

## 2nd Corinthians Chapters 12 and 13 – John Karmelich

1. We have now come to my final lesson on 2nd Corinthians. My title for this lesson is "What it takes to live the Christian life". Yes, that is a very-encompassing title. ☺ I will explain that concept and give examples of what I am talking about through out this lesson.
  - a) Of all of Paul's letters, 2nd Corinthians is considered his most personal. Paul expresses his personal feelings more in this letter than any other letter. Paul pours out his love for this church and explains what living the Christian life is all about.
  - b) Ever since the opening words of 1st Corinthians, Paul has made it very clear that the church in Corinth consists of saved people. At the same time, Paul has also made it equally clear that this church had lots of problems that need attention. What both letters to the Corinthians have in common is that they are both focus on issues to improve oneself as a Christian and draw closer to God. That of course, ties to our lesson theme.
    - i) While 1st Corinthians is very organized in that it goes from issue to issue, 2nd Corinthians is much more focused on the key issue of living the Christian life.
    - ii) It is in this second letter where Paul really pours out his heart both "over" and "for" this church. It is in this letter that Paul lays out his feelings more than others.
2. Which leads me back to the theme of the letter, which is all about living the Christian life.
  - a) In this section of the letter, Paul recalls a vision he had of heaven. It is the only time in the New Testament (I believe) that this event is even mentioned. You would think a vision of "life in heaven" would be a major topic in Paul's letters. It is the type of vision where most people would write a book and spend a life discussing that vision.
    - i) Paul mentions this event reluctantly. It is as if Paul was thinking, "I would rather be talking about how God makes a difference in Christian lives than discuss a vision of heaven. Since you Corinthians like "bragging" let me explain that vision.
    - ii) This leads me to my first "key point" about living the Christian life: It should never be focused on "bragging ". The Christian life is all about making a difference God (through people) and not bragging about visions He has given us.
  - b) This section of 2nd Corinthians then focuses on some type of ailment that Paul had. Whatever the physical ailment is, it is specifically not mentioned. The main point, as we will discover is Paul used this problem to draw upon God's grace.
    - i) Whatever this problem was, Paul used that problem to draw closer to God. Paul discusses this problem more than he discusses his experience of being drawn up to heaven. He "used" this problem to specifically draw closer to God.
    - ii) In other words, seeing a vision of heaven didn't draw Paul closer to God. In Paul's suffering, he let physical ailment to personally draw himself closer to God.
    - iii) Think of it this way: How many of us get visions of heaven? Now ask, how many of us have suffered through some sort of "thing" in which we want and need God's help to deal with that suffering? Since far most of us have experienced the latter than the former, I suspect that is why Paul focuses far more on this issue.
    - iv) The other point here is that Paul teaches us how to use this ailment to draw closer to God and how to depend upon God to deal with the pain caused by this.
  - c) This leads me back to my title of this lesson. The idea is to trust God in whatever we go through in life. In the "high" moments where God is blessing our life, we need to give God the credit. When the "low" moments come, we need to remember that God allows these moments as well, with the ultimate purpose of keeping us close to Him and be dependant upon his strength.
  - d) Now that you've gotten the general idea of the text, ☺ it is time to start verse 1.

3. Chapter 12, Verse 1: I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.
- a) We last left Paul "arguing" with those people in the Corinthian church who didn't accept Paul's authority as an apostle.
  - b) Paul was reluctantly boasting about himself, with the only motivation being to show the Christians in Corinth that he was an apostle and was sent by God.
  - c) Paul was doing this was because there were "false apostles" in Corinth who were claiming they were "something" by their own boasting.
  - d) Paul is trying to match his opponents "wit for wit" or "boast for boast" because that is what Paul's opponents in Corinth were impressed with.
    - i) While the false apostles (i.e., false teachers) were claiming how special they were, Paul was boasting about all the suffering he has gone through.
    - ii) Paul "one upped" the false apostles not by saying how wonderful he was or how many miracles he has done. He did it by showing how much suffering he has gone through for the sake of the Gospel message.
    - iii) Remember the key point is that Paul "gloried" God in his suffering for the Gospel. During the rough times of our lives, we are to trust in God even more to get us through such times. It is easy to brag about "I accomplished this or that." What is difficult to do is to give God all the credit for getting us through difficult times.
  - e) This leads us to chapter 12. Paul is still "reluctantly boasting" in order to deal with his opposition. One has to remember that Paul's opposition was in Corinth and that Paul, being a good distance away had to take them on in the form of a letter.
    - i) Paul is saying in effect, "Well, since you Christians are impressed with self-boasting, let me tell you the vision that God showed me."
    - ii) In other words, this first part of Chapter 12 is Paul "very reluctantly" talking about himself and what God has done through his life. One gets the impression that Paul didn't even want to speak along the "lines" of the first part of this chapter.
    - iii) Notice the tone of the bragging that is about to occur over the next three verses. Paul is about to state how God showed him a vision of heaven. Paul wants to make it clear that he wished it were not necessary that he even explain this vision.
    - iv) The only reason Paul even "brags here" about how God used him is that he believes that the Christians in Corinth are "impressed by this sort of thing".
    - v) If Paul hates bragging about this vision, why did Paul mention it in the first place?
      - a) In other words, if God does not want us to focus on how God "used us", why state this vision? The answer is to read it in context. The surrounding text is all about how Paul trusted God to get through his life.
      - b) Think of it this way: In Chapter 11, Paul listed his "suffering resume" with the key point being that God got him through all of that suffering. The next part of Chapter 12 deals with some ailment Paul has and how Paul trusts God to help him deal with this ailment.
      - c) Surrounded by those two sections on suffering, Paul explains in Verses 2 through 4 about his experience in heaven.
  - f) Another reason Paul was hesitant to describe his vision of heaven is I'm sure Paul's opponents also had wonderful stories of things they saw in dreams. In other words, this section, by itself, can come down to "You have your vision of heaven and I have mine". Neither side could prove they are any better than the other based on comparing dreams and visions.
    - i) That is why the key to reading this section is to see it in context of the surrounding text. Paul only describes this vision of heaven to make the point that he is called by God and one proof of that fact is that Paul was at one time, called up to heaven.

4. Verse 2: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- <sup>4</sup> was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. <sup>5</sup> I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.
- a) From Verse 2 through Verse 4, we have Paul bragging about his experience in heaven.
  - b) Apparently at one point in Paul's life (14 years earlier as stated in Verse 2), Paul was "caught up" into heaven. Paul states to key facts about this experience in these verses.
    - i) The first is, Paul couldn't tell if he was taken to heaven in his body or without it.
    - ii) The second is Paul heard things there that were "inexpressible".
  - c) Let's talk a little about the "first thing", which is the fact that Paul didn't know he was in his body or not in his body. The word "caught up" is the same Greek word that is associated with the rapture of the church. The point is Paul was caught up into heaven and Paul didn't know if it was just his spirit, or if his body was there with him.
  - d) Notice also that Paul saw something "indescribable". We're not sure what this is, but if it was something that was "expressible", I'm sure Paul would express what it was.
    - i) We know it was not just "Praising God" as that is a common thing in the bible.
    - ii) I suspect that whatever it was, it has something to do with God's future plans for those who are saved. The bible is fairly silent on what we do in heaven. Yes there are some references to eternally praising God and the fact that we are rewarded in heaven. Still, details of our life in heaven are not written in the bible. I suspect whatever Paul got to "peak at" involves the long-term plans for saved people.
    - iii) So why is that inexpressible? We don't know. Maybe God just wants to keep that a secret until the next life. The point is Paul did hear what it was (Yes, we can hear in heaven), but it was so "indescribable", that Paul felt he shouldn't repeat it.
  - e) Now let's go back to Verse 2. This event occurred 14 years ago. Many scholars try to tie this to some specific event in Acts, but the truth is, we don't know exactly when it was.
    - i) Think about this event this way: It is not mentioned in any of Paul's other letters. Nor is this event discussed in Acts, which was completed long after this letter.
    - ii) Notice Paul didn't go on a speaking tour saying, "Guess what God showed me?"
      - a) Why is it everybody who has a vision of God finds it necessary to write a book about it and then go on a speaking tour? Paul's long-term silence on this issue teaches us how we should properly handle such information.
    - iii) In other words, Paul is describing this event reluctantly as the false apostles in Corinth probably bragged about their "glorious miraculous experiences".
  - f) Notice that Paul gives no details about what heaven looked like. He gave no details about what God said to him other than it was in effect "indescribable".
  - g) If you haven't noticed, Verses 2 through 4 are written in the "third person". So how do we know Paul is talking about himself in these verses?
    - i) The answer is coming up in Verse 7. Paul said that in order for him to not be conceited from receiving this great revelation of God, he was given a thorn in the flesh. My point is that Paul speaks about the same event in the first person in Verse 7 and is using "third person" (of himself) here in Verses 2 through 4.
    - ii) Paul chose to talk about himself in the third person, as he wanted to keep the focus on God and not on himself. That is part of the idea of not boasting about one self.
  - h) What I suspect is that the false teachers went around bragging about their visions of God and described in great detail what they "saw" of heaven.
    - i) It seems that Paul's sole purpose is to show that God had called him and if these other false apostles had "really" seen heaven, then they would know that what happens there is "indescribable" for human hearing.

5. Verse 6: Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.
- a) Let me "translate" the verse: Even if I (Paul) choose to boast about myself, I would only say what is truth and I wouldn't make up stories. The truth is I (Paul) hold back from talking about myself, as that is not what God called me to do.
  - b) The biblical idea of "foolish" is to do things that are not pleasing to God. One of those things is to focus on ourselves as a priority over the needs of others around us.
  - c) One gets the impression Paul hated to boast about the fact that he had a vision of heaven. He knew that others could match Paul "story for story" and on that basis alone, it is difficult to tell who is right or wrong. I'm sure a key difference between Paul's story of heaven and false teacher's story is Paul is limited in what he could say about heaven versus false teachers, who I am sure bragged about every detail of their vision.
  - d) Let me put this another way: When a person says they had a dream about heaven or had a "near death experience", should we take them seriously about what happened? The problem with such visions is that they are not verifiable. Even if every word they say is true, how do we know it? The bible mainly teaches us how to live "now" for God. Am I sure we have great rewards in heaven for obedience? Yes.
    - i) So what is wrong with reading stories about heaven? The answer is again, we can't verify those stories. It is better to focus on what we know God called us to do then to spend time reading the latest book of "Here is my heavenly experience".
6. Verse 7: To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.
- a) We now come to one of the more famous verses in this section of scripture. Many people have heard of the term "thorn in my flesh". It has become a common expression.
    - i) Understand that this term is not literal. The Greek word translated "thorn" is more like a tent stake. Paul's point is that this was not some little pain that occurred for a short time, but something very painful and "hangs around" for a long time.
  - b) Notice that Paul understood the "purpose" of the thorn in the flesh. Paul understood the reason he had it was to prevent him from being too conceited.
    - i) We just read that Paul had some sort of wonderful vision of what life is like in heaven. In order to prevent Paul from being conceited about, the text says that a "messenger of Satan" gave Paul whatever the "thorn in the flesh" was.
    - ii) Does this mean that if God shows us something wonderful about our future, that we are guaranteed to go through some sort of suffering to keep us humble? I would not say it is guaranteed, but if we become conceited about some wonderful future vision, even if it is true, this could happen to keep us focused.
    - iii) Even though this pain came "via Satan", Paul understood that God ultimately, was behind it, in the sense that God said in effect, "OK, Satan go hit Paul. Don't take his life, but inflict some sort of pain in his life that he has to live with."
  - c) As to the "thorn in the flesh itself", history is full of speculation as to what it could be. Almost every commentary one can read speculates on what was the pain. The truth is we don't know for sure. If God wanted us to know what it was, the text would state it.
    - i) So why is the text silent on what it actually was? I suspect so that we could all related to it better. It is so we could fill in our "pain" here.
  - d) Let's try this text another way. Suppose you or I say, "Well, I never got any sort of great vision of heaven, why did God allow me to have this particular "pain" in my life? ☹️
    - i) One of the things we have to accept about this life is that all things that happen to believers do happen for a reason. That is what is taught in Romans 8:28. What the bible never says is that we are entitled to a reason for whatever happens to us.
    - ii) What is important is that God does give us the strength to handle whatever pain He has allowed in our lives. That is a key point of the next few verses.

7. Verse 8: Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.
- a) Paul specifically prayed for God to remove whatever was the "thorn in his flesh". Paul mentions that he prayed three times for God to take it away. At that point Paul gave up asking God to take it away and in Verse 9, we'll read that Paul took a different strategy.
  - b) Some commentators think the "three times" is an expression and Paul actually prayed more than that. Who knows? If it was me, Lord knows I would be at it for a long time!
  - c) Suppose we are dealing with some sort of life long (or just "very long") issue that won't go away. It is ok to ask God to take it away, but we have to accept the fact that God's has the right to say "no" to any prayer request. Notice Paul didn't give up after one prayer. It occurred to Paul after awhile that God's answer is no, but that didn't prevent Paul from asking in the first place.
    - i) My point here is that it is ok to ask God for "anything", but we have to accept the fact that God has the right to say "no" or "not now" to any prayer request.
    - ii) A (not the) purpose of prayer is for God's will to get done. If it is not God's will to answer "yes" to a prayer request, we have to accept the no answer.
  - d) So what do we do if God won't take away that pain? The answer is Verse 9.
8. Verse 9: But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- a) Here is your memory verse of the week. It's the last lesson of the series, so I don't feel guilty assigning another memory verse to you. ☺
  - b) This verse is important because it is the secret to handling any sort of pain we have to deal with our lives. In other words, if God won't take away whatever is our "thorn in the flesh", Verse 9 is the secret on how to handle whatever we have to deal with.
  - c) We may think, "This is not fair. I didn't get any great vision of heaven, but "oh boy" did I ever get a particularly difficult "thorn in the flesh". Why did God put this in my life?" ☺
    - i) The answer is that God wants to show that His grace is sufficient to handle any and all issues we have to deal with in our lives.
    - ii) An important idea to grasp here is that God never gives us anything we can't handle. It may be a physical pain or it may be some sort of mental issue such as depression or dealing with an addiction. It may be a person or persons that gives us grief that seems beyond our ability to handle it. The key point of this verse is that God never allows anything (emphasis on anything) to happen in our life in which He does not also give us the strength to handle it. Here's the key: We can handle it if we are willing to give that particular "thing" to God for Him to handle.
  - d) With that "comforting yet scary thought" out of my system, let me explain further. ☺
  - e) The key term of this verse is "My grace is sufficient for you". What that essentially means is that if we pray for God to take away that "pain" and He doesn't, then we must accept the fact that God does (not will, but does) give us the strength to handle it.
    - i) Think of the "pain" as something we are carrying on our shoulders. If God doesn't take away that pain, then He does give our body the ability to carry that pain. (I'm speaking metaphorically, not physically.)
    - ii) Let me break down the phrase "My grace is sufficient for you" in parts. The idea of "My" is we are talking about the God of the Universe. An all-knowing God that is capable of creating everything in the world is also capable of providing us with the power we need to face whatever it is we have to face.
      - a) The idea of God's "grace" is that He has the power (to give us) to face that issue. The idea of "sufficient" is that God's grace can handle whatever it is we have to face in our lives. The idea of "You" means that it is not just for Paul, but also for anyone who wants to trust in God.
      - b) The expression, "My grace is sufficient" is a good term to memorize and even recite out loud to remind ourselves what God can do in our lives.

- f) This verse does not mean that if we are in a lot of pain, we are to just say that phrase over and over again, and the pain will go away. The phrase itself is not magic. The point is God never gives us anything in life that we can not handle as long as we trust in Him to "handle it" through us.
    - i) I'm sure Paul's "thorn in the flesh" didn't go away. Whatever it was, it flared up often enough that Paul had to think about it a lot.
    - ii) The point is whenever Paul thought about it, it would be a reminder to him to think about God's grace being upon him and that God does, and always will provide us with the strength to handle whatever our "thorn" is.
    - iii) Does this mean we shouldn't get medical help for our "thorn in the flesh"? Of course not. What the verse also means is that God gives us the strength to go through any treatment as well as the strength to deal with our "pain" issue.
  - g) The rest of the verse says, "My (God's) power is made perfect in weakness".
    - i) Remember that Paul understood that Satan "delivered" this pain to him. It does not mean that Satan himself delivers all of our problems. In a sense it doesn't matter where the pain came from, but the fact the pain is there and it is real.
    - ii) The point of the whole verse is that God gives us the power to go on no matter how weak we are due to our "thorn in the flesh".
9. Verse 9: Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- a) Paul hated to brag about what "he" did, but loved to brag about what God can do and is capable of doing in his (Paul's) life. Paul realized that when hard times come, it is an opportunity for God's power to rest upon him.
  - b) Verse 10 is arguably the most difficult verse to "do" in practice. It says that Paul "delights in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties". I have to admit I am not at the spiritual point where I can think like this and I suspect most people are the same.
  - c) Let's face it, when difficulties come, we are usually busy yelling at God to take "it" away. We hardly accept God's grace to come upon the situation so we can deal with it.
  - d) Take comfort in the fact Paul first prayed for God to take it away. I doubt it was some sort of simple "here it is God" kind of prayer. My point is there is nothing like "pain" to really get us on our knees and pray with a lot of effort for God to take something away.
  - e) The trick is once we accept our hardship, then we can pray for God's grace to be upon us. In essence, God's grace is already there. The prayer should be for us to "accept and apply" that grace that is already there.
    - i) So how do I do that? Let's suppose we are currently suffering with some sort of "thorn in the flesh". How do we accept God's grace? A sample prayer might be as follows: "Dear Lord, what I am going through is too much for me to handle. Help me to draw upon your strength to be able to deal with this "thing" and provide me with your strength to face the day over and above it. I know it is not your will for it to go away at this time, so help me to make it my will to accept it, deal with it and provide me with the strength to do so."
    - ii) Also understand and accept that dealing with this takes time. I doubt Paul got to a point of acceptance in one brief moment. Most difficult situations require lots of prayer in order for us to deal with the situation.
  - f) I said these verses are hard and I meant it. Paul said he even delights in these difficult moments so that he can rely on God's grace. Personally, I have not reached that point in my life where I can "cheer" for bad things to happen to me. ☺ I doubt Paul did as well. The point is when difficult things happened, Paul turns to God as a source of strength as opposed to trying to handle something based on his own ability to do so.

10. Verse 11: I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing.
- a) In Verse 11, Paul said he has "made a fool of himself". What Paul meant by that is when he was described all the hardships he went through for the sake of the gospel (latter part of Chapter 11) and even describing Paul's personal vision of heaven in this chapter.
    - i) The point is Paul hated to focus on himself and his life. Paul loves to focus on what God can do and what God is doing through His own life and the lives of people who have put their trust in Jesus as both Lord and Savior.
  - b) In the second part of Verse 11, Paul said that you (Christians in Corinth) drove me to the point of having to talk about myself. So is Paul being a victim here? Not exactly.
    - i) The point is that "boasting" impressed some in Corinth. Some people in Corinth accepted what the "false-apostles" were teaching. Paul is saying that since boasting impresses "you guys", let me boast about what God has put me through.
    - ii) The "boasting" by the false-apostles were about things that were not true. That included the false idea that salvation required more than just believing the Gospel. I'm sure the false "boasting" included signs and visions that these false-apostles claimed to have. Paul decided to match "boast for boast" by talking about how much he had to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Further, Paul goes on to say how God's grace got Paul through all of that suffering.
  - c) This leads to another point: The reason God allowed the "thorn in the flesh" to occur right after Paul's heavenly vision 14 years earlier is so that he would know how to rely on God's strength to get him through all of those hardships that he has suffered since that vision occurred.
    - i) So how does this affect you and me? Often God allows our "thorns in the flesh" to teach us to rely upon His grace for the next "thorn" that comes along.
11. Verse 12: The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance.<sup>13</sup> How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!
- a) In Verse 12, Paul now changes the focus from "things God has done through me" to "things that God has done through you", with the "you" being Christians in Corinth.
  - b) Paul reminds those Christians that "signs, wonders and miracles" are done through them.
    - i) Think of it this way: Are you saved? Than a mighty sign was done through you. Have you seen other people give their hearts to Jesus? Then you have seen other mighty wonders and signs. Sometimes we are privileged to see other signs such as a miraculous healing. To me, there is no greater sign than to see someone accept Jesus and watch the change occur in their lives.
  - c) Paul asks "sarcastically" how were you (Corinthian Christians) inferior to other churches?
    - i) The point is this church had problems and I'm sure all churches have problems. The particular problem with this church is that they were getting away from the basic gospel message and were being influenced by those who teach we have to "work" to earn our salvation.
    - ii) Paul's point in Verse 13 is different. Paul's point is that the Corinthians church was not any inferior to other churches, except in the fact that Paul never "hit up" this church for any money. Paul asked other churches to give a donation, but never asked it of the Corinthian church. Paul then says (I'm sure in a sarcastic tone) to "Forgive me of this wrong".
    - iii) The point is Paul loved this church so much that he was willing to work for free by asking others to support him so he could minister to this church. I'm sure the false teachers made all sorts of false-accusations against Paul that he was really in it for the money. Paul answers that charge by saying others supported him, so he would not be a burden to this particular church.

12. Verse 14: Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.
- a) Paul has been to Corinth a grand total of two times prior to this letter. We know from the book of Acts (Chapter 18, Verse 11) that Paul spent 18 months there in his first visit.
  - b) The second visit probably occurred between first and second Corinthians.
  - c) Paul is announcing here in Verse 14 that he desires to come there a third time.
  - d) Further, Paul does not want to be a burden to this church. Paul uses the illustration of "parents saving for the children and not "vice versa". (Yes there are exceptions for elderly or sick parents but that is besides the point here.)
13. Verse 15: So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.
- a) Paul is using money as an illustration point. The point is those who have been Christians for a while should help to teach newer believers about growing in their faith. In that sense of teaching, Paul desires to "be spent" and to "spend" on this church.
    - i) In other words, Paul desired to be used by the church to help it grow.
    - ii) Paul has no desire to ask for money from the Corinthian church in that they would think that he is just doing all of this just for the money. As one matures as a Christian, one understands that those who "live by the Gospel" still need food to eat and it is ok to ask for donations. This church hasn't reached that level of maturity yet, and it is best that Paul doesn't ask for money.
14. Verse 15 (cont.): If I love you more, will you love me less?
- a) Paul is emphasizing the point that he refused to be a financial burden to this church, even if it means to survive off of donations from other churches.
  - b) Remember that Paul started this church and wants to see it mature. Since Paul wants to pour out his love on this church, all Paul asks in return is that they return some of that love to him. What does that mean practically? It means for them to trust that he was sent by God and more importantly, that they only trust in Jesus for their salvation.
  - c) What Paul wanted from these Christians to learn the principal of "loving each other". That means putting the needs of others above one self. That is what Paul meant by wanting to receive love from them as he showed to that church.
    - i) Remember that this has nothing to do with salvation. The issue at hand is about our growth as believers.
    - ii) How do we apply this? It is a reminder for us to not just "go and leave church", but to look for opportunities to show love to other Christians. It is also about going through our lives looking for opportunities to do loving deeds for others.
15. Verse 16: Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! <sup>17</sup> Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?
- a) Paul is emphasizing the fact that he was not a burden to the Christians in Corinth. He never made a plea for money from them.
    - i) The application is about something I mentioned in the last lesson. There are times when one should work "for free" as a Christian or at least be dependant upon others for support in the ministry. People are going to question are motives. It is better to work for "less" and show people one's sincerity than to demand payment.
  - b) OK you say, but I'm not a missionary and I give to my church. How does this affect my life? You may be, or some time in the future working to help out someone around you. The question one has to ask is "what is my motivation?" Am I doing this for some sort of "perk" or am I doing this out of Christian love? A good test is, "If no one even said thank you, would I still be doing this"? I admit, it is hard to do things without receiving any gratitude, but one has to remember that our thanks come from God and not people.

16. Verse 19: Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. <sup>20</sup> For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. <sup>21</sup> I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.
- a) I have mentioned that Paul's last visit to Corinth caused him to come down hard in a famous "lost letter" of Paul to this church. Paul's fear is that things have not improved.
  - b) The fact that Paul had rivals would not bother him if they were teaching the same gospel truth as him. What bothered Paul is the fact that other people were teaching that salvation required more than just believing in Jesus. That leads to the bad things as stated in Verse 20. It says Paul feared there may be "quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder".
  - c) Think of it this way: If some Christians believed they were saved by faith alone and some believed that it requires "more than that", that would cause quarreling in that church.
    - i) The idea of "jealously, anger, factions" etc. would be that one group is trying to "impress" the other by showing "how great they are" in their works.
    - ii) The idea is not that those who believe that "Jesus alone" died for their sins would do less "good deeds" than those who were trying to earn salvation. The fear is that those who were trying to earn salvation were "rubbing it in" with their good efforts and causing division in the church.
  - d) God desires that Christians work together. That means there is none of the negative things listed in Verse 21 in our church.
    - i) Most church leaders have to spend a lot of time being a "referee" in dealing with disputes. The point is if we care about other people and care about the welfare of other people, we wouldn't want to hurt others. The need for a "referee" would decrease dramatically if we all learn to put the interests of other's before our own.
    - ii) My point is that if we truly care about the welfare of other Christians, then most of these negative traits would go away by themselves. Problems occur mainly due to a "me first" way of thinking. The hard part for us is learning to "point the finger at ourselves" instead of blaming others.
    - iii) Grant it, some things need to be worked out on a regular basis and a lot of times apologies are in order. The point is if we (that includes me as well) care about the health and well being of other Christians would act differently at times.
  - e) This leads to Verse 21. Paul says his fear is to come to Corinth and to find Christians who have not repented of "impurity, sexual sin and debauchery".
    - i) My first point here is that for a guy (Paul) who doesn't believe salvation requires any more than just believing Jesus is God and died for our sins, he sure believes that Christians need to act in a way that is pleasing to God.
  - f) Let me define these three terms in Verse 21. Let me define the second and third terms first. The idea of "sexual sin" is any sort of sexual relationship outside of marriage.
    - i) The idea of "debauchery" (or "lewdness" in the NKJV) is about over-indulging in things that are not pleasing to God. It does not mean if someone is overeating we have to take away his or her food. ☺ It does refer to a sin where people are indulging in things to a point where that "thing" has become their primary passion more than God. It may refer to someone who claims they are a Christian but never comes to church and never makes any effort to do anything for God as they are always "too busy" with their life to make any sort of commitment for God. It is essentially a complaint about those who are "doing nothing" for God.

- ii) This leads back to the first word, which is "impurity" (or "uncleanness" KJV). God wants us to lead a life that is "pure" to Him. It does not mean we have to be perfect. It does mean we strive to please God in all that we do. It does not mean we keep all the Old Testament laws.
  - iii) Personally, I find that keeping Jesus command to "love one another" (i.e., putting the needs of others before oneself) is hard enough. It's not a list "do this and don't do that", but it's about having a loving attitude in all we do. If we have such an attitude our actions will "naturally follow" that attitude.
  - g) My final point is that it is not just these three sins or the list of things in Verse 20 that makes Paul "nervous". Paul is giving examples, not a list of "just avoid these things".
17. Chapter 13, Verse 1: This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."
- a) An Old Testament principal is that two or three witnesses are required for judgment. (See Deuteronomy 19:15). I believe Paul's intent here is that when he comes back to Corinth, he plans do judge the Corinthian church in a "biblically acceptable" manner. Since he is just one person, he will have at least one other person come with him to witness the activity of this church.
  - b) Paul has not personally visited Corinth since he wrote the "lost harsh letter" sometime between 1st and 2nd Corinthians. Paul does not know if the church has personally grown since his last visit or are they still influenced by the false teachers. Paul's point is that when he shows up, he will know for sure himself if this church has improved.
18. Verse 2: I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others,
- a) I heard a great paraphrase of this verse that I want to share. The paraphrase is about a parent warning his or her children about cleaning their room. It goes, "Your room is a mess. I have to leave for a while. If I get back and this room is still a mess, I'm going to be mad. If I'm mad, you are going to suffer the consequences". (Source David Guzik).
    - i) The point of this verse and this paraphrase is that Paul is planning to make a third visit to the Corinthian church. If Paul sees the same problems that he saw the last time he came to Corinth, he will be mad and "not spare those who sinned".
    - ii) In other words, Paul is warning he may have to come down hard on this church.
  - b)
  - c) So if Paul loves these people as fellow believers in Christ, why threaten them like this?
    - i) It is the job of the leaders of the church to, well lead. If there is a sin issue in the church, it has to be dealt with.
  - d) Notice Paul says he will not spare "those who sinned". This gets back to Verse 1 where Paul is coming as a judge. What does "come down hard" mean? It gets back to Jesus' method of dealing with sin as stated in Matthew 18. The essential idea is one confronts the sinner by his or her self. If that doesn't work, one goes back with witnesses. If that doesn't work, the problem is brought to the church. If that doesn't work, it's "ex-communication" time.
19. Verse 3: since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. <sup>4</sup> For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.
- a) Here, Paul gets back to his critics. These critics are demanding proof that Jesus was speaking through Paul. Paul responds by saying in effect, "I am acting like Jesus".
    - i) Let me explain: When Jesus was on the cross, He was still the Son of God. He could have called down angels and "received relief" from that situation. Jesus agreed to be weak so the power of God would work through Him after the resurrection. In other words, Jesus agreed to be weak so He could be strong.

- b) Paul is saying he draws upon the same strength that Jesus drew upon prior to his resurrection. Paul is not saying he is strong based on his own power. He is saying he is acting the way Jesus would want him to act as the leader of this church.
    - i) In a sense, this is similar to what Paul said about drawing upon God's strength when it came to his "thorn in the flesh". Paul is claiming God sent him and his proof is the fact he is relying upon God's strength (i.e., His grace) to do so.
    - ii) The "false-apostles" didn't like Paul because he was acting the way Jesus would want him to act, even though these false apostles didn't acknowledge that.
  - c) One of the ways Paul acted was to assume leadership. Remember that Jesus Himself on occasion came down "hard" on His apostles when they didn't get some point Jesus was trying to make. Paul is essentially making the same type of point that he would come down hard if the Corinthian church wasn't growing in their faith and trust of God.
20. Verse 5: Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>6</sup> And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.
- a) Let me start this section by reminding all of us that Paul is speaking to Christians. Paul opened 1st Corinthians with the statement that they were saved. Despite all the problems this church had, they still trusted in Jesus and therefore, were saved.
  - b) With that said, Paul asks them (and us) to examine ourselves if we are "in the faith". If we are saved, what does this mean and how do we test ourselves?
    - i) The issue is not salvation, but one's behavior as a Christian. Since Paul accepted the idea that these people were already saved, the "whole purpose" of both letters to the Corinthians was for them to improve their behavior. Yes that included rejecting the false teachers, but it is much more than that.
    - ii) The essential idea is that we should "strive" every day to be pleasing to God.
  - c) I've read lots of wonderful commentaries with lots of wonderful suggestions on just how to "test ourselves" in the faith. Let me state a few suggestions and if you want, design your own list of how to test your faith:
    - i) For example, ask yourself, "What have I done lately to draw myself closer to God? Or try, "What have I done recently to make a difference for God's kingdom? Or try, "What effort have I made to make a difference for God?"
  - d) The point of these verses is that God wants our lives to make a difference for Him. Occasionally that requires some self-examination on our parts to check our progress.
21. Verse 7: Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.
- a) Verse 7 is not saying we have to be perfect. Verse 7 is saying that one should examine our lives and see that we are making a difference for God and we are striving to be pleasing to Him with our lives.
  - b) In other words, Paul is expecting "progress" on his next visit to Corinth. Paul, like Jesus is asking us to keep on working toward making a difference for God in our lives.
  - c) So what does that mean practically? It means we are doing things (hopefully whatever God calls us to do) to make a difference for Him. In other words, we aren't just showing up for church and forgetting about God the rest of the week. Because we believe the Gospel message, we are using that fact to make a difference for God in all that we do.
    - i) I'm not saying each of us has to start our ministry. I'm saying that each of us needs to get involved in God's program of "Helping the church grow". That includes bringing in new members and that includes helping existing Christians grow in their faith and trust in God. This is where one uses their spiritual gifts and even does what one enjoys doing to make a difference for God.
    - ii) As usual, I'm getting on a roll with a few more verses left to go, so I'll move on. ☺

22. Verse 9: We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. <sup>10</sup> This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.
- a) Verse 9 starts by saying "We are glad whenever we are weak". If you recall, Paul "liked" his weak moments (i.e., the "thorn in the flesh"). It does not mean Paul enjoyed being weak. It meant that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" weakened him and that "thorn" gave him an opportunity to rely even more on God's grace in his life.
  - b) The idea in Verse 9 is to contrast Paul's "weakness" with the "strength" of the church in Corinth. Paul is saying in effect their "strength" is a bad thing in that this church was relying on their own strength and not the strength of Jesus working in their lives.
  - c) Does this mean we should desire some sort of physical "thorn in the flesh"? No. It does mean that we should be dependant upon God for our lives and not our own physical ability to live the Christian life.
    - i) That's the idea Paul is trying to get across. Paul is wrapping up this letter by encouraging Christians to be strong in "God" but "weak" in their ability to get things done without God's help. In other words, God wants us to rely upon his strength to get through any situation and not our own physical ability.
  - d) This leads us to Verse 10. Paul's next point is he doesn't want to come down "hard" on them in person. In other words, Paul wants this church and all believers to be strong in God's grace and not strong in their own ability to discern "right from wrong". The reason we pray for God's guidance and the reason we study His word is to learn what God expects from us. That is what it means to rely upon God and not on our self.
  - e) Paul's final point in these verses is that God gave him the authority to be their leader. The purpose of that authority is not to put down Christians for their lack of faith, but to "build them up" so that they can live the type of life God wants them to live.
23. Verse 11: Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.
- a) Paul ends this letter with a final reminder to "listen to his appeal". That means to pay attention to what Paul said about being dependant upon God for every aspect of our lives.
  - b) Paul also says to "aim for perfection". Paul understands that no one is perfect and sin comes in our lives no matter how much we "aim for perfection". The point is we don't let the fact we are imperfect become an excuse to not try to please God in the first place! God wants us to live a life for Him and to "strive for perfection" even though we all know it is impossible to be perfect. We don't let our shortcomings be an excuse before God.
  - c) Paul's final admonishment is to "be of one mind and live in peace". That does not mean that all Christians have to think exactly alike or desire to all do the same thing. The idea of "be of one mind" is that we all agree on the fundamentals of Christianity. That is, we are saved by faith alone, believe Jesus is Lord and He died for our sins
    - i) I can promise you, that if a church can simply agree on those points, there will be peace in that group of believers. The "trick" is to practice that on a regular basis.
  - d) The last sentence in Verse 11 (The sentence begins with an "AND". Isn't that illegal? ☺) says, "The God of love and peace will be with you". In other words if we strive to live for God, Paul promises us that the God of love and peace will make His presence felt upon us no matter what we are going through at the moment.
24. Verse 12: Greet one another with a holy kiss.
- a) A "holy kiss" in today's vocabulary might be a good handshake or a hug or whatever method Christians use to greet each other.
  - b) My grandparents are all from Croatia. A standard greeting there is to kiss each other on both cheeks. It was a sign of respect. That was the literal idea of this type of greeting.

25. Verse 13: All the saints send their greetings.  
a) Paul had others around him when he wrote this letter and Paul is sending their greeting.
26. Verse 14: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
a) This verse is commonly used as a greeting given by pastors at the end of sermons. That is because this benediction mentions all three members of the trinity.  
i) One of the things that Jehovah Witnesses point out is the "trinity" is not mentioned in the bible. They are correct. However, the word "trinity" is actually a solution to a problem, and not a problem itself. The idea of "The Trinity" is to explain how we can have "Three Gods in one".  
b) Notice Paul says the "Grace of Jesus Christ". That little statement alone shows that Paul considers Jesus "equal" with God the father.  
c) Also notice that a purpose of the Holy Spirit is to help Christians in their "fellowship". What does that mean? It is about our interactions with other believers. The point is even that aspect of the Christian life should be dependant upon on and not ourselves.  
d) OK, enough about living for God. Let's wrap it up for this lesson.
27. Since this is the last lesson, let me remind you like all the studies I do, my sources for this study are listed on the last page of the last study of every book. Thanks for sticking with me through all of this and I truly hope these lessons are beneficial to your life.
28. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we ask that You help us grow as believers. Help us to be dependant upon You for every aspect of our lives and not rely on our own strength. Help us to use our lives to make a difference for You. Guide us to that particular ministry(s) that You have called us to and help us to follow through with our commitments. Help us to make a difference to a lost and dying world. Guide us through our day and through our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to further commentaries as listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in this study. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) and The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over the past lessons. The specific commentaries on 1st Corinthians are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to "audio" commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on 2nd Corinthians by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>
2. Commentary on 2nd Corinthians by Bob Davies. They are available in MP3® format at [http://northcountrychapel.com/audio\\_studies/](http://northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/)
3. Commentary on 2nd Corinthians by David Guzik. It is available for free in text and audio format. The web address is <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/47.htm>.
4. MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: 2nd Corinthians; By John MacArthur, Jr. Moody Press, Chicago, IL Copyright © 1984 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago; Also available in electronic format through Parsons Technology ("QuickVerse® 7.0") Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc., PO Box 100, Hiawatha, Iowa. All rights reserved.
5. Commentary on 2nd Corinthians by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>. Also available at <http://firefighters.org/html/library.cfm>
6. The Defender's Study Bible by Dr. Henry Morris World Publishing (1995) ISBN: 052910444X
7. The English Standard Version Study Bible Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers"
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm)
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229
10. When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999
11. I also refer to Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org).