

Note

2 Corinthians – Part 1 of 1

Summary

2 Corinthians - Part 1 of 12

2 Corinthians gives us a glimpse into the life of Paul, which parallels the life journey of Jesus Christ, and reveals the paradox in this upside down world and the cross of Jesus.

In a sin cursed world, man continues his relentless pursuit for success, wealth and reputation, all of which ultimately amounts to nothing before God. Personified in Jesus, God values humility, service and weakness. His power is sufficient for us and it is made perfect in our weakness. Weakness that acknowledges our utter dependence on His unmerited mercy and grace.

The cross also unleashes the transforming power and presence of the Holy Spirit to empower the followers of Jesus to take up His crucified way of life – live out His agape love. Salvation is from hell to Christ-likeness.

Transcript

2 Corinthian – Part 1 of 1

In this Epistle we will see the practical realities of life on earth. In Romans, God's righteousness was revealed to us so that we can be born again. The power of the gospel in Romans was declared to us. Then we realised in 1 Corinthians that though people are born again, justified so marvelously, given the righteousness of Jesus Christ, yet, sanctification is a long and difficult journey that we need to go through.

This is not preached very often. Most Christians believe that the day they get saved they will step into a beautiful journey of ease and prosperity and health and everything else. There's a lot of frauds who preach this just to get crowds into their churches. And the more people come in, the more they can squeeze them for offerings so that they can live very good, easy lives after that. So that's the gospel that we hear a lot of and in fact, in a lot of the bigger mega churches, that is the gospel that is often preached. But what we see in Corinthians was, the first church was a terrible church and Paul's agonies with that church.

We come to 2 Corinthians and you're going to see that journey of sanctification is almost like the journey of Jesus Christ. We are not only saved from hell, we're saved to Christlikeness, and how do you grow into Christ-likeness without following His footsteps? I don't know. Jesus said, "Follow Me." Are you ready to follow Him? You said, "Yes, I want to go to heaven." But He had to go through a lot first, His journey on this earth was tough. And so, we see Paul's life was very tough in 2 Corinthians.

Let's just look at the events after 1 Corinthians. After 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to them that letter, which we studied. Then you thought, well, maybe after that letter, everything would go well, but no. The people whom he had led to the Lord in Corinth after 18 months of hard labor and love and sacrifice there, fell into sin. Other false preachers came in and sold the cheap gospel to them. They preferred the new freedom from these new

preachers who told them that they can still sin, they're free in Christ. Sound familiar? Grace, you got grace already, you're saved, you're going to heaven, go and enjoy yourself.

They fell into immorality and idolatry. And then when Paul wrote the letter, they rejected the letter. They said, what kind of strict teaching is this? So he rushed to visit them and that was very painful.

2 Corinthians chapter 2:1

For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.

The first visit was not painful. The first 18 months there, they loved him, he taught them truth, they grew, became a church so he decided to leave. But then when he heard about all these problems, he wrote the letter. This visit was very painful, they rejected him, the one who led them to the Lord was rejected by them. Then he wrote another letter and that is found in 2 Corinthians

chapter 2:2-3

For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad, but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice....

He wrote a letter hoping that if he comes again, then things would be better. That letter is not put in the inspired scriptures. What happens is after that letter, the missing letter, so to speak, many people in Corinth realised they were wrong. They were arrogant, they were deceived by these new slick preachers, preaching an easy gospel, so to speak, not even a gospel and they apologised to Paul and they wanted reconciliation after that letter. So Paul writes this letter (2 Corinthians) to assure them of his love.

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians is about Paul assuring them of the reconciliation. Then the second part of 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9, Paul is telling them, don't forget to be generous. We heard you wanted to be generous, you forgot about it. Because of all the problems that came up, you forgot about your generosity for the starving Jews in Jerusalem. There was a lot of Christians in Jerusalem who were starving, going through a famine and because they were Christians, they were rejected by the other

Jews. They were really suffering. And when Paul was in Corinth, they said, let's give to them. But then what happened was in all these problems, they forgot. Chapter 8 and 9 reminds them. Then the last part of 2 Corinthians chapter 10 to 13 speaks of Paul challenging the remaining people who did not repent, who did not accept his apostleship over them, his ministry over them and challenging the false preachers who were still hanging around among them.

We see 3 parts:

First - chapters 1-7 Paul assures them of their reconciliation. God always opens the door of reconciliation through repentance.

Second - chapters 8 & 9 Do not forget your intention to give to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Third - Chapter 10 to 13 Paul is challenging the people who did not repent, and did not accept his apostleship and ministry over them, and challenging the false preachers.

In 1 Corinthians Paul is telling the what's wrong with them (turning back to idolatry and immorality).

In 2 Corinthians Paul is defending himself. And because he has to defend himself, it's almost like an auto biography of Paul. Because of this problem in Corinth, we know a lot about the life of Apostle Paul because he had to tell these Corinthians Let me tell you who I am. They were all questioning him. The people in Corinth had been fooled by the new slick guys who came in and were saying that Paul cannot be the real deal. How can he be? He's so poor. He doesn't even get support from you guys. He's not even a full timer, he's a tentmaker. He's been in jail so many times. He's been facing persecution. He's so unimpressive as a preacher. How can he be the real deal? Look at us, we are so much better. So Paul had to write to defend himself.

2 Corinthians almost reads like an auto biography of Paul. In fact, we know a lot about Paul because of this problem in the Corinthian church. Otherwise you wouldn't know what is a missionaries life, what should be Christians' life. He says, be followers of me even as I am of Jesus Christ.

When you read 2 Corinthians, you're seeing what you should be like. I would suggest listen to it in the New Living Translation audio. It gives you the anguish, the pain of Paul and that's going to be your pain too if you really want to follow Christ. Many times we have no clue. In fact, at the first suffering we have as a Christian, we get a heart attack. Oh, my goodness, how come? We weren't prepared for it because we never read the Bible the way we should. After Romans - justification. Then we read Corinthians - the church isn't as great as you think it is. Many Christians go to church and get discouraged. They see all kinds of problems in churches, and get discouraged. If you read Corinthians, you won't be. It's a sin cursed world, and in a sin cursed world, nothing is good. Even the good things are tainted and rotten. If you don't read the Bible as one book, you get all kinds of discouragement and confusion. That's where 2 Corinthians comes in. So listen to the NLT audio version as it'll give you this feeling of anguish and pain that you will go through if you are a real Christian.

Chapter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

What is this? Is it very comforting to you? You read this, we are going to share abundantly in Christ's sufferings. Is that what you were told when you came into the family of God? Or are you told you are going to be healthy and wealthy?

You enter any family, you'll understand the character of that family. The character of Jesus's family is service, loving those who don't love you, agape love. God is love. What is God's love? Romantic? What is God's love? He loves those who love Him? No, no, no. God's love means God loves the unlovely. God reaches out, God reaches down, God serves those who hate Him. That's a Christian life, my friend. Is that a shock to you? So we need the God of mercy and all comfort because our journey as a Christian isn't going to be a bed of roses. It's going to be a tough journey, but yet with great comfort along the way. I always say the Christian life is

a lot of struggle outside, but great peace inside. The life of an unbeliever is lot of comfort outside and great agony and emptiness and miserableness inside. Which one do you want? You choose but you can't have both. You can't have comfort outside and peace inside. It doesn't exist, definitely not in the Christian faith, and it doesn't exist in the world for that matter.

Chapter 3:1

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?

Paul says, do I really need to get letters of recommendation to you? You got saved through me, through my ministry in you, this church in Corinth would not even have existed without me. And yet now you're questioning my apostleship. If I was not a real Ambassador of Christ, how come you guys now believe in Christ? It's through me. But now I need to bring a letter of recommendation to you so that you can say, Paul, you're real now. What do you learn from this? You learned that when you serve God, you serve God among people who are still sin-tainted, namely ungrateful.

One of the problems with this world we live in is that it's a sinful world and one of the biggest and most common sin is complaining and ingratitude. Even after we become believers, ingratitude is a huge problem. If you want to serve God, please get used to the fact that the very ones you serve, you invested your life in as Paul did for 18 months, don't expect gratitude. You expect lots of complaints and ingratitude. That's why I always tell young ministers, you serve an audience of one. If you serve for thanksgiving and gratitude in this world, if that's your motive for service, please don't go in. You're going to be very disappointed. You go in because you serve someone who was so good to you on the Cross. And if you get a thanksgiving and appreciation, it's a bonus, it's not a right, it's not an expectation, make sure you understand that. You think they thanked Christ when He was on the Cross? They crucified Him. Are you greater than your Master?

Chapter 4:8-12

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us but life in you.

This is our life - afflicted in every way. Every time you're down, another statement says, still you are being upheld by the hand of grace. The God of comfort and mercy will sustain you as you walk towards Christ-likeness.

But I want you to notice something - you see the word 'manifested' twice here. Let's look at verse 10, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." Look at verse 11- For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. It sounds like he is repeating it twice. Why twice? He's telling us, when you suffer and people see your suffering, even when they don't thank you, you still love them. Even when others reject you, you should share the gospel with them. Even when people are hostile to you, you still go and help them. You know what they are seeing? They're seeing the life of Jesus manifested in you, not preached by you, but manifested by you.

Have you realised that God allows us to go through all these sufferings as we serve others because God wants us to demonstrate, not just tell about the life of Jesus. And I can tell you, all those preachers who stand up there with all their brilliance and all that talk don't have one fraction as much power as a simple missionary, a simple servant of God who serves others, in spite of the hostility, the ingratitude and danger. Whose sermon is more powerful? The eloquent words or the simple walk? The life of Jesus will be manifested in you, not proclaimed by your words.

I hope you understand why God allows us to go through this as we serve Him because when people see this, they see the Christ you are describing so real. Is this the love of God, the God who came down to be rejected and hated and yet continues to love us? I see that in your life. So now you know why we go through sufferings. It's called setting us as an example. People believe what they see.

Chapter 4:17

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Paul considers all these things he's describing as light, momentary because of the comparison with the great glory he anticipates. You cannot do anything for God without God recognising it. He saw all our sins, He also sees all our labor. Your labor is not in vain in the Lord. So yes, we are going to go through affliction in this life but how long will you be blessed in eternity?

Chapter 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This verse is often preached out of context. Everybody look, I'm a new creation! What is a new creation? Someone like Christ with a love of Christ. What kind of love? Agape love. That's why 1 Corinthians 13 told us about what is love? It's Agape love which is a giving love, serving love, sacrificial love for those who don't love you. Eros is you're attracted to somebody. Philadelphia is brotherly love. Agape love is I want to help him someone who doesn't care about me. Why? Because God helped me. So that's a new creation. It's not the creation that looks more beautiful, healthier and richer. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. What's the new creation? Christlikeness.

Chapter 5:20

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Now as a new creation that wants to love the unlovely, you can be ambassadors. That's what you want to do because God sent His ambassador to us-Jesus Christ. The first ambassador to lead from Heaven to Earth, not from country to country, not from man to man, but the long journey away from heaven to earth.

Chapter 6:4-10 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings,

imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying and behold, we live; as punished and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

You see the paradox of the Christian life? Looks so terrible outside but it's so amazing inside that you can rejoice in suffering. How come? That's the mystery of being like Jesus. I hope that is giving us a better example of the new creation you will be if you are truly in Christ and want to be like Christ, imparting more and more. The journey of salvation is not from hell, but from hell to Christlikeness.

Remember in chapters 1-7 Paul speaks of reconciliation. In chapter 7 verse 10, he tells that their repentance was true. There are two kinds of reactions when you reprimand someone. He can turn away or he can look at himself and turn to Christ, and reconcile with you. When Paul wrote the letter, some turned away. But the majority wanted to get right, to be like Christ.

The next section, chapter 8 to 9 is about forgotten generosity. When Paul was there, they said that they wanted to help those poor persecuted Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. But when all these problems came, they forgot and so Paul reminds them. One of the evidence of salvation in your life, (not a condition for you to be saved) is that you will be generous to the undeserving, to people you don't even know. Corinth was so far from Jerusalem, and 99% of the people in this church had no idea who these people were, and yet they were going to help them because it is a mark of Christianity, that we have the heart of God for people faraway, people we don't know.

Chapter 8:8-9

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

How come we can be generous? Because of Christ. He was so generous to us. He became poor, came to this earth, born in manger, grew up at a carpenter's house. In His ministry He had nowhere to stay, and yet through His poverty, we became rich. How do you know you're a Christian? You're willing to sacrifice your comforts so that others can be blessed - one of the evidences of salvation. It's very funny when you hear people praying for people they've never seen, wanting to give to people they've never seen and never will, never hear a squeak of a thank you from them, I know they are true believers usually. Though often even unsaved people do have a heart of mercy because they're made in the image of God.

Because of their forgotten generosity, we see a teaching on Christian giving.

Chapter 9:6-8

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

You see some principles of giving:

Number 1 - give generously. He that sows sparingly or give generously will lay up your rewards in heaven. God will bless you, not on this earth but definitely in heaven. Number 2 - it must be cheerful. I don't believe in tithing simply because it's a tax. In Christian giving, it always must be cheerful, out of a grateful, cheerful heart. Never twisted, never forced, never mandated, it's giving cheerfully.

Number 3 - give confidently, knowing that whatever you give God will take care of you. Let's look at verse 8: And God is able to make all grace (see the "ALL" there) abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As you give, you are not depleted. You give and somebody gives you - it's called God - at all times, in every way, in all kinds of strange ways. As you thought you'd be running dry and be depleted, there's a supply that keeps coming all the time. Could be peace in your heart, could be friends around who help, it could be just sheer health. In all ways, God will take care of you.

Chapter 11:3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from the sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Number 1, learn this, the devil is real. He doesn't leave you alone, especially when you try to draw close to Christ, to Christ salvation and Christ likeness. Paul tells you very, very plainly, but I'm afraid the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning. You too will be deceived by the serpent. In other words, when you think you go to church, you're safe, rethink. The devil didn't stop outside of the church because it says, no entry Satan, he doesn't, he just walks in. He's there walking about among the congregation, looking for those who he can easily deceive. And who can be easily deceived.? Those who don't know the word of God. Babes don't know anything, they can be deceived. And some are spiritual babes after 50 years because they still don't know the Word of God. They're not interested to know the Word of God, they just want to pick and choose. So just expect a lot of deception in the churches. Don't be shocked, it's part of life on this sin cursed world. Who brings in this deception?

Chapter 11:13

For such men are false apostle, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness....

Who are these people coming in to deceive? They are very impressive. They look like angels of light quoting the scriptures out of context, of course, and it's very easy because all of us read the Bible out of context anyway. He's just using exactly what we have deceived ourselves. He's just using that to deceive us more. So he comes in like an angel of light and we are all deceived and so don't be surprised. Just be aware that if you don't want to be deceived, then learn the truth and the truth will set you free. In John 17:17, it says "Thy word is truth." So if you know the Word of God, it will keep you from being easily deceived. I'm not saying that you won't, the devil is smarter than us, he knows the Bible better than us. At least you do your part, God will do the rest. But if you don't even want to read the Bible from beginning to end. Then what do you expect? God to protect you? You don't even want to protect yourself, why should God protect you?

And then we see the secret of success in chapter 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

What's the secret of success? To be smart, you will be successful, you're eloquent, you will be successful, you're brilliant, you can study, you'll be successful? No. It says here, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses. The only one who will really be able to serve God is one who realises how weak he is. Beginning with weak in Bible knowledge.

I know a lot of people think they really know the Bible. I'm telling you if you think I'm a teacher of the Bible. Let me tell you, I'm a super weak student of the Bible, I'm not saying just to impress. I haven't scratched the surface after 40 years. I teach this series called "The Beautiful Book", but do you know why I'm teaching it? Let me tell you the truth - I need it. I'm doing this basically for myself. If not one of you wants to listen to this Beautiful Book, it's fine with me. I hope more of you will be blessed, but I need to learn and being a teacher forces me to learn.

Chapter 13:5

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Examine yourself. The people in Corinth were very confident. They were rich, mostly self-made businessman, successful. Paul says, can you just stop for a while, examine yourself, ask yourself - are you saved? Don't assume.

Number 2, are you strong or weak? Do you know where you are in the faith? Kindergarten, Nursery, or grade 1 level? Let me tell you, in the Bible, we are all nursery level. All of us-so called Bible scholars. The Bible is so deep, it's so rich like biology. If any biologists think he's figured out biology, he is insane and arrogant. If any doctors thought he figured out medicine, he is arrogant, he's a fool. Any virologist thinks he understands viruses? God's creation is amazing and the deepest of all is His book, because it shows God. Examine yourself.

What have we learned from 2 Corinthians?

We've learned of God's love. It's not about Paul. Paul just reflects Christ. Christ reflects God. What's God's love? Sacrificial, suffering, serving. To whom? To undeserving people, horrible sinners like the Corinthian church. Paul's love for them, Paul's sacrifice for them-he got nothing, humanly speaking, not one cent from them. But he reflects God's love for us. You're seeing God in the Corinthian church. Who is God? We see Him in Christ. We see Him in Paul. What do you see? You see Paul or you see Christ or you see God?

Another lesson we can learn is, church is a mess. Why? People think they know a lot.

The Corinthian church was a mess because it was a rich church full of arrogant people whose mind was so infused with a sinful understanding of the world's way. God's way is exactly opposite of the world's, that's the theme of this book. God's ways are upside down. You're great by serving, you're rich by giving away. Can a Corinthian, can a Singaporean understand this? No, not easy. A lifetime enough to figure out? Not enough. Eternity? Yes. We see the church a mess because our brain is so infused with success, measured in a worldly way, not God's way.

Hopefully through this we can also identify true servants of God. They're not the scholars, they're not the pulpiteers, they're not the brilliant Bible writers. To me, the best teachers of God are the people whose lives reflect Christ. They can be illiterate, they may only know 5 verses of the Bible because they cannot read. I've seen some in China like that who know so little but their lives are Christlike. So may God bless you with this simple Bible study of a horrible and ungrateful church. But may you see the Agape love of God who is love.

God bless you.