

SMALL GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 11/22/09

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-7:1

This passage continues Paul's extended defense of his ministry. In chapter 5, Paul turned to the deeply theological discussion of reconciliation. God has supplied the means through Christ's death for all humanity to receive forgiveness for sins. In 2 Cor. 5:20, Paul pleads with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. This command drives the content of the next passage as Paul now moves to the subject of the ethical outworking of a life that has been reconciled to God. In 2 Cor. 6:1, Paul pleads once again with his audience to take their calling seriously.

This next section in 2 Corinthians extends the theme of reconciliation to Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. Once again he commends himself to them as worthy of God's ministry and worthy of their love as their spiritual father in the gospel. 2 Cor. 6:1-2 sets the stage for the following discussion by bringing out the urgent need for the Corinthians to respond favorably to his message. This group of believers is in danger of falling either under the spell of false teachers or the spell of cultural compromise. Paul follows up on his plea for them to be reconciled to God by pushing them to a point of decision. 2 Cor. 6:3-10 is a highly poetic passage composed by Paul to once again list his apostolic credentials. This is considered to be the second list of Paul's hardships in this letter and its purpose is to underscore the extent to which Paul will go to bring the gospel to the Corinthians as well as illustrate God's compassionate care in preserving Paul against all obstacles. 2 Cor. 6:11-13 is an emotional interjection on Paul's behalf, bearing his heart to this congregation and asking for a response of love in return. 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 begins Paul's admonition of a specific behavior that plagues this church, dulls their senses, and keeps them from all God has to offer them. In this section of the passage, Paul calls the Corinthians to live like the called out saints that they are.

Throughout history Paul has been accused of being antinomian, or against the Law, suggesting that he has a lax view of the Christian's ethical response to God. In 2 Corinthians however, Paul is strongly motivated by the backdrop of the Judgment seat of Christ. Paul lives in the present by looking forward to a future day when our lives will be evaluated. It is Paul's desire to live for Christ in the present and it is this perspective that moves him to implore his readers to do the same.

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

This section begins, "And working together with Him." Paul is God's fellow worker, or coworker, in the ministry of reconciliation. It is as one who has been called by God that Paul can speak on God's behalf just as the Old Testament prophets did. Paul, as God's mouthpiece, urges the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. He speaks directly to this group of believers who are in a precarious spiritual position. To receive the grace of God in vain (to be empty, worthless, of no purpose) is to be reconciled to God yet fail to live a life that reflects that new standing. Paul is not questioning the salvation of the Corinthians. In fact he asserts this truth in his call for them to now live the life that reflects their new status in Christ. Paul uses the words of

the prophet Isaiah in 6:2 to make his point sharper. Paul quotes from Is. 49:8a, which in its context is God speaking to Israel, commanding them to come out of Babylon. This is God's promise not to forsake His covenant people and His demand for them to be separate from the wicked culture that surrounds them. God has heard the cries of His people and "now" is the acceptable time for Him to respond. Paul uses this verse for two reasons: 1) to provide a backdrop to later command the Corinthians to separate themselves from unbelievers and 2) to emphasize the time sensitive urgency for the Corinthians to respond. The moment in which God reconciled man to Himself on the cross is the day of salvation. The Corinthians have already entered into this. Now is the time for them to allow this truth to influence and transform the way they live out the rest of their lives.

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

Having laid the groundwork, Paul does not immediately address the behavior of the Corinthians. In this next section, he once again lists a series of hardships incurred as a result of his apostolic calling. This list of suffering will serve to underscore his authority to make ethical demands of this body of believers. In 6:3, Paul writes that he gives no offense in anything, or that he puts no stumbling block in their way, so that the ministry will shine forth and that Paul's person will not be the issue. Since the Corinthians have made Paul the issue though, he needs once again to commend himself to them. 2 Cor. 6:4b-10 is a highly stylized passage that sets forth Paul's hardships, Paul's Christian character, and Paul's heart for ministry, with no less than 37 terms.

The passage is divided as such:

2 Cor. 4b-5

There are 9 different hardships that are introduced under the general heading of "in great endurance." Without being defeated, Paul endures the following injustices. They are broken down by Paul Barnett as follows:¹

- 1) Afflictions, hardships, and distresses. These are considered "generic tribulations that arise from bringing the gospel to a hostile world.
- 2) Beatings, imprisonments, and tumults. These describe social hardships, sufferings at the hands of others.
- 3) Labors, sleeplessness, and hunger. This grouping reflects difficulties that are more voluntary in nature.

We will encounter another such list in 2 Cor. 11, but for now it suffices to say that although the Corinthians may view Paul's hardships as reason to doubt him, Paul views them as necessary pains in fulfilling the call of his ministry. Paul's life clearly imitates

¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament, 327.

Christ's in His suffering and in his willingness to suffer so that others may know the indescribable riches of God's grace.

2 Cor. 6-7b

The next section lists a series of graces in Paul's ministry. Paul's character also stands as witness to his authority, and his character is undeniably shaped and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul operates in purity, in knowledge, in patience, and in kindness. Purity is to be understood in the sense of pure motives toward the Corinthians. It is undeniable that in his interactions with this group of believers that Paul has exhibited gifts that can only come from the working of the Spirit in his life. Paul has had harsh words for the Corinthians, but overall he has treated them as his children, as such he desperately longs for them to know the fullness of their relationship with Christ. "In the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God," all these descriptors make it clear that Paul is utterly dependent on God for his ministry. Paul strongly asserts that his motives are those of genuine love for the Corinthians, and that his gospel message is validated by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians have already seen this.

2 Cor. 7c-8b

The following terms are grouped according to the preposition that introduces them, "by." Paul begins to lay out the means through which he accomplishes his ministry and the paradoxical results that follow.² Through the means of weapons of righteousness (here he is referring to his ethical righteousness, or right behavior) which are for the right and left hand. In other words, Paul is thoroughly equipped with ethical righteousness—his moral behavior substantiates his claim. "By glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report," these descriptions represent the varied evaluations that Paul has received. Paul's ministry is not judged on others' perceptions, rather it should be judged by the effect of the Holy Spirit on those who choose to respond to the message in faith.

2 Cor 8c-10

Again, these terms are grouped according to the introductory preposition; in this case "as." This next grouping brings out the point that Paul made previously in 2 Cor. 5:12, the outward appearance often betrays what is in the heart. Paul now makes 7 contrasts between what others may externally observe over and against the inner reality which is validated by the power of God that enables Paul to endure all that is handed to him. Accusations against him are that he is a deceiver, he is unknown, he is dying, he is punished, he is sorrowful, he is poor, and he possesses nothing. Having been with Paul for 18 months and under his ministry for even longer, the Corinthians know that this catalog of accusations does not ring true.

² Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 162.

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

At the conclusion of Paul's long list of troubles, lies an emotionally charged plea toward the Corinthians. "Our mouth has spoken freely" has been translated, "I have let my tongue run away with me."³ Paul cannot constrain himself, for he deeply loves this group of people. In these few verses we experience Paul the pastor as his heart breaks knowing the spiritual peril of this congregation. It is not often that Paul addresses his congregations by name, but he does so here, "O Corinthians," which emphasizes the depth of his plea. Paul's heart is wide open to them and yet the Corinthians are restrained, restricted, cramped in their response toward him. Paul asks the Corinthians to respond to him in the same overflowing of love. Not only is Paul one who loves them with great affection but he is their father in the faith. In 1 Cor. 4:14-15, Paul writes, "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would* not *have* many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." He has a paternal relationship with them and it is his duty as well as his desire to guide them in the right direction. Paul's motives are hardly malicious or self-serving. These are his children and they are in need of correction.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Although Paul will return to the subject of the openness of the Corinthians' heart in 7:2, he now sets forth a series of ethical commands. As is typical with Paul's writing, ethical commands always follow theological discussions of one's standing in Christ. A person needs to understand who they are in Christ in order to have the proper motivation and desire to live for Christ. At this point, Paul has laid the groundwork for his readers to understand the egregiousness of their behavior and to desire change in their lives. 2 Cor. 6:14 contains Paul's command to the Corinthians, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." Some translations read, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." The metaphor of unequal yoking comes from Lev. 19:19 and Deut. 22:10, the former banning cross breeding of animals and the latter forbidding the yoking of an ox and a donkey together for plowing. The point that Paul make is that the Corinthians need to stop partnering with unbelievers. The extent of the command will be explained as the passage develops, but the force of the command suggests that the Corinthians were already engaged in this behavior and that it is so dangerous, Paul sees it as the climax of his argument.

2 Cor. 6:14b-16a lists a series of rhetorical questions that highlight the gravity of this unequal yoking. Paul starkly contrasts the believer with the unbeliever. The believer has righteousness, light, Christ, faith, and is described as the temple of God. The unbeliever has lawlessness, darkness, Belial (a word not found elsewhere in the New Testament but is used in other Jewish writings to describe an opponent of God), anti-faith (the literal definition of an unbeliever), and idolatry. Paul then uses 5 different terms stressing that the believer should have no partnership unbelievers. He writes that there is no partnership, no fellowship, no harmony, no commonality, and no agreement

³ Ralph P. Martin, 164.

between the two. Lest we take this passage to mean that believers should remain absolutely separate from unbelievers (which would contradict Paul elsewhere and seriously hinder evangelism), Paul sharpens his focus with his last rhetorical question. The issue at hand is the chasm that lies between the temple of God and the idolatrous temples that populated the city of Corinth. With 2 Cor. 6:16b, Paul then transitions to the concept that WE are the temple of God. Paul addressed this previously in 1 Cor. 3:16-17. We are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in us.

In 6:16b, Paul directs the Corinthians as a church, "You (plural) are the temple of the living God." It is in their midst that God dwells, that God moves, that God is worshipped. By contrast, any other temple to idols is void of this. We know from Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians that this congregation had difficulty knowing how to separate themselves from the religious cults of Corinth. Paul gives them the motivation to do so. Paul continues with a series of Old Testament quotations that he strings together for his own purposes. The first is based on Lev. 26:11-12. This chapter in Leviticus is a restatement of God's covenant promise to Israel and in particular, the priesthood of Israel. If the Israelites will separate themselves from all that is unholy and have no other gods, Yahweh will be utterly for them. He will set His tabernacle among them (dwell with them), He will be their God, and they will be His people. God called Israel to be a holy people for the very purpose that they might bring Yahweh to the nations. A persistent problem in Israel's history is that more often than not they tried to mix the nations' gods with their own. God has always demanded the sole attention of His people and Paul argues that He is no different with the Corinthians. They have the three-fold promise of God's indwelling, His presence among them, and His covenant faithfulness, but they are also under the same expectation that in return their hearts will be reserved for God and God alone.

Paul continues in 6:17-18 with another command to separate from what is unclean. This command is issued in the form of Old Testament citations and it is followed by the promise of God relating to them as a loving Father. The two citations, "come out from their midst and be separate," is from Is. 52:11 and Ez. 20:34. Is. 52:11 reads, "Depart, depart, go out from there, Touch nothing unclean; Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, You who carry the vessels of the LORD." The prophet Isaiah addresses Israel as she is captive in Babylon. As Isaiah promises a future release from exile, he records God's command for the Israelites to leave, taking nothing with them (in the first Exodus from Egypt, they brought silver and gold with them). The prophet Ezekiel writes regarding the second Exodus, when Babylon was overthrown and the Israelites are allowed to return to their land. Through Ezekiel, God promises to welcome home his people. The point Paul makes through these two references is that God has called the Corinthians to be separate from the idolatrous religious practices that surround them. They are to steer clear of any relationships with unbelievers that might draw them into contact with idols. In Corinth, this would affect many of their relationships as the focal point for fellowship was usually a dinner party which often consisted in part of religious ceremonies to other gods. Paul is calling them to make hard decisions in their relationships that might place them at risk. As he has unduly demonstrated in his own life, this is often part of the calling.

In 6:18, Paul offers one more Old Testament citation from 2 Sam. 7:14. In 2 Sam. 7, the prophet Nathan communicates God's covenant to King David. This covenant promises that David's kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom. Although David's kingdom was divided shortly after his death, the covenant made with David is fulfilled in Christ. In using this particular reference, Paul tells his readers that God promises to be a Father to them, sons and daughters, which is all-inclusive. Not only does God desire an intimate relationship with the Corinthians, but the fulfilled Davidic covenant in the person of Jesus secures it. Paul finishes with the words, "says the Lord almighty," placing a final stroke of absolute, unyielding, certainty that God will do what He said He will do in their lives. Paul finishes his thoughts in 7:1 as he recalls all of the promises he previously mentioned. Therefore, having these promises (God with them, God walking among them, God dwelling in them), let us act as those who are set apart from idolatry. Paul urges the Corinthians once again to separate themselves, to thoroughly keep themselves from anything that presents itself in opposition to God. Paul has mentioned "fear of the Lord" previously in 2 Cor. 5:11 as his response to the Judgment Seat of Christ and as his motivation to continue in his calling. He returns to this theme at the end of the verse. The motivation to keep ourselves away from those things in our culture that directly challenge God in our lives is to have a proper perspective of who God is and who we are in Him. The exhortation rings clear to us today as we have to discern which relationships will be beneficial to us and which relationships will wear down our ability to respond in faith.

SMALL GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS
2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-7:1

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

2 Corinthians 6:1 -2

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain-- ² for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION "--

Read Isaiah 49:9

Isaiah 49:8

Thus says the LORD, "In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;

- 1. What do you think it means “to receive the grace of God in vain”?**

- 2. Have you had moments in your Christian walk where you have needed these strong admonitions to stay on the right path?**

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

³ giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, ⁴ but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, ⁷ in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸ by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; ⁹ as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

- 3. What is your response to Paul’s list of hardships?**

4. Have you experienced any of these in your own life as a result of your faith? What was it like?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

¹¹ Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. ¹² You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. ¹³ Now in a like exchange-- I speak as to children-- open wide to us also.

5. How do you feel about Paul addressing the Corinthians in this way?

6. Do you think this is God's perspective of us? Why or why not?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1

¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. ¹⁷ "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸ "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

7. What do you think of Paul's command to not be bound together with unbelievers?

8. Have you been in situations where a relationship with an unbeliever has challenged your faith?

9. Do you hear the concern that God has for us in the choice of Paul's Old Testament quotes? Does that motivate you more than a lightning bolt might?

10. How can we relate this passage to our modern day circumstances?