

# REFLECTIONS ON 2 CORINTHIANS

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reflects on just about every emotion a pastor can have regarding his flock. News of problems drags him down and then news of maturing and proper living pumps him up. But Paul remains firm in Christ, firm in correction, firm in praises and firm in blessings.

Before you delve too deeply into Second Corinthians, a word of caution, suggestion. Thoughtfully, and carefully read First Corinthians. Perform a careful, comprehensive, study reading. A considerable amount of the content of the second letter is drawn from the first.

Throughout second Corinthians Paul refers to “us, we, you and them”. It is important to understand who Paul is referring to. Throughout this letter the, *us* and *we* refers to Paul and the Brothers who are presenting the Gospel of Christ Jesus. When he speaks of *you*, he is referring to the members of the Christian fellowship in Corinth. Finally, there is the, *them* and *they*. These are the false apostles and those promoting a different gospel, one that conflicts with the Gospel brought by Paul and the Brothers. As you read 2 Corinthians be very careful to understand, to who or about who Paul is speaking.

There is one exception to the, *us/you* format and that is in Chapter 7 verse 1. It is rather clear and you will see it when you get there. In verse 2 of chapter 7 Paul reverts to pre-mentioned differentiation of *we, us, you* and *them*.

There have been volumes written about the relationships between first and second Corinthians. Even more about the time-line and occurrences between the two letters. All these, sometimes conflicting ideas add nothing to the understanding of God’s Word in these letters. All of the ‘history’ needed to understand the letter is explained by Paul in the letter.

As we open chapter 1 we see that Paul starts with the typical preamble to his letters. From Paul and his companion, to the Corinthians and all the saints in Achaia, followed by a blessing. It is of note that Paul includes “all the saints in Achaia”. This has been interpreted as an instruction to circulate the letter throughout Achaia. In verses 3 through 7 Paul explains in detail why we are Christians. This dissertation is in fact a definition of the first century word *χαρᾶν* which we interpret as joy. To the Greeks this word *χαρᾶν* meant the recompenses of a relationship with God. We see the word joy throughout the New Testament and quite often confuse it with happiness. We must be careful and not fall victim to this thought process. As defined in the first century it is possible to have JOY in the midst of our tribulations. And, that is why we follow Christ. Joy is a devout personal thing between you and God. It is not a measure of your pleasure on earth.

In verses 8-10 Paul speaks of persecution.

There is a word used in verse 8 that needs attention, for it has far reaching implications. That word is *ἀδελφοί* (pronounced adelphoi). The word *ἀδελφοί* is most often translated as brothers or brothers and sisters depending upon which translation you have. The word has much deeper meaning. It refers to all the members of a group or movement. More importantly it bestows equal value or importance to each member of that group or movement. From the wealthy landowner to the slave, man or woman, young or old. All have equal value. All share equally.

Next Paul proceeds in verses 15-through the end of chapter 1 with a caution or warning. He states that he writes clearly and literally, do not read anything more into his words.

In verses 1:15 to chapter 2:4 He addresses why he did not visit as he said he would in the letter we call 1 Corinthians. He first explains that he does not make plans thoughtlessly when it involves his mission for Christ. His intent is always true. It appears that there was harsh reaction to the 1 cor. letter and he wanted to allow time for necessary corrections to take effect. Hoping, a more pleasant visit would come after a passage of time.

In verses 5 through 11, which offence Paul is speaking of is unclear. What matters is that it is dealt with properly.

Paul goes on to explain that he and the other teachers of Grace do not teach for profit but only to please God. They are simply God's tools on earth. Verses 12-13 are a parenthetical insertion defining his travel timing and motivation.

The rest of chapter 2 through chapter 3:6 talks of his motivation, rewards and goals as a minister of the New Covenant.

*As you continue, keep in mind the differentiation of, **us, you, and them.***

In 3:6 Paul cleverly states that the covenant of grace has superseded the covenant of Moses. The rest of chapter 3 Paul speaks of the greater glory of the New Covenant. Perhaps this would be a good time to look again at the two covenants in discussion. There are a lot of misconceptions about the covenant of Moses and the New Covenant of Grace.

Just what was the covenant of Moses? In the most basic form it was a protected land grant. God said I will give you land and dwell there with you. You (the Israelites) will worship only Me and live by My commandments (The Ten Commandments). You may ask, where does the law fit in covenant of Moses? **It doesn't**. The law was given to Moses to order the Israelite society. The Israelites had just exited 400 years of slavery. Now they were free, totally without limits or legislation. God recognized this and gave Moses ordinances for an ordered society. The law was not just a guide for temple worship. It was a behavior code that guided all aspects of Hebrew life. The important concept to take from this is: There was a covenant between the Israelites and God. The articles of that covenant were the Ten Commandments. The agreement was simply: God would provide the people with a homeland and protect them and that homeland, **IF** they lived by the 10 commandments he gave them. The Law of Moses was and is a separate entity from the covenant.

On to the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace or it could be called the Covenant of the Redeemer. The origin of the promise of a redeemer is and has been debated by biblical scholars and theologians since the first century. That in itself is the basis of an independent study. The promise of a redeemer/savior is the foundation of the Christian Faith system. The New Covenant states: God sent his only son to suffer and die for the sins of mankind. Jesus, the Son honored the wishes of the Father and died on a cross. The Father took Jesus from death and returned him to the living

and He was and is the Christ. He ascended to the heavenly realm and sits with the Father. In the Fathers time Jesus, the Christ will return and destroy all evil, pain and suffering. At that time all who believe in the salvation act of the Son will be united with the Father, forever in glory.

Do the 10 commandments fit in the New Covenant? **Unequivocally, yes.** Jesus said we must love God, which is the first 4 of the **10**. He went on to say we must love one another, which is 5 through 10 of the **10**.

Chapter 4 is quite often captioned *Present Weakness and Resurrection Life*.

In my mind I think “This is why we do what we do” fits better. In 4:2-6 the ‘we’ Paul is speaking of are himself and anyone who witnesses to Christ. Paul is addressing all who believe. If you truly believe then you have a duty to witness. Paul goes on to convey the real and true motivations of all who witness to Christ.

Beginning at verse 7 Paul is still promoting the ‘us-you’ separation. However be mindful that what he is saying is applicable to all who witness to the Gospel of Grace. When your witness is faithful and true you are offering true life to those who hear or see your witness and choose to believe. Your efforts will be a blessing to **you** eternally. Their choice will be **their** blessing or curse.

Chapter 5 Awaiting the New Body.

It could be argued that verses 1 to 9 are referring to all Christians, and it does. But, I do not think that was Paul’s intent. This is one of those “freedom in Christ issues”, where scripture is not definitive, you are free to interpret as the Spirit guides you. You must also let others follow where the Spirit guides them.

Starting in verse 11 it is clear that Paul is making a clear distinction between ‘us and you’. Paul and the brothers have a deep understanding of what the Lord expects from his people. God knows that their motives are God centered and Paul hopes the believers know this as well. In verses 13 through 15 Paul seems to be answering critics who question Paul’s state of mind. Paul clarifies by what authority he spreads the Gospel of Grace (verses 16-20).

Paul opens chapter 6 with prophesy from Isaiah 49:8 and asserts, “That time is now”. He continues in verses 3 to 13 with what seems to be a benediction to what he wrote in chapters 2:12 through chapter 5. This benediction is specifically for the benefit of all the workers who spread the Gospel of Christ.

Paul finishes chapter 6 speaking metaphorically, “we need to be separated from those of this world” that is, non-believers. In many of Paul’s letters he acknowledges that we must co-exist with those of this world. Here he is warning us not to adopt their rituals and liberal life styles. Paul uses the Old Testament word Belial in verse 15. Used in this way, with an uppercase B, It is a name for Satan.

*Note: I thought as I wrote this: “Being a believer, baptized in the Spirit, gives me the power, in the midst of the pain and discouragement of the physical to live in the JOY of the Spirit”.*

Chapter 7 starts out with the only clear statement where “we” and “us” refers to all believers in Christ’s Gospel, leaders and followers. He then immediately returns to the separate distinction of we/you.

Paul is now in Macedonia. This part of his journeys comes with great discomfort. He puts it clearly with “—harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within,” (NIV). On top of this Paul has a heavy heart due to the nature of his letter to the Corinthian Church, the one we call First Corinthians. He had sent Titus to Corinth on a fact finding and teaching mission. Titus has returned with an uplifting report. There is REPENTANCE in Corinth! Not only that but, Paul and his Gospel of Christ are loved and respected within the fellowship. Furthermore Titus was treated with the utmost respect and caring. Titus has not returned drained and downhearted. No, he has returned inspired and uplifted which was an energy boost to Paul and the brothers in Macedonia.

Paul closes this section of the letter with a statement of confidence in the fellowship in Corinth.

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul addresses what I believe is the true thorn in his side. That is the opposition to salvation of the Gentiles by some of the Jews in the Jerusalem Church (The circumcision group). Even after the council in Jerusalem in the year 49 and the letter to Antioch-Syria, Issus and Tarsus that stated an acceptance of the “Gentile Gospel of Grace”, Conflict from the circumcision group did not dissipate.

Paul hoped that by providing sustenance to the Church in Jerusalem, in time of famine, would narrow the divide between the Jew and Gentile.

Like a tactful mother, Paul praises one sibling (Macedonian churches) to another sibling (Corinthian church).

Paul moves on to dispel rumors of mishandling of funds collected from the Gentile churches. So he divests himself from the collection of and handling of the relief funds for Jerusalem. He assigns Titus, who is respected by all and an unknown to us brother, who is respected by all the churches for his service to the gospel.

The guidance, instruction and explanations of chapters 8 and 9 are closed with the beautiful prayer-like statements of verses 9:6-15.

Many captioned bibles label chapter 10 as ‘Paul validates his ministry.’ I prefer ‘Paul defines his ministry.’ There is no doubt in Paul’s mind as to the validity of his ministry. After all, his mission on earth was given to him by our Lord and Savior. Verse 1 is an exercise in sarcasm. Detractors have accused Paul of being timid and a poor speaker. Paul is about to dispel that idea (In verse 17).

Understanding the transition from verse 5 to verse 6b can be somewhat confusing. From verse 2 to verse 5 Paul is laying out the principle that: A, a Christian cannot live 2 lives, Christian on the Sabbath and secular at other times. A Christian is a Christian 24/7. Once their Obedience is complete in that philosophy they will be ready to discipline other believer’s acts of disobedience.

Remember when reading verses 7 through 11, Titus has returned from Corinth with an overall positive report of the reaction of the Corinth fellowship to the first letter.

The rest of the chapter Paul simply states: Compare our boasting to theirs. “Our” refers to Paul and the teaching brothers.

“They” boast to promote themselves and their distorted message.

Paul and associates boast of the word of Christ and being chosen by Christ to carry His word to the nations.

Chapter 11 verses 1 through 15 Paul is basically taking ownership of their spirituality as God owns his. He presents the example of the serpent taking Eve and then Adam from God. In much the same way there are those who would take the Corinthians from Paul and in the end from God. They have been weak and followed the “false apostles”. As he continues to write he asks them to remember how he lived and treated them as he brought the true Gospel of Grace.

The gospel of Grace, repentance, and salvation, through the sacrifice of Jesus is what brought them the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who preaches a different gospel is a false apostle and an agent of the devil.

The rest of chapter 11 is Paul's synopsis of all the trials, tribulations and suffering he has gone through in order to preach the Gospel of Grace, given him by Christ. Would he have gone through and continued to experience that kind of persecution if he was not on a holy mission, commissioned by Jesus Himself.

Paul now closes out this letter.

In his first two visits to Corinth Paul came in the love and Grace of Christ. His next visit will show the power and judgement of Christ. True, Christ died in weakness but He rose in all the power of God. Paul intends, if necessary, to demonstrate this power on his next visit.

Paul suggests, or perhaps commands, to do a self-examination. Are they truly living in Christ? In doing an honest self-examination they will also find that "we", that is Paul and the brothers have not failed the test.

Paul ends the letter on a more pleasant theme of love and peace. Greetings from afar and a blessing.