

Grace / La Gracia Episcopal Church
Bible Study: The Second Letter to the Corinthians
June, 2018

Paul's second Letter to the Corinthians is an extended meditation on the meaning of apostolic ministry. Written about a year after his first letter, it represents Paul's attempts at reconciliation after the conflicts that occurred during his ministry in Corinth; in doing so, Paul eloquently presents a vision of ministry that is profoundly meaningful for today as we renew and redefine our own desire to understand God's purpose for us – as individuals and as a community.

Outline:

Week One [June 4-8] 1:1- 3:6: Introduction: Paul and his ministry

Week Two [June 11-15] 3:7 – 7:4: Paul explains the nature of his ministry

Week Three [June 18-22] 7:5-9:15: Paul's appeal for the collection for Jerusalem

Week Four [June 25-29] 10:1--13:13: Paul describes his plans for ministry

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Week One [June 4-8] 1:1- 3:6: Introduction: Paul and his ministry

Overview:

The opening section of the letter introduces Paul's theology: God is the source of comfort and hope. The resurrection of Christ is the sign of God's promise and the basis for human hope. The church is not an insular organization but a community of believers that extends throughout the region, and whose bonds with each other are grounded in the suffering of Christ and the promise of the resurrection. Paul defends the authenticity of his ministry against other teachers and against the misrepresentations by opponents.

1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3-7 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, ⁴who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. ⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. ⁶If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

2:16-17 Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

3:2-6 ²You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; ³and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ⁴Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. ⁵Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Week Two [June 11-15] 3:7 – 7:4: Paul explains the nature of his ministry

Overview

This section presents the core of Paul's vision. Paul uses a series of comparisons to explain the nature of apostolic ministry. His specific purpose is to address the conflicts that arose with his opponents when he was in Corinth and the subsequent misunderstanding of his message and mission. His larger purpose is to show what the resurrection means for understanding the church, the nature of his own ministry, and the unique relationships that are formed among and by believers. To make these points he points to parallels between himself and Moses and between his experiences and the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, arguing that reconciliation is the ministry to which Jesus calls all believers.

3:17-18 The LORD is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

4:7-9 But we have this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn't come from us. We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out.

4:13-15 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

5:17-20 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

6:16-7:1 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, *'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'* [Lev.26:11-12] Therefore *come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you,* [Isaiah 52:11] *and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.* [2 Samuel 7:14] Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

Week Three [June 18-22] 7:5-9:15: Paul's appeal for the collection for Jerusalem

Overview:

In this section, Paul writes to persuade the Christians in Corinth to contribute to fundraising for Jerusalem, as they have done in the past. His argument is based on two principles that are central to modern stewardship and grounded in the Jewish tradition of tithing: (1) the church in Corinth is just one part of a larger community of believers, and (2) generosity is a spiritual discipline that is an act of thanksgiving to God. He sets the tone by referring to his fellow missionary Titus, who had visited Corinth on his behalf. Reconciliation, relationship, and reciprocity are the key terms for his ministry.

7: 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

8:12-14 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

9:5-9 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. ⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written, *He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.* [Ps.112.9]

9:10-15 ¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Week Four [June 25-29] 10:1--13:13: Paul describes his plans for ministry

Overview:

There is a shift in tone in Chapter 10 as Paul adamantly defends his ministry against personal attacks. He asserts evidence that his authority is from God, that his message is more authentic than the teachings of his rivals, and that what seems “foolish” is actually an expression of divine wisdom (just as his suffering is a sign of strength, not weakness).

10:3-5 ³Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments ⁵and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

11:4-6 ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. ⁵I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

11:10 The truth of Christ is in me.

11:21-33 But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. ²⁴Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. ²⁸And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? ³⁰If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. ³²In Damascus, the governor* under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

12:8-10 ⁸Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power* is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

12:19 We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up.

13:3-5 ³since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. ⁴For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?