

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 4 (Chapters 11-13)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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

To the apostle Paul, the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9). Welcome to our fourth lesson in this series on Second Corinthians. In this lesson we will be discussing chapters 11-13, with the overall theme being that we walk by faith, not by sight. We will be honing in on the idea of how, in these final chapters, we see that we walk by faith in the power of God. Second Corinthians 11 begins by taking us back to events that happened in the earliest days of mankind in the Garden of Eden. Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that the Genesis account is inspired of God—“I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” Paul is concerned about the Christians in Corinth, and about the possibility that they will be deceived and fall away from God. As an illustration, he uses the Genesis account of how the serpent deceived Eve. From this we can learn that the Genesis account is inspired of God, and that Paul realized that. Just as the New Testament is inspired, so Genesis is inspired as well. How do we have faith in the power of God today? We have faith when we recognize that His Word is inspired from beginning to end, and that we can trust it wholeheartedly. It contains everything we need to get to Heaven (2 Pet. 1:3). It will make us wise unto salvation, and will help us learn not to get caught up in sin. Like Jesus, we can overcome the devil by realizing, “It is written...,” “It is written...,” “It is written...” (Mt. 4:4,7,11). There is power in our faith when we look to the Word of God. The serpent deceived Eve by its craftiness. She thought that the fruit would be good to eat—which is the lust of the flesh. It was pleasant to the eye, and appealed to her. Adam and Eve thought they would be like God and that it would make them wise. That is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Paul told the Christians in Corinth that they needed to be careful so that they did not fall prey to the same thing to which Eve had fallen prey. We need to realize that our fleshly lusts are not what are important in this life. We must recognize that there is something far grander than fulfilling just the passing pleasures of this life (Heb. 11:25). What we have now, according to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, is temporary, and is not what matters. Just because something appeals to the eye does not mean that it is good for us spiritually. In fact, there are many things that may appeal to the eye, yet can damn a person’s soul. We must realize that the only way to be wise is to follow God’s instructions (Prov. 3:5-7). True wisdom comes from trusting the Lord and placing faith in Him.

In the last part of 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul explains how we can walk by faith in the power of God—through realizing the simplicity of Christ and Christianity. Paul said that he feared that some might “be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” This is not a puzzle that requires some sort of encrypted code to understand. Christ, Christianity, Christian living, and God’s plan of salvation are simple to learn. It is not hard to learn how to become a Christian. The Bible tells us exactly how to do that. We hear the Word (Rom. 10:17). We believe in Jesus (Jn. 8:24). We repent of our sins (Lk. 13:3). We confess Christ before men (Rom. 10:10). And then, as Jesus said, we must be baptized in water to be saved

(Mk. 16:16). That is a simple plan. Learning about Christ and the church is very simple. Jesus came to Earth and lived a perfect life (Heb. 4:15). He died as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all men. In order to be saved, we must go through Him (Jn. 14:6). When we obey the Gospel, we are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47)—the one body that is the collective group of the saved (Eph. 1:21-23). We can learn how we are supposed to live. In Romans 6:4 we are told that we are to walk "in newness of life." So much of what people promote today in our confused religious world is so deceptive and so hard to understand. You can know that such things are not from God. The simplicity of Christ is the thing for which we need to be searching. The only way to find the simplicity of Christ is to have the mindset that is determined to go to the Bible and do only what God has told us to do.

Another powerful lesson we learn from 2 Corinthians 11 is that we must make sure that we do not listen to another gospel or different spirit. Paul understood that there were some destructive doctrines that were not "of God." In 2 Corinthians 11:4 he wrote, "If he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" Paul's point was while they "might" put up with it, they should not! He already has informed them about the simplicity of Christ, and now warns them to be careful about another gospel, a different spirit, or things of that nature. In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul said,

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

We need to understand as we consider the simplicity of Christ that there are false teachers out there. There are false gospels, and there are different spirits teaching things that are not right. However, can know the truth (Jn. 8:32). We can go to the Bible as our source of reliable information (Acts 17:11). And we can compare what people say with God's Word. We are told in 1 John 4:1-4 that we need to test the spirits to see if they are of God, since there are many false teachers and false prophets in the world.

One of those "different spirits" that will try to preach another gospel is Satan and his ministers, who have a great knack for transforming themselves into angels of light. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 Paul wrote,

"Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

In walking through the power of God through the Gospel, not only must we be on the lookout for another gospel taught by a different spirit, but we also must realize that Satan is behind such things. Those who stand up to proclaim a certain gospel, but stop short of salvation, or those who proclaim a social gospel, or those who are all about taking people's money, are not ministers of God, but are instead ministers of Satan. Jesus said in Matthew 7:15 that certain people might be clothed in sheep's clothing, and might look like a sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves whose goal is to tear apart and destroy the church. We must test the spirits by God's Word. And we must realize that Satan is doing everything possible to cause people to be lost. Satan has ministers who are proclaiming a different gospel that is not according to the will of God.

What else do we learn in 2 Corinthians 11 about walking by faith in the power of God? We learn that along the way, we are going to have to suffer—but that suffering will make us stronger in the cause of Christ. Look in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 what Paul suffered for the cause of Christ.

“Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

Look at all the things that Paul suffered. Did that suffering make him stronger? Absolutely it did! When Paul was given stripes five times, when he was beaten three times, and when he was stoned once, what do you think was going through his mind? He realized that his faith was worth dying for, and that he was going to have to suffer. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Do you remember what Paul said after he had been stoned? In Acts 14:22 he said, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” There is great power to be found in trials, troubles, and the things that we face in this life. In fact, this leads us into chapter 12 where Paul mentions his thorn in the flesh. But before he does so, in order not to discourage people, and in order to remind them of the motivation they should have, he shares with them a vision given to him of Paradise. He says that he was caught up into the third Heaven, and that he saw things about which he could not speak, or things that he did not really know how to describe. Why is he mentioning this in the midst of his discussion of his trials, and right before he mentions his thorn in the flesh? In the midst of our trials, like Paul, we, too, need to look for Paradise. We need to stay focused on Heaven. I firmly believe that Paul saw this vision because in the midst of all that he was suffering, and because of his terrible thorn in the flesh, he realized that Heaven will be worth it all. To keep us from getting down when we face the thorns of this life, or when we suffer because of the cause of Christ, we need to stay focused on Heaven. We must be able to see, in our mind’s eye, the beautiful Paradise that is Heaven. In John 14:3 Jesus said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself—that where I am, there you may be also.” Romans 8:28 says that “all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and who are called according to His purpose.” In Romans 8:17 Paul said that the sufferings of this world are not even worthy to be compared to the glory that will one day be revealed in us. Hebrews 4:9 describes Heaven as a place of rest that remains for the people of God. In Revelation 2:10 we are told that if we will be faithful unto death, God will give us a crown of life. Paul was able to say toward the end of his life,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Sandwiched in between his discussion of the trials he had endured, and the thorn in the flesh with which he was dealing, Paul sees in his mind the great vision of Heaven. Sandwiched between the external and internal troubles that we have to endure should be our concentration on Heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul talks about his thorn in the flesh. “Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.” What was Paul’s thorn in

the flesh? We do not know because we're not told. There are various views, but they are all opinions. All we know is that Paul was having to endure some kind of fleshly ailment that represented a thorn in his side. Who doesn't have that?! All of us have struggles in the flesh. Most of us have problems with our bodies if we live very long. Paul prayed to the Lord three times to ask God to take away his problem. Did God take it away? No, He did not. We must realize that there is a divine purpose in our trials. That is why God did not remove Paul's thorn in the flesh. James 1:2-3 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." We are to count it a joy when we suffer. Why? It is because those trials help refine us and make us better servants of God. In Job 1 we learn that there was not another righteous man on Earth like Job. He was blameless, upright, feared God, and shunned evil. Yet he contracted a dreaded disease. Was there a divine purpose in that? Absolutely! God was showing Satan that men serve God because of Who He is. Plus, this situation was helping Job to perfect himself. In Psalm 119:67 we see a valuable insight into trials. The psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." The psalmist tells us that trials and tribulations help us overcome those things that really do not matter. We must instead focus on what's important.

Did God give Paul any help? He had a thorn in the flesh, and he had suffered a great deal because of the cause of Christ. Surely there was some kind of aid that Paul received. Absolutely there was! That same aid is available for you and me today. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 we read, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul prayed to the Lord three times and said, "Lord, please remove this thorn." The Lord said, "No. But here is what I will offer you. My grace is sufficient." From this we can learn that no matter what trials, physical infirmities, or difficulties we may experience, God's grace makes such things endurable. In Titus 2:11-13 we are told that the grace of God has appeared to all men. In Ephesians 2:8-9 we are told that it is by grace through faith that we are saved. Because we are saved by God's grace, we can endure anything—even death. The grace of God is here, and it is available for all people everywhere. That grace came through Jesus ("The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," Jn. 1:17). When we think about our trials, we need to remember that if we have obeyed God's plan of salvation, then we are in His grace. No matter what troubles we experience or what thorns in the flesh we may have, we can endure them in view of the grace of God and what Heaven will be like.

Everything we do should be done in order to edify one another. In 2 Corinthians 12:19 we read, "Do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification." Part of the power we have in our faith in God comes through the edification and encouragement that we receive through other Christians. As we see Paul's example and read of his thorn in the flesh, we can be encouraged by the life he lived and by the things he suffered. As we look at Christ's life, we see real edification. Look at all He suffered and what He went through. This should edify and encourage us to keep on going. Hebrews 3:12-13 says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'" Hebrews 10:25 tells us to "exhort one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." We need to edify one another and build up one another. Acts 20:32 tells us that the Word of God is able to build us up. But Christians also can edify one another. How does such edification come to us? It may come in the form of a rebuke. We are to rebuke one another if one of us falls into sin. But we are to do that out of love in order to save a soul. That is genuine edification. Or, edification may come in the form of correction. In 1 Corin-

thians 5 and 2 Corinthians 2, we find an example of such edification through correction that worked. Edification may come in the form of encouraging words that are preached through the Gospel or that are offered to us by someone. We must realize that everything we do must be done for edification.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul shows us that we walk by faith in the power of God through our transformed lives. Our power in God comes from the fact that we now have a transformed life through Jesus. In that life, we need to constantly test ourselves to make sure that we are living correctly. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 we read, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." According to 2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul is writing to the church of God in Corinth. These are members of the body of Christ. And to them Paul says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." The practical lesson we can learn from this is that it is possible to fall away from the church. It is possible for a child of God to stop examining himself and to stop testing himself, and to get caught up in the world as he is tempted by Satan. The idea that a person cannot fall from grace is not taught in Scripture. In fact, Galatians 5:4 actually uses the opposite language when it says, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." We need to understand the sober realization that every day we must do some introspection. We need to look inside ourselves and ask, "Are we really 'in the faith' today? Are we living the way God wants us to live?" James 1:23-25 tells us that we must be doers of the Word, not hearers only and thereby deceive ourselves. He then offers an illustration of a person who is a hearer of God's Word, but not a doer.

"If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

What do we learn from such an illustration? When you look in a mirror, you want to see what is out of place. Does your hair need to be fixed? Are your clothes straight? Are you presentable? The Bible is our spiritual mirror. We must look into it in order to examine ourselves. In Luke 9:23 we are told, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Are we checking ourselves daily? Sometimes we are quite good at looking at someone else and saying, "He's not living correctly," or "That person said something she shouldn't have said!" But do we have that same attitude regarding our own lives? Often we are critical of others. Jesus said that we are quick to spot a speck in someone else's eye—while we have a beam coming out of our own eye. We need to test ourselves. Let's ask ourselves, "Are we in the faith?" The power is in God and the transformed life that we live through Him. Are we living such a life? We must do only those things in this life that will further the truth. In 2 Corinthians 13:8 Paul said, "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." Our lives must be lived in such a way that everything we do furthers the progress of the Gospel. Here is what I mean by that. When people look at the way we live our lives, it must further the truth. Our speech must be such that it does not bring shame on the truth. Rather, it furthers the truth because people see that we are trying to talk like a Christian. We must not use four-letter words. We must not tell off-colored jokes. We do not do things like that. Our speech must further the truth. Our examples must further the truth, too. According to Matthew 5:16 we are to be a shining light. Our worship also must further God's truth. The only way that can occur is for us to follow the truth in our worship. (Jn. 4:24).

Are you walking by faith? Or are you trying to walk by sight—that is, based on what you think, what you feel, or what others have said? Are you walking by faith in the Word of God when it comes to the plan of salvation? There are many ministers of Satan who are preach-

ing false plans of salvation today. There are so many people who will tell you that all you have to do to be saved is “just believe in Jesus and say the sinner’s prayer.” I am going to be blunt with you today. If that is all you have done, you will go to Hell. God does not want you to go to Hell. And neither do we. I say these things to get your attention so that you will realize that there is more to God’s plan of salvation. Must a person believe in Jesus? Absolutely! The Bible teaches, “Unless you believe that I am He, you will surely die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24). But you also must recognize the Word of God as the only authority in matters of salvation. Once you believe in Jesus, the Bible teaches that you must repent. In Luke 13:3 Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” You must confess the good name of Jesus (Rom. 10:9-10). And you must be baptized (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of your sins. How could it be any clearer than what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21—“Baptism does not also save us”? If God wanted to say that baptism is something that is essential to salvation, how else could He have said it? He might have said it like this: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16:16). Upon obeying the Gospel, you must realize that you do not “join” any religious group or become a part of some manmade denomination. Rather, you become a part of the one true church. There is only one church. Denominations are sinful (1 Cor. 1:10-13). There is only one church. Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). That church is the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16) and the church of God (2 Cor. 1:1) if it teaches what is true to the Bible. The message of Second Corinthians is a powerful message. If we are going to please God, we must walk by faith. That faith comes by hearing or reading the Word of God. And it is that faith which gives us the victory over this world (1 Jn. 5:4). In the struggles and trials that we face, let us remember that if we walk by faith, we can overcome. But let us also remember that there are a lot of things out there that are not correct. The only way to walk by faith is to walk by the Word of God. Has your life been lived by the Word and will of God? Are you sure right now that you are saved? Are you sure that you are a part of the Lord’s church? If you are not, we are begging you and pleading with you to obey the Gospel and so what is right so that you can be sure that you are walking by faith, not by sight.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST* is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today’s broadcast, please write to:

***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

**607 McLish Ave.  
Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where “the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached.”

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 4 (CHAPTERS 11-13)**

1. As Paul began his discussion in 2 Corinthians 11, to what Old Testament event did he refer (2 Cor. 11:3)?
2. According to 2 Peter 1:3, what do we possess in God's Word?
3. What admonition is found in Proverbs 3:5?
4. What five things must a person do, according to the Bible, to be saved?
5. According to Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:21-23, and Ephesians 4, how many churches did Christ establish?
6. What important admonition did the apostle Paul offer in 2 Corinthians 11:4?
7. What does 1 John 4:1 admonish us to do?
8. According to Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, what mode of deception does Satan sometimes use?
9. What is contained in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27?
10. How does 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 "fit" with Christ's statement in Acts 9:16 when He was talking to Ananias about Saul (who would become the apostle Paul)?
11. What did Paul tell Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12?
12. What important statement is found in Acts 14:22?
13. What important statement is found in Romans 8:28?
14. According to 2 Timothy 4:7-8, what awaits the faithful child of God in the hereafter?
15. What important message is found in James 1:2-3?
16. What important point is found in Psalm 119:67?
17. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh." When he asked God to remove it, what (according to 2 Corinthians 12:9) was God's answer?
18. What does Hebrews 10:25 admonish Christians to do for one another?
19. What does 2 Corinthians 13:5 admonish Christians to do?
20. In James 1:23-25, James discussed two types of individuals. Of those two, which one is a faithful Christian supposed to be?
21. What important message is found in Luke 9:23?