenant, you're transformed by the work of Christ. You're changed from the inside out.

A metamorphosis takes place in your life... the caterpillar becomes a butterfly... the roughed out rock becomes a crystal. A change occurs... first, your spirit... then your thoughts and attitudes... finally your actions. And it happens without you even having to try. Maintain an open face toward Jesus, and He effects the changes. The Holy Spirit does the work. Look to Jesus with an open-face, a humble-heart, and you'll end up a transformed person.

THE MINISTRY

Chapter 4 begins, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." The glory of the message also affects our approach to the ministry. A glorious Gospel needs to be conveyed through faithful ministers. He says in verse 2 he has "renounced the hidden things of shame". Craftiness and deceit are not Paul's style. His job is present the truth.

Our last family car was purchased at Carmax. I was so tired of all the bickering and bargaining that goes on in most used car lots... the Carmax claim of a good car at a fair price appealed to me. They say that their best price, and only price, is on the sticker - take it or leave it. Their policy said to me they had confidence in their cars.

Paul had the Carmax approach to ministry. Other evangelists were like used car salesmen. They embellished the truth, made false claims, glossed over details, tried to hide costs. Not Paul. He was upfront. He laid it out clearly, succinctly, and honestly. Paul knew the Gospel was a good deal and it would sell itself.

In fact, the Gospel is such a good deal the only way a man would reject it is if his eyes were blinded. And that's what happens. Chalk it up to "the god of this age". Satan blinds men to the truth of Jesus. This is why before we preach we need to pray. Effective evangelism always follows a season of spiritual warfare.

Notice verse 5, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for

Jesus' sake." Christian ministry should be devoid of self-promotion. Our goal is not to attract attention to ourselves, but to Jesus. Paul says we're "servants for Jesus' sake"... *Imagine a servant with a fan club?* When we preach, or share a testimony, what do people remember afterwards? My funny story, my exploits, what a rotten sinner I use to be? Not just what we say, but how we say it - will point a person to Jesus, or point them to ourselves.

Verse 7 tells us, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels..." At first glance this is a strange idiom - who puts treasure in a clay pot? This is like serving steak and lobster on a paper plate - or an expensive wine in a Styrofoam cup - or wrapping up a beautiful diamond in a paper sack... it doesn't seem fitting or appropriate.

Yet this is what God has done. He's taken the most valuable treasure on Earth, the Gospel, and placed it in clay pots. That's what we are... we're made of clay. We're nothing but cracked pots. *Imagine- God places the Gospel in Ball jars.*

DL Moody was the Billy Graham of his day. A man used by God in mighty and marvelous ways. Once, a reporter was sent out to analyze his success. He wrote, "I can see nothing whatsoever in Moody to account for his marvelous work."

God does it this way by design. He uses rough, coarse, uncouth, uncultured humans so "that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." God doesn't like to share the spotlight, so he uses clay pots. Here's a question, "In trying to get the message heard, are you wanting to get the messenger seen?"

Devotion Box - Don't Lose Heart

Paul writes in verses 16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." In these 3 verses Paul tells why we should take heart, not lose heart... He draws 3 contrasts...

First, is the contrast between *the outward man and the inward man*. Before I turned 30 I was in perfect health. I could *go to sleep late and wake up early*. I was a dynamo of energy! But since turning the big 3-0 I've had 4 surgeries, developed allergies, my beard's grey, my chest has sunk to my waist, my best friend is a tube of Preparation H, and I now appreciate a nap in the afternoon. While the outward man deteriorates, the Spirit of God invigorates the inward man. We're wearing down physically, but we get stronger and stronger spiritually.

Second, is the contrast between *the world's afflictions and heaven's glories*. It's amazing- Paul endured incredible hardships... shipwrecks, stonings, imprisonments, beatings - but he calls it "our light affliction". How can that be? His list doesn't seem "*light*" to me... until it's compared with heaven's glory. Heaven's highs will make today's burdens seem light as a feather. Heaven is so heavy your first second with Jesus will more than make up for a lifetime of pain on earth. And notice Paul says "our light affliction... is just for a moment." Compared to eternity life on earth is a split second. A million zillion years from now the pain we feel today will have long been forgotten. It will be remembered no more!

Third, is the contrast between *things visible and things invisible*. Focus on what can be seen, and you'll lose heart. Circumstances will rob you of your faith. But focus on spiritual realities like love, grace, mercy, fellowship, integrity - and faith and hope will grow. Hey, *take heart, don't lose heart!*

Devotion Box - How To See People

Paul learned a lesson from the Lord. Jesus died and rose again. He no longer exists as He once did. At the resurrection, His body was transformed. Paul no longer sees Jesus as he appeared while on earth. He envisions His glorified form.

And that's how Paul treated other people. Verse 16, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh." When Paul eyeballs a pretty woman he looks past the flesh to the inner person - the person of the heart.

Here's a quote from super model Carole Mallory, "Everywhere I went my figure followed. But I learned I am not my figure." Aren't you glad *you are not your figure?* There's more to us than flesh and bone - flab and folds. It would transform our relationships if we looked past the flesh and saw each other in a spiritual light.

Devotion Box - A New Creation

If you're a believer in Jesus you've become someone special. 5:17 tells us, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." A Christian is a new species of creature that's never before roamed this planet. You're God's special miracle.

The real you - the core you - has been transformed. The old nature has been replaced with a new nature. Rather than please yourself, your deepest desire is now to please the Lord.

Bible Scan - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Middle School Youth Swim Party and Cookout: Thursday, June 13th @ 6 PM
Men's Fellowship Breakfast: Saturday, June 15th @ 8 AM
Vacation Bible School for Preschool—Middle School: Sunday evenings, 6/23—7/28 @ 6:30 PM
High School/Middle School Retreat: Sunday, July 14th-Sunday, July 21st
Kid's Camp: 1-2nd grade, Tues, 7/16—Thurs 7/18; 3rd—5th grade, Thurs, 7/18—Sun, 7/21

Next Bible Scan - June 16, 2002 - 2 Corinthians 8-13

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things have become new." - 2 Corinthians 5:17

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

Devotion Box - Your Ministry

You have a vital ministry. Perhaps you've been looking for a ministry. Verse 18 says you already have one. It's the "ministry of reconciliation." Our role on earth is to put the hand of repentant men into the outstretched hand of God.

Verse 20 tells us that we're also "ambassadors for Christ".

An ambassador lives in a foreign land, but represents his homeland. We're official emissaries of heaven. It's our job to voice God's concerns on earth - to demonstrate the culture and values of heaven in the midst of a fallen world.

On the cross Jesus was *dying to save us*; now, according to verse 20, through you and me He is *pleading for men to be saved*.

UNEQUALLY YOKED

Verse 14 gives us an important principle, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The harness that pulled the plow usually held two animals. But it was vital that both animals were the same breed. Mix the breeds and you'll end up with two animals working against each other rather than working with each other.

That's what happens when a believer and unbeliever enter into a binding agreement. Friction, rather than harmony, characterizes the relationship. It's true in marriage - in business - in all areas of life. Two species in the same harness and their natures will pull in different directions.

Here's the bottom line... some things just don't mix! Righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial (or Satan), oil and water, honey and vinegar, dogs and cats, drinking and driving, water and electricity, hot cars and chocolate bars, sunshine and homework - *and* believers and unbelievers. Don't misunderstand- an effective ambassador will have contact with the world - but *contact* and *interact* doesn't mean a full-fledged *contract*.

GODLY SORROW AND WORLDLY SORROW

In 7:10 Paul mentions two types of sorrow - *godly sorrow* and *worldly sorrow*.

Paul says, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." Worldly sorrow is self-directed. I'm sorry *I* got caught - that *I* might have to suffer the consequence. It produces crocodile tears, and a lot of self-pity - but no real desire to change.

It reminds me of the man who stole wood from the lumberyard. In fact, he built a house for himself, one for his son, and one each for his two daughters using the stolen lumber. He was so grieved he went to the local priest to confess his sin.

The priest said, "This is a serious offense. You'll need to perform a severe penance. Have you ever thought about doing a retreat?" The man answered, "No, but if you can get me the plans, I can get the lumber." That's not godly sorrow.

Godly sorrow is God-directed. It's realizing that I've broken the heart of God - failed my Lord - disappointed my Savior. Godly-sorrow leads to repentance. It produces a willingness to change - to do whatever it takes not to let it happen again.

Paul is thankful the Corinthians exhibited a godly sorrow for their sin.