

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 1 (Chapters 1-4)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3). Welcome to our study of the Book of Second Corinthians. In this book Paul defends his right to be an apostle, and offers some encouragement to the church in Corinth. Paul summarizes the contents of the book in 2 Corinthians 5:7 when he says, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” Today in chapters 1 through 4, we will see that Paul presents the principle that we walk by faith in the promises of God. How true it is that we serve a God Who is loving, and that His promises are just as much for us today as they were for people in the first century. As Paul begins 2 Corinthians, we learn about the people to whom he is writing as well as to whom the church belong. In 2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul says, “...to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia.” Here we see that Paul is writing to the church. But notice especially the ownership of the church that Paul discusses. It is not the church of men. It is not the church of the most-popular religious ideas. Instead, Paul notes that the church belongs to God. How important it is at the outset of this study (and as we see the division that afflicts the religious world around us) that we understand that God’s church belongs to Him. It has no right to wear any manmade name or to be founded upon any manmade idea. As the church of God, it belongs to Him. In Romans 16:16 Paul said, “The churches of Christ greet you.” What was the church called in biblical times? It was the church that belonged to God and to Jesus Christ. It is the “general assembly of the firstborn”—those whose names are registered in Heaven (Heb. 12:23). In 1 Timothy 3:14-15 Paul wrote, “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is God’s house, and is the place from which we today must worship Him. Jesus said in Matthew 16:17-18 (after Peter had stated in verse 16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”),

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

As we think about the church of God today, we must understand that its ownership and the names that it wears must give God glory and honor. And, as Romans 16:16 suggests, the church also belongs to Jesus. Here is why. Who paid the great price for the church? In Acts 20:28 we read Paul’s statement to the elders in the church in Ephesus: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Here again we see the idea that the church belongs to God. Jesus purchased the church with His own precious blood. He paid the price for it. He established it. He called it His own. There is but one church (Eph. 4:4). And we must understand at the outset of the Book of Second Corinthians, as well as when we read through the rest of the New Testament, that God has only one church. It belongs to Him, not to men.

As Paul open this book, he builds upon the promises and character of God. As we walk by faith, we walk in the promises of God and in His character. Notice the beautiful description presented in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." As we think about God and His character, we understand that God cannot change (Mal. 3:6). We know that He does not lie (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). But another impressive attribute of the God we serve has to do with the fact that He is "the Father of all mercies." The idea of mercy has to do with compassion—being tender and caring toward others. In 2 Peter 3:9 we are told that this is the nature of God: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God is a longsuffering and merciful God Who has made various avenues available to us so that we can be His children, live according to His will, and receive Heaven's blessings. He also is "the God of all comfort." The word "comfort" also is used in the New Testament to describe the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16 Jesus promised His disciples (as He was about to depart) that He would send the Holy Spirit ("the Comforter") to give them aid. The Comforter brought the Word, and also allowed them to perform miracles. He was a help in time of need. That is the basic idea of our God. He is our Help in time of need. We can trust Him like we can trust no other. We can say, "The Lord is my helper; what shall man do to me?" (Heb. 13:6).

In 2 Corinthians, one of the promises (and one of the things of which we can be sure) is that God has made available to us every avenue possible so that we will not remain in ignorance of His will, but instead to be informed concerning His promises. In 2 Corinthians 1:8 we read, "We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." It always has been God's will that we not be ignorant. He does not want us to remain in ignorance—which is why He has revealed His will to us. In Ephesians 5:11 Paul said, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." How was it that Paul expected those people to come out of darkness and expose error? God had given them the knowledge that would make that possible. In Ephesians 5:17 Paul said, "Do not be ignorant, but understand what the will of the Lord is." God has given us the Bible, which is His Word that contains His will, so that we can know exactly what He wants us to do. In John 8:32 Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Not only is it possible to know the truth, but look at the power that comes from knowing the truth. It is truth that will set us free from sin and give us the hope of Heaven.

Did you know that one of the reasons that God wrote the Bible is so that we would not have to wonder about, doubt, and worry about our salvation. In 1 John 5:13 John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." Knowledge of God's will is what separates those who claim to be Christians from those who simply present the façade of what the world views as Christianity. Knowledge of God's will has been so imperative that without it, people were in jeopardy of being destroyed. In Hosea 4:6 God said through the prophet, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The people did not have the knowledge of God and what He wanted them to do in their lives. As a result, they were going to go away and be destroyed. That same principle applies to us today. If we are going to be the church that God wants us to be, it is important for us to know the Word of God. This is why Paul told Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15). This is why Paul complimented the Christians in Berea—because they searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). This is why the Proverbs writer said, "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). As

we walk by faith, we must understand that such faith is not a flying leap into the dark. Rather, we have faith in the promises of God that are based on a knowledge of His Word. One of the great attributes of God that ought to encourage us is His faithfulness. The God we serve is faithful. His “Amen’s” are true and right in the sight of all men. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 we read, “All the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” The idea is that all of God’s promises are right and true, and that when He has said something, we can rest assured that is the way it will be. Hebrews 6:18 tells us that it is impossible for God to lie. Titus 1:2 says that we live “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.” God’s nature will not allow Him to lie. In Malachi 3:6 God proclaimed, “I am the Lord; I do not change.” This ought to be a great encouragement to us, especially when we read passages such as 1 John 2:25 (“This is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life”). We do not have to worry, wonder, or doubt. We can know that because God has promised us something, if we will do His will, then everything will be all right.

The promises of God are sure. Every time that God has said something, He always has followed through. When He told the people in the Book of Exodus (as He was leading them to the Promised Land) that if they would obey Him, He would give to them the land that flowed with milk and honey, every time they obeyed Him, He kept His word. But when the people failed to do God’s will, they were forced to endure a time of wandering in the wilderness of sin. That is true for us today, too, as we journey toward Heaven. God has made the promise that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn. 14:6). If we will follow Jesus and do His will, then we can know for sure that we will be saved. Paul noted that Christians stand by faith (2 Cor. 1:24). It is our faith in God—in the midst of various troubles and tribulations—that keeps us going. We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). That faith is not a leap in the dark. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). “Standing by faith” is such a powerful principle because of what we see in passages such as 1 John 5:4 where John wrote, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” It is our faith in God that helps us overcome the world.

As Paul moves into 2 Corinthians 2 and builds upon God’s promises, he refers back to something he had said in 1 Corinthians 5. A man in the church in Corinth had been living with his father’s wife. He had taken up residence with her, and they were in a relationship. Paul told the Christians that they needed to put that man away from their midst by disfellowshipping him so that the church could be cleansed. This was difficult, and took some encouragement by Paul. But the Christians in Corinth followed through and disfellowshipped that ungodly man. What happened? As we read 2 Corinthians 2 we should rejoice in the promises of God. The church did exactly what God had said needed to be done. The church disfellowshipped the ungodly adulterer. He was put out of the congregation in order to save his soul and in order to purify the church. Look what happened. In 2 Corinthians 2:8 Paul said, “Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.” The disfellowshipping process worked. The man had been put out of the congregation as the church followed God’s will. But how wonderful it was that Paul could write to them and say, “Your efforts worked. Now, do not make it too hard for this man. Reaffirm your love for this man who has now repented.” Regardless of what society thinks, regardless of what the media like or do not like, and regardless of what some in the church view as being too harsh, the Bible teaches that when we follow God’s will, it will always work. Disfellowshipping always works for several reasons. It works mainly because that is what God has told us to do to keep the church pure. We ought to be ashamed when we are unwilling to put away ungodly people from among us, but instead become puffed up (1 Cor. 8). How foolish of us! Dis-

fellowshipping works because God told us to do it. And at times it is the only way by which to restore people who are so deep in sin that they do not seem willing to come out of it. We need to have faith in the promises of God, even concerning such difficult matters.

But we also need to remember that Satan can use unforgiving Christians as a tool in his arsenal. In 2 Corinthians 2:11 Paul noted that if we are not forgiving and loving toward those who have repented, then we are tools in Satan's arsenal, and he will use our unforgiving attitudes against us. Paul wrote, "Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." Satan can use us as a device if we are not willing to wrap our arms around a person who has repented and do what is right. We therefore need to realize the importance of forgiveness. Followers of God, according to Scripture, have always been led in victory when they have done the will of God. One promise of God of which we can rest assured today is that if we will do what God says, we will be victorious in the end. In 2 Corinthians 2:14 we read, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Christians are victors in this life, and especially in the life to come. Our victory is in our faith (1 Jn. 5:4). The victory is ours only because Jesus, through His death, "overcame him who had the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Our victory is made possible by the great sacrifice of Jesus. As John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Our victory can be made sure because we are willing to trust in the correct source. In Philippians 4:13 Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." If we follow Christ, we will be victorious. We can trust the Bible as God's Word. If we take the path of righteousness and do what God says, then we will not be led astray. As we do that, look at what we represent to God. As we walk the path of righteousness and head down the road to victory, look how pleasing we are in God's sight. In 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 we read,

"We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

We are the ones who diffuse the fragrance of Christ wherever we go. It is a sweet-smelling savor to the Lord when Christians live the lives they ought to live. To some, we are the aroma of death because they are not living their lives as they ought to, and our lives show them that. But to others we are the aroma of life that leads to life. So, let me ask you this: If you are the fragrance of Christ, how do you smell? How do you represent Christ? If we as Christians are the fragrance of Christ, and if we represent how Christ ought to appeal to others (just as a nice-smelling cologne or perfume is appealing), how do we smell to others? Do we exude the good aroma of Christ? Do our lives reveal through our actions, our speech, and all that we do, why others ought to want to enjoy the same life that we enjoy? In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." We must make sure that we exude the aroma of Christ because, as 2 Corinthians 3:3 points out, we may be the only Bible that some people ever read. Have you ever thought about the fact that you may be the only Bible that some people ever read? Look at what Paul said: Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." We are an epistle or letter of Christ. As people read our lives, it is like a living letter. What do our lives say? Are we living according to the will of God? As people in the world view us, can they say, "Those people are trying to live according to the Bible. They are honest and trustworthy. They are trying to do right. And they are people we can trust"? As Paul makes the point about how we should be epistles of Christ, he knows that in the backs of some people's minds they are wonder-

ing, “Why can we not be an epistle of Moses? Why are we under the law of Christ and not the Law of Moses?” Thus, much of the rest of chapter 3 discusses the fact that we are to follow the law of Christ, which is far superior to the Law of Moses. In Paul’s comments he says that we are following the Spirit of God, not the letter. The Spirit gives life, while the letter kills. We are under the ministry of the Spirit, whereas the Old Law was a ministry of death. The law of Christ is written in our hearts, while the Old Law was written on stones (which, on one occasion at least, were broken). The law of Christ that we follow is more glorious than the Old Law, which itself was glorious. The glory of the law of Christ never will fade, while the Old Law, from its very inception, was fading. The law of Christ is a ministry of righteousness, while the Old Law is a ministry of condemnation. The law of Christ is an open, unveiled law that offers hope. But Moses’ law blinded people because it was a veiled law that had no clear hope. Christ, however, reveals through hope. In view of this section of 2 Corinthians 3 where Paul contrasts the beauty, splendor, and greatness of the law of Christ, why would anyone want to go back to the Old Law? When we talk about walking by faith in the promises of God, we need to realize that those promises are found in the New Testament.

Here is the power that we have. In order to accomplish all the promises that God has given us, we have access to a power that is not found in and of ourselves. In 2 Corinthians 4: 7-8 we read, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.” How is it that in the midst of an evil and sinful world, and in the midst of difficulty, sin, and temptation, that we can follow and hold onto the promises of God? It is because we have a treasure in earthen vessels. What is that treasure? It is the fact that the “excellence of power” is not of us. We do not have to pretend that we can do all that we need to do by ourselves. We can acknowledge that we cannot be successful by ourselves. We can (and will) succeed only with God’s help. In Philippians 4: 13 Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” If we try to do all things by ourselves, we are destined to fail. We must trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and lean not on our own understanding.

As we focus on the latter part of 2 Corinthians 4, we also need to notice that our motivation is based on the fact that we have a better home promised to us. In 2 Corinthians 4: 16-18 we read,

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

What is it that motivates and challenges us to hold onto the promises of God? It is the hope and joy of Heaven! If we live faithfully, then one day we can have a home in Heaven with God. Are you walking by faith in the promises of God? Have you obeyed the Gospel? Have you believed in Jesus? Are you willing to repent of your sins? Have you confessed the good name of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10)? Have you been baptized for the remission of yours sins (Acts 2:38)? If not, you need to do that so you can grab hold of the promises of God. We need to all be encouraged to walk by faith in the promises of God, knowing that God cannot lie and that we do not have to do it alone. May God help you as you strive to do just that.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 1 (CHAPTERS 1-4)

1. According to 2 Corinthians 1:1, to whom is the Book of Second Corinthians written?
2. How is God described in 2 Corinthians 1:3?
3. According to Hebrews 12:23, where are Christians' names registered?
4. According to 1 Timothy 3:14-15, what is "the house of God"?
5. Who, according to Acts 20:28, "bought" the church?
6. According to Acts 20:28, what was the purchase price for the church?
7. What does Ephesians 5:17 admonish Christians **not** to do?
8. What does Ephesians 5:17 admonish Christians **to** do?
9. According to 1 John 5:13, what was one of John's reasons for writing Christians?
10. In 2 Timothy 2:15, what did Paul admonish Timothy to do?
11. What important admonition is found in Proverbs 23:23?
12. What important piece of information is found in the last section of 2 Corinthians 1:24?
13. In 2 Corinthians 2:14 we are told that God "leads us" in a certain manner. What is it?
14. According to 1 John 5:4, what is the victory that "overcomes the world"?
15. According to 1 John 2:25, what has God promised all faithful Christians?
16. What tragic event had taken place in the church in Corinth (according to Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 5) that also was discussed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 2?
17. According to John 1:29, who is Jesus Christ?
18. According to 2 Corinthians 2:11, about whom should Christians not be ignorant?
19. What did Paul mean when he said in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 that Christians are "the fragrance of Christ"?
20. In Matthew 5:16, what command did Jesus give His followers?
21. In 2 Corinthians 3:3 Paul said that Christians are "epistles of Christ, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh." What did Paul mean by such statements?
22. How would you summarize in your own words the message of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18?