

1 Corinthians-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

One of the big themes of 2 Corinthians is that God's grace toward us is more than enough to sufficiently answer any trial (or *"thorn in the flesh,"* as Paul will colorfully put it in chapter 12) that we may encounter in this life. And that theme of bringing our trials honestly and fully before God is opened right away, immediately after the greeting. Customarily, in his letters, Paul moves directly from greeting to thanksgiving. And that's exactly what he does here, but notice that the thanksgiving is not focused upon some honorable trait of the readers. It's focused upon *"the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"* (vs.3,4). One of the purposes of our trials is that, after receiving comfort from God, we are now able to help others find comfort from God in their trials. Are our trials making us more or less sensitive to the afflictions of others?

Chapter 2

Another big theme of 2 Corinthians is the unity of the local church. This unity is not a unity merely for *unity's* sake (which can easily sacrifice truth and even genuine love), but a unity around Jesus, for *his* sake. That kind of unity will sacrifice neither truth nor love. From 1.12 - 2.4, Paul had to defend his own integrity in the midst of accusations against him that had to do with changes in his travel plans. Rather than charitably thinking the best (that Paul must have sensible and justifiable reasons for changes to his travel plans), the church had made some uncharitable assumptions. Was Paul being capriciously fickle? Is he temperamentally untrustworthy? Is he just plain worldly? These are the kinds of charges with which Paul must deal, throughout the letter. What about us? How quickly do we assume the worst in people? And how often has our tendency to do so brought great harm to the unity of the Lord's precious, blood-bought people? Note the last of the seven things listed in Proverbs 6.16-19.

Chapter 3

Back in 2.15-16 Paul said this about the ministry and proclamation of the gospel: *"we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."* And then he asked a question which all who have declared the gospel will find very poignant: *"Who is sufficient for these things?"* Paul now answers that great question about our (in)sufficiency in 3.4-6. His competence and his confidence come only from the Lord. It is a plain fact that true, spiritual work can only be accomplished by the power of God at work in us, through the Holy Spirit. We can't reach into someone else's heart and make it new. We can't even do that with our own heart. Salvation is of the Lord, and it is all of grace. As Paul will say in 4.6: *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* Amen.

Chapter 4

Today we come to the verse that adorns the front of the DPC worship guide nearly every Sunday: *"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake"* (2 Corinthians 4.5). Let's consider *"our"* verse, in its context.

In **vs.1&2** Paul says that because God Himself entrusted him with this great ministry of the gospel, he does not lose heart in the midst of it, even though—as we saw yesterday—he could never be sufficient for it in and of himself. And for that same reason he completely refuses to distort the Word of God, in an effort to make it more palatable to people. Rather, he simply sets

forth the truth of God's Word, plainly. Our manipulation of God's Word will never make it effective; it's the work of the Holy Spirit that makes the Word of God effective (see Isaiah 55.10,11). In **vs.3&4** we are reminded that our enemy Satan has blinded people to *"the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."* In **vs.5&6** Paul declares that because the gospel is all about the glory of Christ, there's no need for us to preach and proclaim ourselves. We simply preach and proclaim Christ. And we regard ourselves as the earnest and purposeful servants of those to whom we preach and proclaim. Why? Because—through God's shining grace in our hearts—we have seen for ourselves *"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

Chapter 5

In v.1 Paul assures us that if the believer's *"tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* This *"tent"* is our earthly body, which will be destroyed—and very easily destroyed, at that—in death. But, for the believer, that earthly tent will be replaced by something like it but unlike it, which will be *"eternal in the heavens."* This will be our resurrection body; see Romans 8.18-23 and 1 Corinthians 15.35-58. Believer, meditate deeply on the **future** realities of the gospel! One day we will be *"further clothed"* (v.4) by putting *"on our heavenly dwelling"* (v.2), *"so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life"* (v.4). Take some time today to consider and reflect upon all that awaits the children of God. And it's yours because of the gospel—the work of Christ—which is profoundly and succinctly stated in v.21. Read it and rejoice.

Chapter 6

In vv.1&2 Paul makes an appeal to us *"not to receive God's grace in vain."* There is great and eternal gravity in that appeal; we should heed it daily. In vv.3-13 Paul describes his own conduct in ministry, as an apostle. He insists that his ministry has not been a stumbling block that would hinder people from receiving the grace of God described in the earlier verses. His ministry has been genuine; he has commended himself as a servant of God in every way! How does a servant of God commend himself or herself? He or she willingly endures hardships for the gospel (vv.4b-5). They act with integrity (vv.6-7). And they do so whether their own personal experiences in ministry are pleasant or unpleasant (vv.8-10). They open wide their hearts to fellow Christians (vv.11-13). Pray this for your church leaders! And pray it for all of us, that none of us may become *"a stumbling block in anyone's path"* (v.3).

Chapter 7

Beginning in v.2 Paul resumes and renews his appeal for **FULL RECONCILIATION** between himself and those who had been maligning him in the Corinthian community. So much of this book is a wonderful study in reconciliation. Every phrase in vv.2-16 is a treasure chest of reconciliation wisdom, ready to be opened and studied. Paul's *"ministry of reconciliation"* (see 2 Corinthians 5.18) between sinners and a holy God has so much more credibility because we see that he was a man who personally practiced reconciliation in his strained relationships with others. May the same be true of each of us! We see that his efforts led to *repentance* (v.9), *godly sorrow* (v.10) *earnestness and eagerness* to clear themselves (v.11), *indignation* against the sins involved (v.11), *alarm* at what had been allowed to happen (v.11), *longing and concern* for a restored relationship (v.11, see also v.7), and *a readiness to see justice done* in the matter (v.11). This was a robust response! And the result? *"At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter"* (v.11). a rhythm, and order in the will and priorities of God that the Scriptures teach. Listen. Follow.

Chapter 8

These next two chapters deal with *"the gift"* (8.12,20; 9.5,9,15), and there is so much we can learn here. The background is this: Paul is taking up a collection from all the Gentile churches, to help the poor Jewish followers of Christ living in Judea who have been suffering outbreaks of famine and persecution. See another example of this very collection at work in Acts 11.27-30; to see an example of this whole mentality at work, read Galatians 2.10. The Corinthians knew about this collection and actually asked to take part in it (1 Corinthians 16.1-4). And here in 2 Corinthians 8.1-5, Paul reports on how the churches in Macedonia have generously and sacrificially responded to this collection, in remarkable ways. He shared this in order to motivate the Corinthians in *"the grace of giving"* (v.7). But the truth that should motivate our giving of ourselves the most is simply the gospel. See v.9.

Chapter 9

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" That's the somewhat surprising manner in which Paul concludes these two chapters (8 & 9) on the privilege of Christian giving. Is this how we think of giving? Have we praised God for the opportunity we have to give, in response to his gifts to us? Have we taught our children to highly value—both in our teaching and our example—generous and responsible giving? Are we attentive to the fact that the time devoted to giving in our worship service is not just a mental break or intermission before the sermon... but a holy act of worship? The reason Paul views giving in this way is that he's learned to see the Lord Jesus Christ as the heart and center of everything. Go through these two chapters on giving again, looking for Christ! He is in this giving, he is behind this giving, he is the purpose of this giving, he is the chief example of this giving.

Chapter 10

There is much in these final four chapters where Paul is having to defend himself against the various attacks whereby his opponents have been attempting to poison the minds of the Corinthians against him. Remember in the very first verse of 2 Corinthians Paul identified himself as *"an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."* But these opponents he terms *"super-apostles"* (11.5; 12.11), *"false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ"* (11.13). By 12.12 he's reminding the Corinthians what the signs of a *"true apostle"* look like. Paul's defense will give you an idea of the character of the charges that were being bandied against him. But in the midst of all of that, look carefully at vv.3-5. Paul is here reminding us where the true battle lies, and how it is won. Do not wage war according to the flesh. Seek the weapons of God, which bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ: the Word, prayer, worship, etc.

Chapter 11

If we are spiritually alive and awake and alert we must always remain mindful and watchful towards this danger: *"your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ"* (v.3). It doesn't usually happen as an outright assault; more frequently it happens by inches, subtly, with a seemingly-harmless compromise here and a lowering of the guard against false teaching there. Satan is a deceiver, which means that one of his chief weapons is simply seducing us with the obvious but comfortable lie that we are not even in a spiritual war. But we *are* in a spiritual war. And if we're not aware of that, that means we're losing. Do not be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. That is the straightforward concern that makes Paul willing to endure great hardship, afflictions, trials, even death for the gospel and the church. He was captured by Christ's love.

Chapter 12

There are different kinds of suffering, and the Bible shows us all of them. Sometimes we suffer because of *our sin* (think of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel). Sometimes we suffer because of *someone else's sin* (think of all Israel suffering because of Achan's sin in Joshua). Sometimes the reason for our sin is *not at all immediately discernible* (think of Job). Sometimes Christians even suffer *for righteousness' sake* (see Paul's description of his suffering in 2 Corinthians 4.7-18). Also notice—in that 2 Corinthians 4 passage—how Paul kept the eternal perspective in view, so that he did not lose heart. But here, in 12.7-10, Paul introduces us to another kind of suffering: the kind that God gives with one hand, while also giving us a fully sufficient supply of grace with the other hand, along with the assurance that this suffering is for our good sanctification... and for his great glory.

Chapter 13

This has been a solemn letter, in many ways. And Paul closes the letter in a solemn fashion: he exhorts the Corinthians (v.5) to examine and test themselves to see if they are, indeed, in the faith! Just being associated with a church or in the membership of a church is not enough to secure salvation. Are we believing the gospel? Have we experienced the grace of Christ? Do we know the love of God? Are we walking in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (v.14)? Paul is about to make another visit to Corinth. And he warns them that if they wish to make further accusations against him, *"every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses"* (v.1). This comes straight out of God's law, in Deuteronomy 19.15. See also Matthew 18.16, John 8.17, 1 Timothy 5.19, Hebrews 10.28, and 1 John 5.7-8. It's a good Biblical principle to keep in mind in any conflict, that we *"may not do wrong"* (v.7).

-Reflecting on 2 Corinthians-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 2 Corinthians. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 2 Corinthians before we move forward?

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2.41