

## **SMALL GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS 10/4/09 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-13**

Throughout Scripture, Paul is many things. He is an evangelist, a missionary, a healer, and a preacher. In this letter to the Corinthians, we meet Paul the pastor. He is deeply involved in caring for his congregation in Corinth. He makes it clear that he is not an itinerant preacher that shows up one day and is gone the next. Instead, he is profoundly involved in the life of the church. His joy is dependent upon them, and Paul is confident that their joy is dependent upon him as well. In this passage, Paul defines his apostolic authority in terms of his relationship with them. Paul brought the Gospel to Corinth, remained with them 18 months, and through his flurry of correspondence with them (letters, visits, visits by coworkers), we see that he not only invested in their initial salvation, but he will continue with them in the process of sanctification (which is simply our cooperation with the Holy Spirit to figure out how to live this Christian life). Paul is their spiritual father, and like most parents, he wants God's very best for them.

### **2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-4**

Chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians continues Paul's defense of his actions toward the Corinthian church. In 2 Cor. 1:23-24 he writes that he did not come to Corinth as he intended because he wanted to spare the Corinthians (and himself) from a sorrowful meeting. In this chapter we learn more of the particulars of the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. In 2 Cor. 2:1-4, Paul explains why he did not return to Corinth a second time. He writes that it was for his own sake that he would not come in sorrow again. He had come once (his painful visit) and its outcome was sorrowful. Paul does not intend to repeat this negative experience and he knows that based on the Corinthians' behavior that they are not ready to meet him face to face again. It is out of his love for them and his desire to work through their differences that Paul instead writes to them. He refers to this "severe letter" in 2:3-4. The letter was born out of a deeply pained and anguished heart. The content of the letter was harsh, but the intent of the letter was to confront the Corinthians' behavior, to encourage a change of heart and perspective, and to reaffirm Paul's love for this congregation. In 2 Cor. 7:8, we learn that this letter did cause sorrow, but it was sorrow that led to repentance and a renewed relationship between Paul and the church.

In 2 Cor. 2:1-11, the themes of grief/sorrow and joy/rejoice are juxtaposed. These themes will recur throughout the letter, but their prominence in this section underscores Paul's view of the believer's life. Sorrow and joy are both part of the Christian life. Sorrow is something experienced in the present, and we have numerous examples from Paul's life. He is at odds with this church. He has been persecuted by his own people. He has been afflicted and abused as a result of God's calling on his life. Paul knows grief and suffering. It is not what he wants this congregation to experience, and in fact he tells them that he expects them to be his cause to rejoice. Paul wrote the severe letter to the Corinthians because they were on a fast road to a very sorrowful place. In the depth of his pain however, Paul is able to view the Corinthians the way that God views us. He sees them for who they are (sanctified in

Christ) even though their behavior was not reflecting this truth. Paul is confident though that the same Spirit that has been evident in their midst will continue working in their hearts to affect change and that when Paul does come to Corinth again, it will be a joyful visit. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and it is the believer's possession in the present as well as a permanent state in future. Maybe one of the reasons that Paul is so future oriented is because he desires to leave the conflicts and strife that plague this church (and others) and participate in the untainted joy that will be ours in eternity. There will be no more pain or tears, only the brilliant presence of God. Paul wants the Corinthians to taste this joy, but their treatment of Paul, their divisiveness and willingness to listen to false teachers has robbed them of the joy that should be theirs. Paul's purpose in writing the severe letter was to rebuke them and to instruct them in certain matters. How they responded to that letter was paramount to their continued relationship with Paul, and with the greater Christian church. We learn in 2 Cor. 2:5-11, that the Corinthians did respond well and that Paul has every cause to rejoice with them.

## **2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11**

In this section, Paul now addresses one of the particular points of conflict. Paul writes of an individual who "has caused sorrow," (2 Cor. 2:5). Although we do not know exactly what this person did, his particular offense was against Paul, but his actions have widespread effect on the church as well. Paul counsels the Corinthians on how they should deal with him and he now advises them to cease the discipline and restore this man to the church. This passage does not provide us with any clues as to how the offender was punished. All we know is that the punishment is inflicted by the majority (suggesting that there is a minority group siding with the man) and that its effect was powerful. Paul makes it clear that this man's actions impacted the entire church and they needed to be addressed. The majority of the Corinthians were obedient to Paul's directive and Paul now deems it necessary for the offender to be welcomed back into the congregation. Paul has received reports from Titus and is probably aware of the heart condition of the offender and his fragile state. Paul does not want to risk the man's faith, and as one who knows excessive sorrow himself, Paul decides that the Corinthians have completed their act of obedience. In 2 Cor. 2:9, Paul writes that this was a test of their obedience. The Corinthians proved that they were responsive to Paul and his authority and that they accepted his pastoral leadership. Paul now asks the Corinthians to act in love and forgiveness, just as Paul himself has acted. He writes in 2 Cor. 5:16-21 of Christ's ministry of reconciliation that has now been imparted to believers and he urges his readers to act in imitation of Christ.

The situation with the man who has caused sorrow, is a picture of the church at Corinth. As the man caused the church sorrow, so the church of Corinth caused Paul sorrow. As the majority in the church disciplined the offender, so Paul writes his severe letter to the Corinthians and issues directives for them to change their behavior. As the severe letter has had its intended effect on the Corinthian church, so Paul judges that the punishment delivered to the offender has also had its intended effect. As Paul urges the Corinthians to now focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, Paul writes with

the desire for the church to know his forgiveness and to be reconciled to him. This test of obedience was also an object lesson. The level of forgiveness that was extended to the Corinthians by Paul was meant to accomplish two things. 1) It should illustrate the profound act of forgiveness that Christ accomplished on the cross. 2) The understanding of how much we have been forgiven should result in an overwhelming gratitude that spills over into how we treat other people. Paul deftly demonstrates this in his relationship with the Corinthians. They are now called to the same act of compassion.

Today if we are offended in a church, if we do not like the direction or decisions made by the leadership, we can find at least ten churches within a ten mile radius. This was not the case in the first century church. When problems cropped up in the church, it was necessary to address them and to deal with them appropriately in order to preserve the health and wellbeing of the congregation and to further the ongoing message of salvation that emanates from God's people. Jesus understood the church as a family. Paul understood the church as a family. Although difficult times come or differences of opinion arise, the common denominator for Paul is our mutual bond of faith. In Christ, we should be able to work these issues out, even if it involves tears and anguish. There is a future joy that Paul assumes he will share with this congregation despite the painful circumstances he has endured. It is extremely sad that a body of believers can succumb to such hurtful behavior, but the beauty of 2 Corinthians is that we have hope in that we know that Paul is reconciled to this church. It could have ended differently, but it did not and that gives all of us hope that whatever our issues, whatever the church is facing, God can work it out.

In v. 11, Paul adds that not only do the Corinthians need to imitate Christ, but they also need to avoid giving Satan any advantage among them. They are already struggling with divisiveness, sexual immorality, and idol worship, they do not need to give Satan any other reason to accuse them or outwit them. Although Paul is dealing with human personalities and offenses in Corinth, he is not unaware of the spiritual attack that assaults the church. In 2 Cor. 11:13, Paul calls the false teachers in Corinth, servants of Satan. He writes that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and so these teachers disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. One of Paul's spiritual gifts displayed throughout the book of Acts is his ability to discern spirits. Often the Holy Spirit fills Paul and he is able to see that a spirit is at work to thwart his ministry (Acts 13:10, 16:18, 19:11-12). Paul's eyes are opened to the spiritual opposition in Corinth and he encourages this church to see the greater picture. It is not just a relationship at stake or a man's faith at stake, but the whole church is at stake if they do not learn to forgive.

As I sat writing this week's small group study, there was a knock at my door. Expecting a friend to be there, I opened the door to find two young men with short-sleeved shirts, ties, and a Bible that is used by the Jehovah's Witnesses. These men were handsome, kind, and considerate yet in actuality they are false teachers whose intent is to undermine the person and the power of Christ. They are disguised as angels of light, yet they preach another gospel. Satan's influence is not confined to the

first century, but it is active and powerful in the present. We fall prey to the same problems: divisiveness, bitterness, immorality, etc. . . . Paul's directs us to forgive, to show love, and to know the truth and in so doing we will not be taken advantage of by Satan's schemes today.

## **2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-14**

This section serves as a transition to the next section (2 Cor. 2:15-7:4) that will focus on Paul's message. Paul concludes the discussion of his travel plans for the time being. It will be revisited in 2 Cor. 7:5. Paul now tells the Corinthians what he has been doing since he sent them the severe letter. He left Ephesus for Troas in order to meet Titus. Titus had delivered the severe letter to Corinth and Paul was exceedingly eager to hear how the Corinthians had responded to his letter. Knowing that the content was harsh and that their opinion of him was divided, Paul was in torment. To make matters worse, Titus is not at the intended meeting place in Troas. Although the Lord provides an opportunity for ministry there, Paul is too distraught over the uncertainty of the Corinthian church. He leaves those in Troas in the company of his fellow workers and journeys on to Macedonia where he eventually does meet up with Titus. Upon hearing the favorable report that the Corinthians had responded well to the letter and presumably to Titus' ministry as well, Paul writes 2 Corinthians.

**SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-14**

**A. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-4**

**2 Corinthians 2:1-4 (NAS)**

*But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? <sup>3</sup> This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. <sup>4</sup> For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.*

- 1. 2 Cor. 2:1-4 describes the severe letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. What was its intended purpose?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. According to 2:3, how does Paul want his relationship with the Corinthians to be?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. Have you had a similar experience in which you had to deliver “harsh” words that were intended to encourage change in a person’s life?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. What does this passage make you think of Paul?**

**B. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11**

**2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (NAS)**

*<sup>5</sup> But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree-- in order not to say too much-- to all of you. <sup>6</sup> Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, <sup>7</sup> so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. <sup>10</sup> But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*

**5. What do you think of the idea that one person's actions can impact an entire congregation? Have you had this experience?**

**6. Have you ever been a part of or witnessed an instance of church discipline like the one described in this passage that resulted in reconciled relationships?**

**7. Do you think you operate with an awareness that Satan is at work to take advantage of us? Why or why not?**

**C. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-14**

**2 Corinthians 2:12-14 (NAS)**

<sup>12</sup> Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.

**8. Why is Paul so troubled in this passage?**

**9. Is this picture of Paul congruent with your view of him?**

**10. What does this say about Paul's love for this church?**