

St Andrews SMALL GROUP Bible Studies on 2 Corinthians 1-7

2 CORINTHIANS **BUILDING COMMUNITY** *in Christ*

St Andrews | ROSEVILLE



Introductory Setting ...

Sometimes it is better to write a letter, especially when relationships are at stake. Paul's recent visit to Corinth had been difficult. His visit was in response to their poor reception of his instructions in 1 Corinthians. It seems they largely didn't listen and many continued in sexual immorality, divisiveness, tolerating false teaching, and doubting Paul's apostolic authority and integrity. So, Paul paid a visit, and things blew up. It is described as a 'painful visit' (2:1).

What to do? He decided to give them some space due to the intensity of his visit and write a letter instead. This letter is referred to as 'tearful' and 'anguished' (2:3-4). It is also lost to us. However, we know the impact this letter had, for Titus who delivered it, finally reported it to Paul (7:5-16). Thankfully, the majority of people had heeded Paul's words and so repented and reinstated him as God's authorised apostle for them.

But not everything was in order! A vocal and influential minority still opposed Paul as unimpressive and lacking integrity, various sins were still tolerated, and self-centred cultural values were eroding their appreciation of the gospel. It is into this context that Paul writes 2 Corinthians (it is actually the 4th letter to Corinth!).

He writes to encourage and build up the majority who have heeded his message, to defend his apostolic authority from further attack, and to address the false teachers (the 'Super-Apostles') who were detrimentally impacting the Church. This helps to explain why sometimes he has a positively encouraging tone, and at others a negative rebuking tone. It is all driven by his love for them and a desire to see them shaped by the gospel and living for Jesus! As he says in 13:10, his God given authority is for 'building them up'.

At the heart of 2 Corinthians stands a robust theology of the gospel, and at core stands the cross of Christ, which though unimpressive and shameful to the world, is the power and glory of God for our salvation and growth. It is a gospel through which God humbles the powerful and strengthens the weak. It is a letter we need to inwardly digest and build our lives and church community upon. So, let's do it!!

2 Corinthians 1:1-22 Bible Study Leaders Notes

- Can you think of a time when you have been comforted by God? What was it about him that comforted you?

★ Paul's many and varied sufferings (read the litany of adversity in Ch11:23-30) were a stumbling block. But in v3-6 Paul seems to indicate that in our suffering not all is lost ...

Read 1:1-7.

- What is Paul's main idea in v3-7?
- What stops us from being aware of and receiving God's comfort in difficult times?
- How does God's comfort of us translate into our comforting of others? How does it work? Can you think of any examples?

Read 1:8-11

- What did God deliver Paul from?
- What did it teach Paul?
- What's wrong with self-reliance?
- Has suffering altered your attitude of self-reliance? How so?

Read 1:12-14

★ In 1:12 Paul suddenly begins to defend himself. Why? Paul's character and ministry has been under attack in the Corinthian community. It seems that the false teachers (Super-apostles, 11:5) were poisoning their minds against Paul. Their perception was that Paul was unimpressive (e.g. 10:10) and lacked integrity (e.g. 1:17). Paul was placed in the tricky situation where in order to secure the Corinthians in Christ he had to re-earn their trust and so somehow defend himself against these attacks without boasting (e.g. 2:17, 4:2, 6:3, 7:2). *Ch7:2 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one.*

- What do you imagine this 'mutual boasting' to look like on the last day (v14)?

Read 1:15-22

- If Paul is so committed to their wellbeing, if he loves them that much, why didn't he visit when he said he would? Whatever the reason (we'll find out next week!), the first thing Paul says is 'it wasn't because I was unfaithful & fickle'. How does he make the point?
- What is the relationship between God's faithfulness and Paul's?

Apply & Pray

- How could you comfort someone with the comfort God has given you, who ...
 - o Is struggling with loneliness
 - o Is struggling with sin and inadequateness before God
 - o Is dealing with opposition for following Jesus
 - o Is experiencing friction in a relationship
 - o Is facing the probable end of their life

- Pray for the various leaders (staff and volunteers) at St Andrews to serve in a way that reflects the faithfulness of God in the gospel.

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:17 Bible Study Leaders Notes

STARTERS

- When facing a relationship difficulty, when is it better to write a letter and when is it better to speak to them face to face?

★ Last week we observed that the reason Paul had changed his travel plans to visit them was NOT because he was fickle and unfaithful (1:15-22). So, what WAS the reason?

Read 1:23-2:4

- What is Paul's goal for the Corinthians and why did he write instead of visiting?
- What does this reveal about Paul?

Read 2:5-11

★ Evidently a particularly troublesome individual had aimed his guns at Paul, probably manifesting in public conflict during his previous visit. It seems that Paul has called this bloke to repentance, and had instructed the Church to discipline him ... (It may actually be the man referred to in 1 Cor 5:1-5, but it's hard to be sure).

- What does Paul call them to do in 2:6-8? What does this assume about the perpetrator?
- Is repentance required for forgiveness to take place?

★ Church discipline is not a popular topic, and yet the bible does teach it. It must be exercised carefully, discretely, humbly, and in love. The purpose of it is restorative. It is designed to lead people to reconcile with God, other people, and themselves! If someone is claiming to follow Jesus but clearly and consistently not living like it, the loving thing to do is raise it with that person in the hope that they will recognise the error of their ways and repent (See 1Cor5:1-13, Rev3:19, Mt18:15-20, Tit3:10, James5:19-20, Gal6:1-2 etc). Church communities should aim for a robust love. A love that doesn't ignore serious error and sin, but deals with it wisely & sensitively, for the good of everyone and the glory of God. When done poorly it can lead to even greater distress. Even when handled with integrity it can get messy. Humility on all sides is required.

- In your experience, what makes apology and forgiveness difficult? What does each involve? How can the gospel help us?

- Satan likes to stir up conflict in a church community and so destroy the unity Jesus has established. In the context of anger toward one another Paul says '*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold*' (Ephesians 4:26-27). How can we protect against this and deal with it when it comes?

★ Paul is so concerned for the Corinthians spiritual health that he even passed up an opportunity to preach the gospel in Troas (2:12-13). Instead he headed to Macedonia to wait for news from Titus about how they had received his intense letter (2:4). It's as though he couldn't do anything else until he knew ... But despite the change in gospel preaching plans and all the messy vicissitudes of life, Paul can still thank God ...

Read 2:14-17

- Why does Paul thank God despite the untidiness of ministry plans and relational setbacks?
- What does God do (look at the verbs)?
- If we are 'incense-bearers' in Jesus victory parade, what are our responsibilities when it comes to evangelism? What should we expect as we do this? Does this ring true in your experience? Why persevere?

★ Sometimes it looks like everything is falling apart. Plans are not working, people are doubting our integrity, we are crippled by self-doubt and inadequacy ... But in the midst of the mess of ministry, God uses our little efforts to spread the aroma of salvation. God 'sends' (v17), 'leads' (v14), and 'uses' (v14) his people to spread the aroma of salvation. In the final analysis, it is God who gets the job done. God's gospel purposes will still go forward despite various setbacks. So, we should join Paul in giving thanks to God, and have an optimistic spring in our step.

Apply & Pray

- Who do you need to reconcile with? (This is a private issue for you to think through)
- What are our personal spiritual goals (1:24, 2:9), both for ourselves and for those around us at St Andrews? In what way do you struggle to make this a priority? What could help?
- Despite the various human reactions to hearing the gospel, God is pleased when the aroma of Christ is spread around (2:15). What is the main thing holding you back from sharing the gospel with someone this week? Pray about it.

2 Corinthians 3:1-18 Bible Study Leaders Notes

FOR STARTERS

- Give some examples of how you use the word 'glorious'? Would you ever describe church-based ministry as glorious? Why/why not?

Read 3:1-6

- What is Paul's basic point in 3:1-3?
- Where does Paul's competence come from? (3:4-6, 2:16)
- Before exploring the rest of Ch3 read Exodus 34:29-35. Share your initial impressions.

Read 3:7-11

- Fill out the following table, noting the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant (Paul is contrasting the old with the new probably because the false teachers infiltrating the Corinthian community are teaching a form of Jewish religion).

1 Corinthians 3:3-11	Old Covenant Ministry	New Covenant Ministry
Location (v3)		
Means (v3)		
End (v6)		
Result (v9)		
Duration (v10-11)		
Glory (v3-11)		

- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What will mark the New Covenant age? (Also, Ezk36:24-27)
- Why is the New Covenant ministry of the gospel in the power of the spirit more glorious?

Read 3:12-18

- What is the veil or barrier between our minds & hearts and knowing the glory of God? What can remove it?

- What is the freedom (v17) referring to in context?

★ Moses wore a veil after being in the presence of God to hide the reflective glory of God from the people (Ex34:29-35). It must have been very bright! Paul then takes up the 'veil' language as a symbol for hard hearts that can't perceive God's glory in the scriptures unless they turn to Christ, the one the Scriptures are about and the one who reveals God's glory ((Jn1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*). When one turns to the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit is given who frees them from the veil of hard heartedness and ignorance, and enables them to see God's glory in Jesus and slowly become more like him. The old testament/covenant pointed to all this.

Apply & Pray

- Why is Paul not concerned about his reputation (3:1-3)? Are you? How does it manifest?
- How does God save and change people? What does he do and what part do we play according to Ch3?
- Do you view the ministry of the new covenant gospel as glorious? Small Group ministry, Kids ministry, Sunday gatherings, Others?? Why/why not?
- How do the truths outlined in Ch3 help with our feelings of inadequacy?
- Spend some time praying about these things.

2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10 Bible Study Leaders Notes

FOR STARTERS

- When and why do you feel competent or incompetent to serve the Lord and share his good news with others?

★ In 2:16 Paul asked '*Who is sufficient for these things?*' referring to serving and promoting the Lord Jesus. In Ch3 he developed this further, stating that our '*competence comes from God*' (3:5). He then outlines the fact that the new testament gospel of Jesus by the power of God's spirit saves and transforms people so that they behold and share in God's glory! God's presence by his spirit and power in the gospel helps Paul to be 'very bold' (3:12). In Ch4 Paul keeps building God centered reasons for continuing in kingdom building activities rather than giving up ...

Read 4:1-6

- Given all we know of Paul and the Corinthians, why might Paul be tempted to lose heart?
- How does 'not losing heart' manifest in Paul's ministry methodology? (v2 & v5) How could a loss of confidence lead to the use of deception and distortion?
- How are we tempted to change the gospel to make it more acceptable to people?
- Why can't many people see the glory of God in Christ as they hear the gospel?
- So, what should we do to help people see the glory of God in Jesus? V5-6

Read 4:7-18

- Is 4:8-9 just a kind of wishful optimism without any basis? A moment of empty sentimentalism to lift our downcast spirits? Is it Paul's way of saying 'She'll be right mate'. In v16 he concludes '*Therefore we do not lose heart?*' On what basis can he say this? Find reasons why Paul doesn't give up given all the setbacks, pains, hassles, and opposition he faces ...
- What is the treasure? (v7)
- How is our weakness part of God's strategy?

- "Paul doesn't focus his gaze on the weight of suffering, but the weight of glory it will produce." (v18) Discuss.

Read 5:1-8

- How does this make you feel about the future and about current struggles?

★ In 5:1-10 Paul proceeds to help fix our eyes on the unseen future by celebrating the resurrection body, which will replace this fragile and decaying jar of clay. A new indestructible body is coming. This means our personal renewal is both present and future. Now we are being renewed inwardly by the Spirit (4:16, 3:17-18), and later we will be renewed physically at the resurrection.

- What does it mean to 'walk by faith and not sight' (5:7) in context? How can we easily do the opposite; 'walk by sight and not by faith'? (4:18)
- A friend says, "I feel inadequate to serve and promote Jesus" How would you respond?

Read 5:9-10

- How does this make you feel?

★ Living by faith means living with God's promised future in mind and acting in line with it. It means realising on resurrection day we will appear before God's throne to give an account, and so we seek to live now in a way that pleases the Lord. But this raises the question of 'What kind of judgment will Christians experience?' Hasn't Jesus already taken away our judgment? Yes! Aren't we already right with God? Yes! (5:21). Christians are only saved by the death of Jesus for us. And yet it is important how we live in response to this salvation. Those who are saved should try to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord (5:9, 7:1). There are other texts which indicate that this judgment will not be about punishment, but rather an assessment of the quality of our good works and an issuing of commensurate rewards (Mt 5:12, 10:41-42; 16:27; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 10-15; 9:16-18, 25, 27; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Eph6:7-8, Phil. 4:1; Col.3:24; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:18; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8; Heb. 11:6; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 11:18; 22:12).

Paul reminds all Christians of their responsibility: we can never say that "it does not matter" what we do (or what we fail to do) in our earthly lives. It does matter, and we will one day give account for our deeds when we appear before the Lord. This shouldn't undermine our sense of assurance, but inspire us to get on with the purpose for which we've been saved (Eph2:10), to grow in the likeness of the glory of Jesus (2Cor3:18).

Apply & Pray

- Why should we continue to jump out of bed and walk out into our day with a readiness to serve and promote the Lord Jesus (In our churches, homes, work places, social environments, places of education?) etc ... when we struggle with our own doubts and sin, when dealing with others misunderstandings and even opposition, while juggling various distractions and setbacks, while seeing little apparent spiritual fruit and just existing in the general unpredictable messiness of life?
- Spend time thanking God for all he has done, is doing, and will do to use our efforts and build his kingdom

2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:10 Bible Study Leaders Notes

FOR STARTERS

- How could fearing God and loving God go together?

Read 5:11-15

- "Fearing people stops evangelism. Fearing God enables it" Do you agree? Why?

★ How can fear be a positive motivation for Christian living & ministry? Love is the highest motivation in the Bible (5:14 'For Christ love compels us'), but there is a place for fear properly understood. Sometimes due to God's grace we relax our sense of reverence for God. We might view him as a harmless Labrador rather than a powerful Lion. In the Narnia Chronicles C. S Lewis presented Aslan as 'good' rather than 'safe'. We should cultivate an appropriate fear in the sense of deep-seated respect because of God's awesome majestic & holy nature (Is6). Broadly speaking there are 2 types of fear (1) Being scared (2) Deep respect. Those who are new creations in Christ need not have the first type of fear, but should nurture the second (7:1). In addition, it seems entirely fitting to experience the first type of fear with respect to our unsaved family and friends, for they are in great danger without God's saving mercy in Christ. At this point we see that love and fear can coexist. It is because we love people that we will seek their salvation from a real fearful danger.

- What are the two motives for persuading others about Jesus? Which one do you need to grow in?
- How does v15 relate to v17?
- How does v15 ('no longer living for yourself but for him') find expression in your life? What is holding us back from fully embracing this attitude? What's one area of your life that has slowly changed in this regard, and what is one area we need to keep giving over to his Lordship? Share whatever you're comfortable with ...

Read 5:18-21

- What are the two things God has done in v18-19?
- In 5:19 & 21 How does God reconcile the world?
- How does v21 help Christians to know they have assurance before God?

Read 6:1-2

- How could we receive the grace of God in vain?
- What does Paul, and through him, God ('making his appeal through us' 5:20) urgently want from the Corinthians, and from us?

Read 6:3-13

- Why would Paul's commendation of himself (v4-10) sound strange to the Corinthians, and yet, how does it show he is an authentic representative of Jesus committed to their good?
- What is the relationship between receiving and trusting Paul, and receiving and trusting the gospel and so being reconciled to God?

Apply & Pray

- A personal question for you is 'Do you need to be reconciled to God?' Have you personally responded in prayer to him, asking him to forgive you? Here is a prayer that the whole group could pray now (Perhaps have a minute of silence so people can reflect and pray if they'd like to).
 - o "Dear Lord: I'm not sure if I'm reconciled with you, but I'd like to be. I'm sorry for all my sin. Please forgive me. Thank you that Jesus takes my sin and I get his righteousness. Help me to live for Jesus from now on. Amen."
- Does Christ's love grip and compel us to reach out with the message of reconciliation? What are your biggest obstacles to evangelism? How can we begin to deal with them?

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:16 Bible Study Leaders Notes

FOR STARTERS

- Why do we find it difficult to say hard things to people, even people we love? Why should we do it?

★ Paul has just implored the Corinthians to 'be reconciled to God' (5:11-6:2). He then immediately began to implore them to be reconciled to himself as their Apostle (6:3-13). To receive God, they need to receive the gospel, and to receive the gospel they need to receive Paul, whom God appointed to preach the gospel. They can't cut Paul loose and expect to remain spiritually healthy (at least not in their immature state). He now continues to seek their allegiance for their own good ...

Read 6:11-7:3

- What are your initial impressions? What does Paul seem to be talking about?
- How have you understood 6:14-16? How have you heard it explained or applied before?
- What strikes you as strange about these interpretations?
- What IS the immediate context for Paul's comments in v14-16? Try 6:11-13 and 7:2 How might v14-16 it relate to this? (See also 11:12-15)

Read 7:1

- What are the promises Paul refers to here? (see 6:16-18)
- How and why should we respond to God's promises in this way?

Read 7:3-16

★ Notice how Paul suddenly changes moods from alarm to joy! In 7:5 he picks up where he left off in 2:13 ...

- What causes Paul joy in the following verses?
 - o 7:4
 - o 7:7
 - o 7:9
 - o 7:13
 - o 7:16

- What idea binds all this joy together?

★ Paul finally caught up with Titus and heard how the Corinthians had received his intense letter well. They had heard and heeded his rebuke and correction and so had repented. Of course, they still had areas to work on (don't we all!?), as the instructions in this letter indicate. But notice the genuinely deep joy Paul experiences because of this spiritual milestone!

- What causes you joy? How can we foster joy in our hearts when we see spiritual growth?
- "There is no place for guilt in the Christian life" Discuss ...
- What is the difference between 'godly grief/sorrow' and 'worldly grief/sorrow' (v9-11)? How would you explain the difference to a friend?

★ Paul's letter, which obviously involved confrontation and rebuke, and initially produced heaviness of heart, has actually fulfilled its purpose as a catalyst for repentance. He doesn't regret saying the truth. He is sorrowful that it resulted in negative feelings. And yet ... praise God for the outcome!

Apply & Pray

- Do we desire the growth in our personal and others devotion to living a Christ focused life? What diminishes our devotion to this?
- How can we be more vigilant in our own daily repentance?
- How should we confront someone with something that needs to be said? How do we call others to repentance? How do we have those difficult conversations? Share wisdom and pray.