

2 CORINTHIANS Bible Reading Schedule

3 Weeks

WEEK 1

DAY 1 – 2 Corinthians 1

There is a principle shared as this letter begins that is repeated several times in God's Word. We know God to be the God of compassion and comfort (V3). He is the One who comforts us in our troubles. "Come to me all you who are weary and weighed down and I will give you rest." (Jesus, Matthew 11:28) There is no doubt that when we lean on God, he helps us. But that isn't even the main point. Paul is challenging us to share the comfort God has given us with others. This is the repeated principle found in God's Word time and again: what God so freely gives us he wants us to share with others as well. "Freely you have received, freely give." (MT 10:8, NIV) "We love each other because he loved us first." (1 John 4:19) Forgive as you have been forgiven is another subject that has us receiving and then giving. God's provision is abundant so we can be generous with others. God is the source so that we can resource others; this might be a good way of summarizing this overarching principle. How would you summarize this topic? I also appreciate Paul's honesty about his suffering in verses 8 to 11. The word used in my reading from the NLT is "rescue." But the word I remember reading is "deliverance." Verse 10 in the NIV is what I remember: "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us." The Israelites were delivered from Egypt. Moses is thought of as the deliverer. We see early on, in God's Word, God's kindness and strength as the God who desires to rescue us. An account from the Exodus story comes to mind in Ex. 17: 8-13. The prayers of Moses are essential to the deliverance of God over the enemy. I encourage you to take a look at this example of God rescuing his people and how he did it. So too, in 2 COR 1 we read about the importance of prayer, "And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety." (V11) Paul shares some of his personal concerns and plans in the rest of the chapter showing us that this really is a letter from him. How has God spoken to you through this chapter?

DAY 2 – 2 Corinthians 2

I am recalling that every chapter in this letter has spoken to me previously in profound ways. The theme of verses 14 to 16 is so memorable to me. In the NIV, it uses the word "aroma," the aroma of Christ. The NLT uses the word "fragrance," like a sweet perfume. The literal word would be "incense." Incense was scattered along the parade route of a victorious Roman general. In the parade, there were the victors of war and the captives destined for execution. For one, the aroma was leading to death, and the other celebration and joy. We are meant to be the aroma of Christ as his followers and a part of his parade. Verse 16 says it this way, "To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume." Now to the story about the sinner who Paul says should be forgiven by them. In verses 5 to 11, many scholars believe that Paul is referring to the

man condemned in 1 COR 5 who was clearly living a sexually immoral life with his stepmother (V1). Paul tells them to confront and if he doesn't repent to excommunicate him from the church. But the hopeful scenario is that he did repent. However, if this is the man from 1 COR 5, the people are not forgiving, so Paul tells them they should. "The man who caused all the trouble..." (V5) has repented and it was "time to forgive and comfort him." (V7) Unforgiveness can cause huge spiritual problems and become something that Satan can use to trap you. (V11) Tough love that is received (1 COR 5) can then be turned into tender love (2 COR 2) because it has led to genuine repentance. I think the connection from the two letters that Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth makes sense to me and something that is very relevant for us in the church today. We are afraid to share tough love and slow to offer genuine forgiveness. We must be strong when necessary and we must desire to forgive quickly. How has the idea of you being Christ's aroma spoken to you? What do you learn about tough and tender love from this story of the man who caused problems but repented?

DAY 3 – 2 Corinthians 3

Since the New Covenant is a predominate theme in this chapter you might do well to read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah expresses the covenant prophetically and precisely. As Paul compares the old and new, he refers to Exodus 34 and the glory of Moses as he met God on the mountain. It is interesting to me how often I notice themes from Exodus in my reading of God's Word. Our sermon series on Exodus addressed such significant Biblical truth. I am so glad we studied it as a church. The old had a glory of its own but nothing compared to the glory found in the new. The New Covenant has an eternal quality to it and it transcends the old. The veil that Moses needed to hide his glorious face is compared to the veil that blinds the eyes of unbelievers from the truth. "This veil can be removed only by believing in Christ." (V14) By and large, the Jews still do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah because their eyes are still veiled. (V15) The last paragraph emphasizes the Spirit bringing freedom and causing transformation. The NLT translates it this way, "makes us more and more like him..." (V18) Now that our faces are unveiled because of faith, we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory." (V18, NIV) Transformation is a marvelous word, "metamorphous." We call the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, the same word. This is none other than the Spirit's work in us to shape us inwardly to become more like Christ. Romans 8:29 tells us that this is God's goal for us, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son..." (NIV) God's destiny for us is the ongoing transformation of our lives to be increasingly more like Jesus. And he has given us his Spirit to make it possible. I am so delighted to be a recipient of the New Covenant which is established by Christ's shed blood (Luke 22:20) so that I am forgiven, receive his Spirit into my heart, have a personal relationship with the living God, and the assurance of living in heaven one day. Verses 7 to 18 speak of the glory of the New Covenant. How do you respond to the New Covenant? What do you appreciate most?

DAY 4 – 2 Corinthians 4

Yesterday we read about a veil that covers the eyes of many Jewish people regarding Jesus as Messiah. Today we read who is behind this deception, "Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe." (V4) This highlights the reality of a spiritual battle for the souls of mankind. The devil is the deceiver and he tries to weaken believers and also keep unbelievers captive in their sin. The scariest word for Satan is the "Gospel" because the Gospel transforms lives and leads to an eternal

relationship with the Living God, Yahweh. There are other profound truths in this chapter like “clay pots,” “suffering but not knocked out,” “given over to death,” “outwardly wasting away,” and the “unseen is eternal.” So many statements that have intrigued me over the years in this one chapter. But you cannot deny the fact that Paul tells us this life is difficult but in Christ we can overcome. How do you understand verses 8 to 10? Paul is building up to the monumental principle of weakness as human beings have the potential to show God’s strength. He will say it clearly in chapter 12 but he is alluding to it right now. God chooses to show himself through fragile earthen vessels, “clay pots.” (V7) But verses 16 to 18 have long been the most inspiring to me in this chapter. I am urged to never give up. The human body is weakened but the soul filled with God’s Spirit is meant to be renewed day by day. In other words, life in Christ can expand and improve until we breathe our last breath. The troubles of this life only assure us of the amazing blessings God has for us in the next life which is heaven. In fact, the worse it is now, the better it will be then, as we see Jesus and our reward for a faithful life. “Well done, good and faithful servant!” What does it mean to keep your eyes on the eternal? Tomorrow, we will read about the “best is yet to come.” (2 COR 5:1-10) Colossians 3:2, “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.” How might you live with this kind of perspective?

DAY 5 – 2 Corinthians 5

You probably know that I am reading from the New Living Translation these days but I have to admit that the words used in the NLT in this chapter do not express the meaning as well as the ESV, for example. The wording in the NLT in the first five verses translates the idea of a heavenly dwelling as a heavenly body. The word “naked” or “unclothed” probably refers to the intermediate state in which believers are with God but they do not yet enjoy their resurrected bodies. But the NLT suggests new bodies right away when we die. My study points to spiritual communion with God and others previous to the resurrected bodies we receive when Jesus returns. Secondly, verse 10 speaks of the judgment seat of Christ which is an important term and the NLT only says stand before Christ to be judged. Finally, since verse 17 is a memory verse, I prefer the idea of “new creation” rather than “new person” in the NLT. The New Living Translation has often made God’s Word come alive and give me new insights but now and then it translates the Scripture in a way that eliminates important terms. Paul uses the idea of a new creation often and especially in Galatians 6:15, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, what counts is the new creation.” This is why I have encouraged you to read more than one translation. But let me affirm the NLT as verses 20 & 21 have a fresh and compelling message for me, “So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” (NLT) Those words make better sense to me and are motivational for us as Christ’s representatives. It reminds me of Isaiah’s prophecy in 53:10, “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer... making his life an offering for sin.” There are three sermons in this chapter of 2 COR 5. What portion are you drawn to? Why? Verse 7 is a timeless truth, “For we live by faith, not by sight.” What does that mean to you?

WEEK 2

DAY 6 – 2 Corinthians 6

Verse 1 has obviously made an impression upon me as I refer to it in my introduction. To be called Christ's ambassadors is quite a privilege and so to ignore your calling to represent Jesus is such a heavy indictment. Paul says that is to receive God's grace in vain. Ouch! But another topic that stands out to me is the idea of being "unequally yoked." That is found in verse 14 of the ESV translation. You have probably heard about the issue of being unequally yoked. It is applied to marriage when a believer wants to marry an unbeliever. It is applied to business dealings when a believer is forming a partnership with an unbeliever. The literal meaning has to do with animals. It is used for being "hitched up" with another animal who is not the same. But in our verses, it is clearly about being "yoked" to an unbeliever. The implication could also include the unhealthy tension when two people have different values and priorities in life but find themselves bound by some legal arrangement. Literally, the title "Belial" means destructive and was used of devilish characteristics so the NLT says, "What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil?" (V15) Then, Paul reminds the reader that believers are thought of as the temple of God (V16). That is because the Holy Spirit lives in us. This reference is compared to Paul's statement in 1 COR 6 when he writes that each one of us is the temple of the Holy Spirit but here it says "believers are the temple of God;" that is, a worshiping people whose dedication to God separates us from all who are not like him. Then, Paul gives three references from the Old Testament to establish the importance of the topic, "I will live with them and walk among them..." (Jeremiah 32:38). "Therefore, come out from among the unbelievers..." (Isaiah 52:11). "And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters..." (2 Samuel 7:14). The bottom line is that Paul wanted the church to be a holy people, filled with God's presence. We are called to be distinct. How much evidence do you reflect through your life so that people would perceive you as a follower of Christ? Are you "yoked" with someone who might bring you down? Paul wrote, "Bad company corrupts good morals."

DAY 7 – 2 Corinthians 7

The first intriguing point in this passage has to do with the "severe letter" Paul wrote (V8). 1 Corinthians had some challenging topics and there was evidence of Paul's rebuke but his first letter wouldn't usually be described as "severe." So, most scholars believe he wrote a letter between 1 & 2 Corinthians. That also makes sense to me. The reason scholars think he wrote this severe letter is because the believers in Corinth didn't fully accept his message given in 1 Corinthians. But we read that they repented after this severe letter with godly repentance. Paul was willing to show tough love and it produced spiritual fruit. The comparison of godly repentance and worldly repentance has been a very helpful distinction for me in ministry. How often do people want the guilt to go away but are not truly committed to changing? The addiction cycle includes this concept with repeated remorse but no lasting change. I might want forgiveness, but do I really want cleansing for my soul so that I can be made new? Forgiveness and cleansing are the message of 1 John 1:9; the main verse on confession of sin in the New Testament. How do I know I am sincerely repenting? Verse 11, "Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me (the one who confronted them), such zeal, and such readiness to punish wrong." I cannot count the number

of times the challenging comparison of real sorrow and human regret has surfaced in church life. I think godly repentance is the key to growth and real maturity. Too often, believers become stagnant and insensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction. If you think you have arrived, you are deceived. Reread 1 John 1:8-10 as instruction for believers and the crucial issue of fellowship with God and spiritual growth. In what area(s) of your life might you need repentance? God knows everything already, so give confession a try... right now!

DAY 8 – 2 Corinthians 8

Verse 7 is the key verse as a launch pad for this topic of generosity. "Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love for us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving." The Corinthians had a reputation for spiritual gifts. Paul has challenged them about their lack of love in 1 COR 13. Now, he stresses the importance of generous sharing for the sake of others and God's kingdom. The topic of giving continues to be a pertinent subject still today. Our abundance of resources coincides with God's goodness to the Corinthians. When God supplies more than enough, he asks us to share. Verse 14, "Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need." In verse 11, it also says, "Give in proportion to what you have." God is reasonable and does not ask us to give so that we have nothing left. No! I think verse 9 is inspiring as it highlights the generosity of Jesus. Jesus is always our best example. As I was studying the Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus, I recall the free will-giving of the people. "Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them." (Exodus 25:2) The result was a well-resourced construction project of the Tabernacle as God's dwelling place among his people. Since the beginning, God's people have been known to be generous. Why might that be? You know the answer because God is generous. It also appears that generosity and spiritual maturity go hand in hand. The spiritually mature person knows that they cannot out-give God. Sharing what God has given us so graciously is a sign of his Spirit alive in us. Part of the equation pertains to the handling of gifts received by the church or by a ministry. Paul places Titus in charge of the money offered as a leader they trusted along with a companion that displayed Christian maturity as well. (VV18 & 22) Aaron the Priest, in Exodus 32, received offerings of gold from the people but that offering was used to make a golden calf. The credibility of the ministry must uphold the highest standards. This was true in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. More on this important subject tomorrow with the clearest statement on giving in the New Testament. How do you respond to what we read today?

DAY 9 – 2 Corinthians 9

The most succinct and insightful statement on giving in the New Testament: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (V7) Generosity is important but one's attitude about it counts even more. What does this timeless principle teach you about giving? The practice of generosity has many benefits as Paul outlines in this chapter. First of all, the Lord affirms generosity as a generous God. Secondly, we learn he rewards generous giving and Paul quotes an Old Testament reference from Psalm 112:9, helping us to see that this is the way God has always been. Also, generosity reflects one's faith and leads others to thank God. Generosity is contagious as God blesses the generous person, then, others want to get in on the blessing as well. What's there not to like about giving and sharing and glorifying God through

generosity? I remember as a young pastor bargaining with God and also complaining about how little the church I served paid me. If they paid me more, I could actually give more and even tithe (which at that time seemed way beyond reach). I am not actually sure when I finally trusted God to take care of us and began to honor the tithe with a proportionate giving of 10%. But I know now that I didn't have to wait to make more money because God has supplied our needs as a family ever since I took that step. Verse 10, "For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you." How might God be speaking to you through this chapter? I think this chapter is one of the most illuminating Scriptures on this subject. May the Lord give us a vision of cheerful giving and trust him enough to be generous! Amen!! I plan to begin chapter 10 next week as Paul launches a new topic at this point in the letter. But this Sunday, since I am speaking on Psalm 103, I think it would be good for us to take the time to read and reflect on David's words in this Psalm. Plus, it will prepare us for Sunday's message.

SPECIAL DAY – Psalm 103

I can't think of a more inspiring Psalm than this one. I am sure there could be some debate on that opinion, but you have to admit it is a marvelous prayer of worship! There are a dozen different phrases and ideas found in this Psalm to highlight but I bet you can't guess which one will be the theme for Sunday's sermon. Of course, I will tell you: "For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows, and we are gone—as though we had never been here." (Verses 14 – 16) How does God respond to our frailty according to this Psalm? What do you learn about the Lord through David's words?

WEEK 3

DAY 10 – 2 Corinthians 10

This begins a portion of Scripture that highlights Paul's ministry and challenges those who are trying to undermine his authority. Even back then, hardship was often viewed as something that disqualifies a leader and is contrary to the Christian life. This chapter presents his defense as someone called by Christ to spread the message. His motivation was not human ambition but enabled by divine power. Paul utilized God's weapons which would take down strongholds of deception and rebellion. Paul would later outline these weapons in Ephesians 6:10f as prayer, faith, God's Word (sword), and the power of the Spirit. He determined to have his mind controlled by Christ leading to obedience. (Verse 4 & 5) His main goal was to build up the believers, not to tear them down (V8). Paul refers to the time when he first arrived at Corinth because God had sent him. His first steps into the city were far from easy but he persevered as God spoke to him in a vision, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." (Acts 18:9 & 10) This makes Paul the spiritual father of this city as he is the first to bring the good news to the Corinthians. He concludes this chapter with a quotation from Jeremiah 9:24, "If you want to boast, boast only in the Lord." He is standing up for his ministry and it may appear he is boasting but his motivation is all about their spiritual wellbeing and honoring God's call on his life. What do you think it means to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ?" That idea seems especially important for us as we desire to walk in the Spirit. How significant is it to have your mind filled with the Spirit's truth compared to human inclination?

DAY 11 – 2 Corinthians 11

I was recently in the Marion County Jail sharing God's Word about the reality of the devil and his schemes. One verse we looked up was verse 3 of this chapter, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure (or simple/undivided) devotion to Christ." (NIV) The devil wants to distract and deceive followers of Christ. In verse 14, it tells us that he often disguises himself as an "angel of light." Paul is suggesting that the false teachers, that had infiltrated the Church of Corinth, were really wolves in sheep's clothing. The devil will do all he can to weaken your faith and try to cause you to be ineffective as a believer. 1 Peter 5:8 likens the devil to a prowling lion looking for someone to devour (believers are his main target since unbelievers are already in his trap). In verses 16 to 29, Paul appears to have discomfort as he portrays his many challenges and setbacks as an Apostle. But because of the intruders' arrogant spirit, Paul matches their style by reciting his true credentials as a suffering servant for Christ. This section is impressive to me and clearly reminds me that serving the Lord can mean suffer for him. In fact, most believers around the world understand this truth by experience. How do you respond to Paul's testimony from verses 23 through 29? The contrast between Paul's testimony compared to the false teachers is intentional and insightful. The false teachers boasted of their strengths and successes while Paul boasted of weakness and defeat pointing to the Lord and away from himself. His list is a compilation of events from the Book of Acts. From the moment he meets the Lord, he is set apart by God to serve and sacrifice for Christ. We read these words from Acts 9:15, "But the Lord said, (red letters) 'Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how

much he must suffer for my name's sake. "' After receiving his sight and being baptized, he preached the Word of the Lord. But within a short time "the Jews plotted together to kill him." (Acts 9:23) Thank God for Paul's example who faced suffering with great courage and amazing perseverance. How does his example inspire you?

DAY 12 – 2 Corinthians 12

The red letters jump out to me in verse 9, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." These are words of revelation from Jesus to Paul. Paul referred to a "thorn in the flesh." Then, he shared some of the most important words in this letter from verses 8 to 10. Anything that God might allow that wards off pride seems like a gift. That's how I read Paul's response. He is embracing his humanity as someone who realizes their need for God. "For when I am weak (realize my need), then I am strong (depending on God)." (V10) These verses are worth extensive meditation, in my thinking. I need to fortify myself with this perspective and I bet you do too. The rest of the chapter is Paul's personal notes of concern for how they viewed him and how he is nervously concerned about their behaviors and devotion to Christ. In chapter 11, he was concerned that the cunning/deception of the devil might lure them away from their undivided devotion to Christ (11:3). This would weaken their resolve to follow Christ and obey him. Will he find quarreling, jealousy... selfishness, gossip... when he arrives? (V20) Will they fall back into old patterns and previous sins? This reminds me of how often I have a genuine concern for the sincerity and follow-through of guys in the jail. They are asking for prayer, repenting of sins (at least I think so), and committing themselves to follow Christ. But the "new wine" of Christ often is poured into old wineskins as they are released and walk back into their old lives. We can do this too, just like Paul was concerned for the Corinthian believers. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include this analogy from Jesus. Matthew 9:17, "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved." He also likens it to putting a new cloth patch on old clothes in verse 16 which is the same idea. I think this is very helpful because God calls us to a new life in him and new values to live out. How would you describe living the new life Jesus gives us? How might you be lured into your old way of thinking and behaving?

DAY 13 – 2 Corinthians 13

This concluding chapter might be short but it is packed with exhortation from Paul. He is warning them and reminding them of the importance of following through. Examination is a valuable practice for us. Richard Foster introduced me to the "prayer of examen" in his book "Prayer." This is not a new concept as David exhibits this posture in Psalm 139 (we will read all of it tomorrow), "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you..." (VV23 & 24) So, in verse 5, Paul uses very similar words that we do well to practice. Paul's heart for these struggling Christians can be summarized in Colossians 1:28, "He (Christ) is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that (purpose) we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." (NIV) Paul has that in mind for these believers in Corinth as he says in verse 9, "We pray that you will become mature." I like when Paul writes something that is especially powerful but said so succinctly, "Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace." (V11) These are phrases that pop up in many of Paul's writings. Each statement says so much, don't you think?

Which one captures your attention? The way that Paul ends this letter is how we often end our gatherings at New Harvest. This benediction should sound familiar to you. It is actually exceptional because he includes the Trinity; it highlights three profound qualities, grace, love, and fellowship; and, it is meant to be poured over our lives as a blessing. You can't beat that. How does that benediction speak to you? How might you offer that kind of blessing to the people in your life? I wonder if 2 Corinthians has become a new favorite of yours. I think it is fantastic.

SPECIAL DAY – Psalm 139

As we wrapped up last week with Psalm 103, let's do the same with another amazing Psalm from David. David begins and ends this Psalm with the "heart." The Hebrew word for heart, in this Psalm, does not refer to the physical human heart. Rather, the heart is the center of one's being, an image of a person's thought-life, reflections, and will. The story of the heart reveals a person's commitment and direction in life. Thus, David begins with and ends on the topic of our hearts: "O Lord, you have examined my heart..." "Search me, O God, and know my heart..." The themes of this Psalm are so profound and shape the writer's heart. God's omniscience and omnipresence are fully displayed in David's poem. David had the inclination to elevate the Lord and did so for us with these words about key attributes of our God. He knows everything and he is everywhere at the same time. But verses 13 to 18 become more personal as he emphasizes God's creative hand in making us. There's a beautiful picture of affection as God thinks about us all the time (V17) and these thoughts are precious which means he loves us and has affirming thoughts towards us. There's no doubt that you understand the amazing way that God has made us. The body functions miraculously and David's assessment is "we are fearfully and wonderfully made." (NIV, V14) I am sure that a careful reading of this Psalm will bless your heart and launch you into a marvelous day (or, wrap up your day with pleasant thoughts). How has God shown himself to you through this reading?