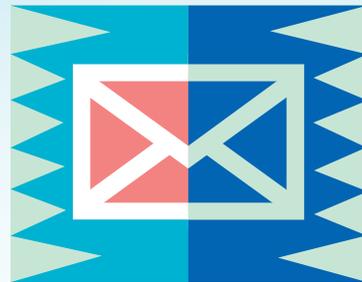
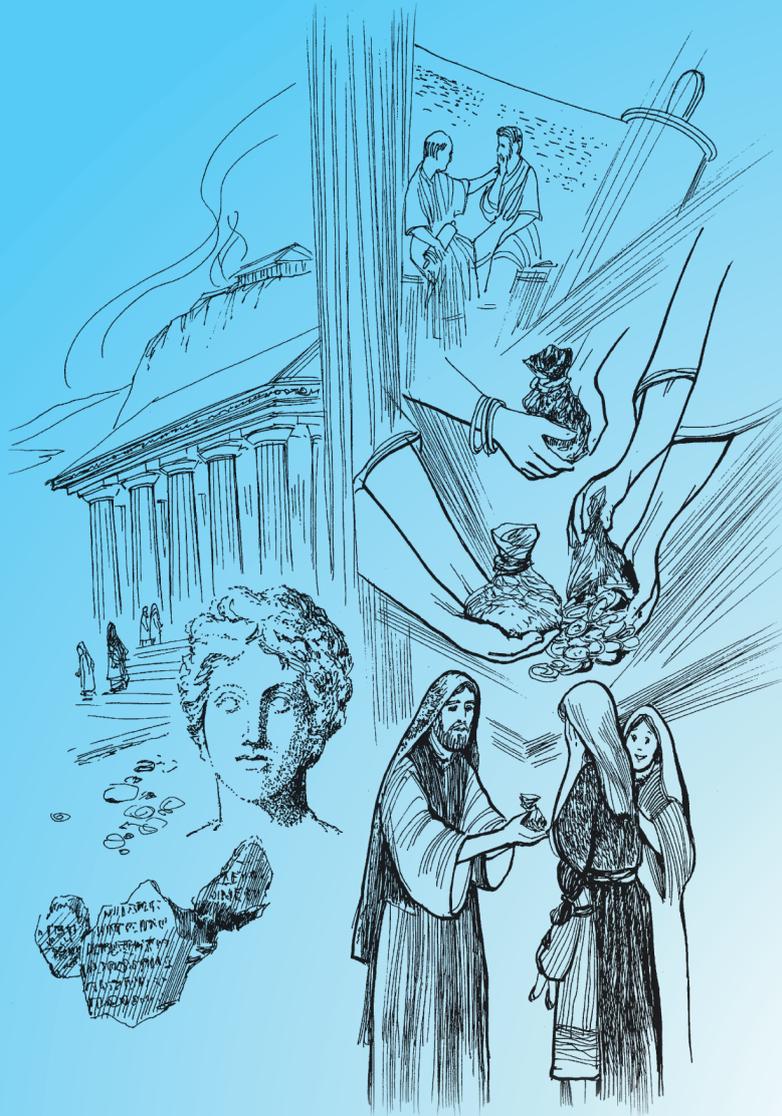


New Testament Survey

Ministry Defended

Studying 2 Corinthians



For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

4



CBLT

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Ministry Defended

2 Corinthians



LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
- II. A Follow-up Letter
 - A. Exploring 2 Corinthians
 - B. Establishing the Historical Perspective
 - 1. Authorship and audience
 - 2. Geography
 - 3. Date
 - 4. General Background
 - C. Examining the Content
 - 1. Theme
 - 2. Key Verse
 - 3. Topics and Teachings
 - 4. 2 Corinthians: Jesus Christ, Our Sufficiency
- III. Conclusion

Self Test

Appendix. Let's Look At 2 Corinthians

LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson you should:

1. Explain why this letter was written.
2. Be able to identify Corinth on a map.
3. Be able to identify the author, audience, basic outline, key verse, and primary theme of 2 Corinthians.
4. Be encouraged to find discipleship patterns from Paul and put them into practice.

5. Be strengthened in your desire to live with integrity and have new ideas about how to develop integrity in your life.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read through the book of 2 Corinthians in its entirety.
2. Read through the entire lesson completing questions and exercises as you come to them.
3. Read Chapter 9 in the Appendix.

WORD STUDY

Acropolis—a very large rock with steep sides on and around which communities were built for easy defense

Aphrodite—the Greek goddess of love, lust, beauty and sexuality

Debauchery—excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures

Integrity—uprightness of character; the condition of being complete or undivided; knowing the absolute standards of God and living your actions accordingly; single-mindedness of heart

I. Introduction

If you have done several lessons in this series you have already studied a few of Paul's epistles and are getting to know him and his style of communication. You can use this knowledge to your advantage as you study 2 Corinthians. You have a second advantage in your study of 2 Corinthians in that you are already familiar with the background information of Corinth. You will come across new information in this lesson, but for now focus on the text and apply all that you have already learned towards understanding 2 Corinthians.

This is a reminder that this lesson consist of questions, exercises and assignments that will help you to dig into this epistle, opening up your understanding to the context in which it was written, and helping you to interact with God's Word. There are answers in the workbook to help you if you get stuck. In addition there is a self test included so that you can review what you have learned.

You need to have a Bible or New Testament which you will feel free to mark up as you will be required to make many markings. When you read, always keep a pen beside you so that you can mark whenever you find something particularly important to you. You will also need a personal notebook for written assignments. In addition there is a supplement, *New Testament Geography and Chronology*, which you must have to complete some of the exercises. If you did not receive one, please ask your leader.

You can do this study on your own, but it will be much more beneficial if you meet with a group and discuss what you are learning and discovering. We are meant to help and encourage and share with each other. It gives all of us more insights and greater joy. And then there is the issue of accountability. So often we have good intentions, but... Life is full and we easily lay aside a study, and then it gets buried. We need to spur each other on! Knowing that you are going to meet with a group often provides that extra incentive to dig in and learn. And every moment spent in the Word of God will build truth into your life and faith in your heart.

II. A Follow-up Letter

Paul gets very personal in this letter. It feels more like a “letter” than any of his other ones in its approach. He is very direct with problems, but his pastor’s heart always shines through.

A. Exploring 2 Corinthians

Second Corinthians has 13 chapters, so you should easily be able to read the whole book in one or two sittings. The maximum amount of time to allow for this is one hour. Remember, if possible you should be reading through the New Testament in your personal quiet time every day so that you will already have a working familiarity with the text.

Also you will be asked to mark several key words in your Bible. As you do this remember not only to mark the exact word but any form of that word so that you get the whole picture.



Exercise 1

Quickly read through 2 Corinthians marking important words. To help you get acquainted with this book we would like you to mark in your Bible some of the key words. This should help you as you continue to study, both during this lesson, and later.

- Green -- “Ministry”
- Yellow -- “Glory”
- Purple -- “Comfort” (in all forms)
- Orange -- “Grace”

Write down in your notebook any observations, comments, questions, key words/phrases, or other information that will help you as you study this book. You may begin to see words that are related to the ones you have marked, and want to include them, or you may find other words which stand out in some special way. Be sure to underline or mark in some way the verses that stand out to you.

Now that you have become acquainted with this book we will move on to an outline. Everyone agrees that there are 3 main divisions to this letter. These are chapters 1-7, chapters 8-9 and chapters 10-13.



Exercise 2

A simple outline of 2 Corinthians. Look over these chapter divisions and create your own title for each section. The outlines below are examples. If you have the time, you might want to make subdivisions under these main sections so that you have a fuller picture of the whole letter. Write your outline in your notebook and be prepared to discuss your titles at the seminar. Leave enough space so that you can add to it from your discussion.

| Basic Outlines of 2 Corinthians | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1-7 | — Past: Misunderstanding and Explanations |
| 8-9 | — Present: Practical Project |
| 10-13 | — Future: Anxieties |
| OR | |
| 1-7 | — Testimonial and Didactic |
| 8-9 | — Practical |
| 10-13 | — Apologetic |

Before continuing the lesson try to take at least a 24-hour break. During this time think about what you have read. Meditate on it. If possible, share with someone something new that you have discovered in or about 2 Corinthians. This is **not** a waste of time. Instead it will embed all of this new information in your mind. Ideally, you should be completing about an hour of homework every day and allowing what you have learned to sink into your mind during the other 23 hours of your day. If you do this, you will find that you will gain much greater benefits from your studies than if you try to cram them in all in one day or into just a few hours.

After you have spent time mulling over 2 Corinthians and solidifying your initial impressions of the letter continue with the lesson.

B. Establishing the Historical Perspective

Often you can gain a clearer understanding of the text by studying the background of it. However, as we learned in the last lesson it is important to always keep the text as the first priority and the background information as the second. If you do study the background of a book it is most important to study the background information that is contained within the Bible itself, such as information about the author and audience and circumstances of writing. It will be more difficult to find information about the language, cultures and customs of the audience/author and information relating to the date of the book in the Bible. This type of information can often be located in extra-biblical books, such as Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias and commentaries. We have chosen to include some of this information in each lesson to help you have the greater historical perspective of each book. However it is always important to keep the Biblical text at the center of your study, rather than the historical context.

Although we have already studied much of the background information for the Corinthian epistles there are still a few things to cover and some things which are good to review.

Answer the following review questions before moving on to the new material.

1. Authorship and audience



Question 1 In which verse is the author of 2 Corinthians revealed? Who was it?



Question 2 To whom was 2 Corinthians written? How do we know?

2. Geography

As with many New Testament letters 2 Corinthians was written for more than one audience. Paul addressed the letter to the Corinthians and indeed it seems that his primary purpose in writing was to address issues in Corinth; however, he also addressed the letter to “all the saints throughout Achaia” and obviously meant the letter for their edification as well. Achaia was the Roman province in which Corinth was located. If you turn now in the supplement, *New Testament Geography and Chronology* to Map 2, you can see the boundaries of this province.



Question 3 What other major city that Paul visited was located in Achaia?

3. Date

As we learned from the last lesson 1 Corinthians was written after A.D. 52, probably in A.D. 55 towards the end of Paul’s three year stay in Ephesus. Since we know that 2 Corinthians was writ-

ten after 1 Corinthians we know that it cannot have been written before A.D. 55. First and 2 Corinthians were written within a short time frame, so it is likely that 2 Corinthians was written in late A.D. 55 or in A.D. 56, just after Paul had left Ephesus and begun traveling towards Corinth through Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:13 and 7:5).



Exercise 3

Plot 2 Corinthians on the dateline. Turn again to the supplement and plot 2 Corinthians in the appropriate blank on the chronology page.



Question 4 Why do you think it is important to know the dates and order of the New Testament books?

Knowing the date of 2 Corinthians and some of the background information helps us to better understand some of Paul's comments and his attitude in writing the letter. It also helps us to keep a perspective on the issues in the Corinthian church as we are reminded again that these believers did not have the whole Bible as we do today.

4. General Background

During the time of Paul Corinth was not only a large, bustling city because of the shipping industry and trade involved with that, but also because it was a religious center. Corinth was the center for the worship of Aphrodite, or as the Romans called her "Venus." The temple of Aphrodite was set on the Acropolis, which was a large hill which rose above the whole city of Corinth and was also called Acrocorinth. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love and beauty. This temple had a thousand priestess/prostitutes who plied their trade in the city daily.

Imagine what it must have been like for the Apostle Paul and the early Christians in Corinth. Every day they had to face this overwhelming assault on their morality. Even just raising their eyes to look above the city they would have seen the temple! The reputation of Corinth was so bad that eventually the term "Corinthian" came to mean one who was morally loose and a drunk. What must it have been like to live in this city that was known for its debauchery? No wonder the Corinthian Christians struggled as they did!

As you continue your studies of the Corinthian letters in the future remember the background of this city and some of the struggles the early believers faced. Think about how different 1 Corinthians 13 must have seemed for those precious believers!

As with any study of background information to the Bible it can be very interesting, but if it does not help us to better apply the Word of God into our lives then it is useless. It is always more important to apply Scripture that we already know than to delve into the background information surrounding the passage--unless it is only through background study that we can understand more clearly how to apply the passage to our lives.

C. Examining the Content

1. Theme

It is difficult to draw one theme out of 2 Corinthians and as with all Bible study it is important not to place our preconceived ideas over what the Biblical text really says. It is easy to identify the author's main theme in many books, but sometimes the author does not appear to have a main

theme and so we must look at the underlying Biblical principles that he is trying to communicate. With this in mind we suggest “live with integrity” as the theme of 2 Corinthians. Paul was certainly not writing directly about integrity in 2 Corinthians and does not even mention the word “integrity,” yet throughout this letter he both defends his own integrity and encourages the Corinthians to show integrity as well.

Live with integrity.

In the first seven chapters Paul lovingly reminds the Corinthians of the way he lived among them as he defends his ministry and apostolic position. In chapters eight and nine he reminds the Corinthians of their commitment to give an offering for the saints in Jerusalem and Paul encourages them to honor their commitment. The last four chapters of the book are a much more strongly worded defense of Paul’s apostolic authority and mission.

Paul’s theme in writing was primarily his apostolic ministry. This is easily visible if you outline 2 Corinthians. The underlying principle that he was trying to communicate was integrity. He was defending his own integrity personally and in ministry. He was also exhorting the Corinthians to live with integrity.

It is quite possible that you discovered another theme in 2 Corinthians such a God’s glory or grace. There are many themes that run throughout this book, but they are not all key themes. We will discuss some of them later in the lesson.



Exercise 4

Confirming the theme of integrity. Read the following verses and then explain how you feel they support the theme.

1:12, 24; 3:2-3; 4:2; 6:3, 6-8; 7:1-2; 11:2-3; 13:11

You may find other verses that you feel also carry through on this. Write them down to share with your group.

2. Key Verse

Because of the difficulty in identifying one key theme for 2 Corinthians it is more difficult to identify a key verse. However, keeping in mind that the principle of integrity is an underlying theme in this letter and also Paul’s focus on ministry, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 is a good suggestion.



Question 5 Write 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 on the lines below.

This verse not only describes Paul’s ministry it also describes integrity. As Christians our understanding of integrity is a little different than that of the world. For us integrity is living always with God’s glory in mind rather than our own. Thus the “love of Christ controls us” and we die to ourselves so that we can live for Him.

3. Topics and Teachings

There are a lot of teachings and topics, both minor and major in these different epistles. We are trying to emphasize the more prominent or important ones, but sometimes include some minor topics for interest sake. You will want to continue to develop this area for each of the epistles as you further your studies in the New Testament.

Paul's example in discipling and pastoring

Paul was very concerned about this church which he had started. He went on to other places and continued in evangelism and planting churches but at the same time he continued to care for the churches he had left behind. There is much we can learn from him as a discipler of others. And much church leaders can learn from how Paul pastored. He stood for truth, rebuked and corrected, but his genuine love for this group constantly shines through.



Exercise 5

Learning from example. Read the following passages and then write down your own observations of what Paul did, how he approached people, what attitude he showed. Look for principles.

1:12—2:10

7:1—16

6:11—13

12:11—21

Now think about how you can emulate Paul in your own situation. How much do you love the people you are mentoring, discipling or pastoring? How do you express that? Do you correct? What is your attitude when you are doing that? How do you respond if your leadership or authority is threatened? Write in your notebook how you are following Paul's example, or what you can change in your personal ministry so that you are.

Comfort

Earlier in this lesson you spent time marking some words that are used frequently in 2 Corinthians. Often with this kind of repetition of the author we can pick out some of his emphases or teachings. The topic of "comfort" is not a major theme in 2 Corinthians. Nevertheless in chapters 2 and 7 it is used quite frequently.



Exercise 6

Summarize what is said about "comfort" in 2 Corinthians. Look at the places you have marked this word, read the content as well as the context, and then summarize what is said about "comfort" with one or two paragraphs in your notebook.

New Covenant

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 Paul uses the word "ministry" as he talks about the part the law had in people's lives. This word as used in this chapter is actually talking about the Old and New Covenant as we see at the beginning of this passage. Notice the contrast between the "ministry of death" and of "condemnation" and the "ministry of the Spirit".



Question 6 What is the other word frequently used in this passage?

Partnership with Unbelievers

One of these topics that is dealt with only briefly but is critical in our Christian lives, especially as we think about living with integrity is covered in 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1. Paul warns against any partnerships with unbelievers.



Question 7 What might be included in not entering into partnerships with unbelievers?

Christian Giving

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1—9:15 now.



Question 8 What does this passage teach about these subjects:

a) How much one should give?

b) What are the rewards are for giving?

c) How pledges of giving should be made and fulfilled?

d) Right attitudes in giving?

Autobiography of Paul

Second Corinthians 11:1—12:10 is another place in the New Testament that we learn about Paul's life. We will cover more details in the next section. Paul's purpose here was to defend his position, authority and ministry in the church.



Exercise 7

Compare your life to Paul's. What have you suffered for Christ? Why should others listen to you? How strong are you?

4. 2 Corinthians: Jesus Christ, Our Sufficiency

Take time now to read Chapter 9 of *A Look at the New Testament* in the appendix. As you read answer the following questions based on the text.



Question 9 What epistle holds the largest portion of Paul's personal history?



Question 10 What four things does Paul tell us about himself that are found only in this letter?

Paul's Ministry



Question 11 What letter of introduction or recommendation did Paul have to show his credentials?

Food for Thought

Examine your visible Christian life. As you read your textbook did you think about your Christian life? How many of your neighbors would recognize from your actions that you are different from them, that you have something that they do not? What about your colleagues at work? Would they say that your honesty and hard-working spirit comes from the fact that you are a Christian? Or would they say, "He's a Christian? I would never have known!"

As you think about these things take some time to pray. Ask God to search your heart and show you the truth about your life. Remember too, that part of the right Christian heart attitude is humility. If we are self-righteous, even if we do everything else right, we will turn many away from Jesus instead of drawing them to Him.

Both of the epistles to the Corinthians stress the importance of Christian living. In both we find Paul reminding us that our actions are noticed by others and we should always seek to abstain from all appearance of evil so as not to be a stumbling block to others. People are looking at us, evaluating us. They might never open the Bible, but they see you.



Question 12 How can sorrow and suffering be a blessing to us?



Question 13 What is the difference between a pessimist and an optimist?

Which would you rather be?



Question 14 What is the wonderful hope that should affect our daily actions?



Question 15 Why should this hope change our lives?

Next time when you come against something which you find inconvenient, frustrating or painful think about how short it will last in comparison to heaven with Jesus.



Question 16 What was the aim of Paul's ministry?

Liberal Giving

Now let us turn again to the topic of giving. Open your Bible and read 2 Corinthians 8:9.



Question 17 Write out this verse.



Question 18 What kind of riches do you have—from Christ? How important are they?



Question 19 How should we give? And how is this possible?

Wrong Standards of Measure

One of the peculiarities of us Christians is how we judge others rigorously, and then measure ourselves against others to prove how “good” we are.



Question 20 What is our true standard?



Exercise 8

Realign your standards. How do you measure yourself? Are you comparing yourself with average Christians or with Christ in your character, self-sacrifice and consecration? How do you measure up when you compare yourself to the standard of Jesus? Let’s take a few basic areas in which you can evaluate yourself. First write down how you think you compare to the average member in your church, then how you compare to Christ Jesus.

- Witnessing
- Prayer
- Serving among believers
- Character

(list areas you think you excel and then compare to Christ) This is for your own benefit, but write it down in your notebook.

Paul in Third Heaven

Can you think of people who have enjoyed a special experience with God of some sort, but have also had heavy physical afflictions?



Question 21 What was Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”?

Why Thorns?



Question 22 Why are “thorns” good?



Question 23 Are you satisfied with Jesus? Do not answer this question quickly, but think and pray about it, opening your heart to God's.

Now that you have read the whole chapter, let's return to Mears' subtitle, "2 Corinthians Portrays Jesus Christ, Our Sufficiency".



Question 24 Which verse speaks about Christ's sufficiency?

Compare that verse with 3:5.



Question 25 Write a personal statement of how God is sufficient for you.

Can you see how tightly integrated this portrayal of Christ is to the key teaching of 2 Corinthians: The way to glory is the way of the cross. There is no possible way for us to be able to take the way of the cross of Christ without the Christ of the cross. He provides everything we need for this supernatural life we seek to live.

III. Conclusion

Congratulations! If you also have done Lesson 3, you have completed a foundational study of 1 and 2 Corinthians. By doing studies like this throughout this course you are developing a foundation for all of your future reading, studying and teaching in and from the Word of God. You are developing a solid familiarity with the content of each book and glimpsing the "big picture" of the continuity of God's work throughout the New Testament. Remember that your purpose as you work through these lessons is not to develop an intimacy with each book, but to lay a foundation so that you can do that in the future!

The other lessons included in this series of *New Testament Survey 2* are:

Lesson 1—James and Galatians—*The Truth about Faith*

Lesson 2—1 and 2 Thessalonians —*Standing Firm in Persecution*

Lesson 3—1 Corinthians — *Problems of the Church*

Lesson 5— Romans — *Righteousness by Faith*

Lesson 6— Colossians and Ephesians — *Christ and His Church*

Lesson 7— Philemon and Philippians — *Joy and Forgiveness*

Lesson 8—1 Timothy and Titus—*Church Leadership*

Lesson 9—1 Peter, 2 Timothy & 2 Peter—*Encouragement and Warnings*

Lesson 10— Hebrews—*The New Covenant*

Lesson 11—Jude, 1, 2 & 3 John—*Love in Action*

Lesson 12—The Revelation—*Climax of the Ages*

Keep in mind that by laying this solid foundation of familiarity with the content of the New Testament you are preparing yourself thoroughly for Christian life and ministry.

We can say in the words of Paul, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

Self Test

Score: ___/99

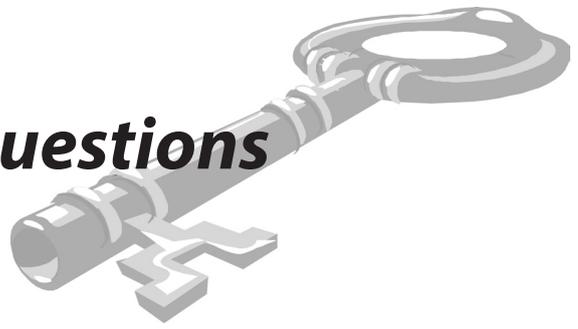
True and False (7 points each, ___/84)

1. ___ Second Corinthians was written within a year of 1 Corinthians.
2. ___ There was a large temple to Hera in Corinth.
3. ___ A key word in 2 Corinthians is “glory”.
4. ___ Another key word is “grace”.
5. ___ The theme for 2 Corinthians is “Live with honor”.
6. ___ The key verse for 2 Corinthians is 5:14-15.
7. ___ The key verse says, “So that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”
8. ___ Mear’s title for Jesus in 2 Corinthians is “Jesus Christ, Our Satisfaction”.
9. ___ Christian giving is an important theme in 2 Corinthians.
10. ___ Second Corinthians is addressed to all the saints throughout Achaia.
11. ___ It was most likely written while Paul was still in Ephesus.
12. ___ Paul included much teaching on the sufficiency of the cross in 2 Corinthians.

Fill in the Blank (3 points each, ___/15)

| Basic Outlines of 2 Corinthians | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1-7 — (1)_____: | Misunderstanding and Explanations |
| 8-9 — (2)_____: | Practical Project |
| 10-13 — (3)_____: | Anxieties |
| OR | |
| 1-7 — Testimonial and Didactic | |
| 8-9 — (4)_____ | |
| (5)_____ — | Apologetic |

Answers to Questions



Question 1

2 Corinthians 1:1; Paul.

Question 2

Second Corinthians was written to the church in Corinth and all the believers throughout Achaia. We know this because it is stated in 2 Corinthians 1:1.

Question 3

Athens.

Question 4

Your answer. Although knowing the dates and chronology of most Bible books is not crucial to interpreting and applying them it can help us to better understand the content and occasionally it clarifies certain issues.

Question 5

See 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 in your Bible.

Question 6

Glory.

Question 7

Your answer should include marrying an unbeliever and business partnerships with unbelievers.

Question 8

- a) According to your ability and beyond it (8:3).
- b) God will increase the harvest of your righteousness (9:10) and provide sufficiency in everything (9:8).
- c) Pledges should be made with readiness and a commitment to fulfill them (8:11). They should be fulfilled readily, not grudgingly (9:7).
- d) We should desire it and have an attitude like Christ (8:8-9). We should give with thanksgiving (9:12) and cheerfully (9:7).

Question 9

2 Corinthians.

Question 10

- 1. His escape from Damascus in a basket.
- 2. His experience of being caught up to the third heaven.
- 3. His thorn in the flesh.
- 4. His unusual suffering.

Question 11

The Corinthian church was the letter that proved all that needed to be proved (2 Corinthians 3:2).

Question 12

If we let them, they will draw us closer to God.

Question 13

A pessimist sees a difficulty in every opportunity, but an optimist sees an opportunity in every difficulty.

Question 14

We have the hope of the resurrection, of being together with Jesus without any of the hindrances of this sinful world!

Question 15

The knowledge that there is more to life than this life should have great impact on our lives. Death holds no fear for those who understand that it is the door to perfect communion with Jesus! The sufferings and inconveniences of this life become as nothing when we set our eyes on an eternity in His arms.

Question 16

The aim of Paul's ministry was that men be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Question 17

See 2 Corinthians 8:9 in your Bible.

Question 18

Everything we have is from Him; He gave all for us. We are always abundant in spiritual blessings as we serve Him. And when we have physical riches, those are also from Him.

Question 19

We should give

- out of our poverty,
- generously,
- willingly,
- proportionately,
- cheerfully, and
- bountifully.

This is only possible if we have given ourselves and our possessions wholly to Jesus Christ for His glory.

Question 20

Christ Himself.

Question 21

We don't know, God did not include that in the Bible.

Question 22

A “thorn in the flesh” will often push us to depend on God more fully or in new areas that we have not yet given to Him.

Question 23

Your answer.

Question 24

2 Corinthians 12:9.

Question 25

As you write this statement you need to think if it is actually true in your life. Do you believe it?

Answers to Exercises



Exercise 1

“Minister” or a form of that should be found at least 10 times.

“Glory” occurs 19 times.

“Comfort” 19 times.

“Grace” occurs 10 times in 2 Corinthians.

Exercise 2

Your outline should reflect the three main divisions of 2 Corinthians.

Exercise 3

Your answer.

Exercise 4

Your answer.

Exercise 5

Your answer.

You may not think you have any disciples. If so you need to think about what you are doing with your Christian life. Why are you not helping other believers to grow in their Christian life? Are you not growing yourself? If you are, then you need to be looking for someone that you can help and encourage. It may start very informally and irregularly but begin to invest yourself in others.

If you are in any church leadership position then look at how you can mentor others, or how you can improve what you are doing. Are you helping the body to know truth, walk in truth? Are you correcting them when you see problems? If not, are you shirking your responsibility? What is your attitude when you do correct? Are you able to assure people of your love and how you value you them while you also make sure they understand the problem and their part in it?

Exercise 6

Your answer. Be prepared to share in the seminar.

Exercise 7

Your answer. This is a time to compare your commitment with that of a great man of God. Maybe you have not yet been called on to suffer like Paul did, but would you be willing if Christ asked you to do so? If you are not willing, what kind of influence will you have in your church?

Exercise 8

Your answer. And now you have ANOTHER opportunity to examine your own life. This is how we let the Word of God sink deep into our hearts and lives.

Answers to Self Test



True and False

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. T
7. F
8. F
9. T
10. T
11. F
12. F

Fill in the Blanks

1. Past
2. Present
3. Future
4. Practical
5. 10-13

Let's Look At 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians Portrays Jesus Christ, Our Sufficiency

Chapter 9 from *A Look at the New Testament* by Henrietta Mears¹

Paul was somewhat worried as to how the church at Corinth would receive his first letter. He wondered how they had accepted his rebukes, so he sent Titus, and perhaps Timothy, to Corinth to find out the effect of his epistle. During Paul's third missionary journey, while he was in Philippi, Titus reported that the majority of the church had received the letter in the proper spirit. But there were those who doubted his motives, and even denied his apostleship, saying that he did not have the proper credentials for an apostle. Perhaps they questioned this because he was not one of the original Twelve. These enemies were bitter and tried to undermine him and his authority.

Under these circumstances he wrote his second epistle, to express his joy over the encouraging news of how his first epistle had been received, and to defend his apostleship.

Paul gives more of his personal history in this letter than in any of his other epistles. He reveals his courage and his self-sacrificing love. He speaks of glorying or boasting thirty-one times, because he was compelled to. Read 2 Corinthians 12:11. *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.*

Paul tells us of some things which happened in his life, that are revealed only in this letter.

- His escape from Damascus in a basket. (11:32,33)
- His experience of being caught up to the third heaven. (12:1-4)
- His thorn in the flesh. (12:7)
- His unusual suffering. (11:23-27)

He told none of these until he was compelled to, to prove that if he wanted to boast, he had good reason to do so.

¹ Used by permission.

Paul's Ministry

(Read 2 Corinthians 1-7)

Paul opens this second epistle with his usual greeting and thanksgiving (2 Cor. 1:1-3). Everyone loves a true story. Paul tells so many personal experiences of his life in this letter that it makes everyone love to read it. He begins by telling of the great trouble through which he has been passing. Through all of his trials he had learned to know God better. God is always made more real to us in times of sorrow. We find that God never fails.

Paul's sufferings in Asia were of a very serious nature. Very likely he went through a dangerous sickness in which they despaired of his life (2 Cor. 1:4-11). He appreciated their prayers and now he was appealing to their love and sympathy. He wanted them to be ready for much that he was to write about, concerning the defense of his apostleship.

Paul had a clear conscience as to his sincerity and faithfulness while he labored among them. He explained that he sent his first letter instead of coming himself, that when he did come he might be able to praise and not scold them (2 Cor. 1:23-2:4). To this statement he calls God to witness.

The Judaizing teachers (or law teachers) of Paul's day always carried letters of introduction with them. They were Paul's chief trouble-makers. They tried in every way to fight him. We hear them asking, "Who is this Paul? What letters of recommendation from Jerusalem does he have?" How foolish this question was to Paul! Did he need a letter of recommendation to a church which he himself had established? *Why*, he answers, *ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.* (2 Cor. 3:2) This letter is not written with ink upon paper, but with the Spirit on Christian hearts.

The lives of true Christians at Corinth served as letters to recommend both Paul the servant and Christ the Lord. Men read men. Living epistles are read when Bible epistles are not. Remember your life is an open letter. Christian lives are about the only religious books the world reads. They do not study God's Word but they do study church members. This gives us a great opportunity for good, for we may lead men to Christ. It also carries a great possibility of evil, for we may drive men from Christ. If ever Christian living were necessary it is now.

Paul's ministry is a triumphant one, but it is filled with suffering. Warfare always is full of illustrations of triumph through suffering. Victory costs! Paul tells us much about his tribulations (2 Cor. 4: 6, 11). When he was so gloriously converted, the Lord said, *I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake* (Acts 9:16). It seems as though the trials began immediately, and followed his pathway for thirty years. But Paul was always optimistic because he knew that afflictions here would increase glory beyond (2 Cor. 4:17, 18).

- The pessimist sees a difficulty in every opportunity.
- The optimist sees an opportunity in every difficulty.

Paul could sing as he suffered, for he knew the wonderful grace of God. He was always conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that the greater the suffering in this present world, the greater the glory of eternity (2 Cor. 4:8-18). Paul lived with his eye on the future! He was a dealer in futures!

Christ nowhere promises that a Christian will be free from suffering or sorrow. Rather do we hear that *in the world ye shall have tribulation.* (John 16:33) Christ allows us to get into trouble that He may deliver us. He allowed Daniel to be put into the den of lions that He might pull him out. He allowed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to go into the fiery furnace that He might deliver them. He allowed Paul to be shipwrecked that He might save him. Our God is able to deliver!

Paul finds his comfort through all his troubles in the fact of the resurrection. He lived under the inspiration of the fact that one day he was to have a changed, glorified body. Our suffering bodies

will soon be exchanged for painless glorified bodies. Whether we live or die, we must keep this reward in view. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* (2 Cor. 5:10)

The aim of Paul's ministry is that men may be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). Men are God's greatest concern. As Christ's ambassador he makes his appeal to men of the world.

He follows this with an appeal to holy living (6:11-7:16). Holy living means wholly unto God. Read these verses, everyone! He appeals to his fellow-workers not to receive God's loving-kindness in vain, but to open their hearts to Him. God demands a clean and separated life. He wants Christians to separate themselves from unbelievers. They were living in a heathen atmosphere and the Corinthians were lax in their morals.

Liberal Giving

(Read 2 Corinthians 8; 9)

Paul tells the church at Corinth of the generosity of the churches of Macedonia to the Palestine Famine Fund. Although poor themselves, they begged for an opportunity to give, and they gave liberally because first they gave themselves to the Lord. The fund was gathered from all the churches of Asia Minor and Greece. It had been started a year before (8:10). Paul was in Macedonia at the time he wrote this. He had accepted no pay for his work from any of the churches except Philippi. Christ was the example of these early Christians (2 Cor. 8:9).

How To Give

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Give out of your poverty..... | (8:2) |
| Give generously | (8:3) |
| Give willingly..... | (9:7) |
| Give proportionately | (8:12,13,14) |
| Give cheerfully..... | (9:7) |
| Give bountifully..... | (9:6) |

All this was because they first gave themselves to Christ. The Lord knows that if He gets us, He will get our gifts and our service.

A young soldier called his mother from New York. She hadn't heard his voice for twenty months. "Hello, Mom; this is Tom. I'm coming home. What can I bring you? I want to bring you something because I love you heaps, Mom." From the other end of the wire a voice, broken with emotion and joy, said tenderly, "Nothing, dear. I don't want anything but just you. Come home as fast as you can. I just can't wait to see you." This is what Jesus wants. He knows that if He has us, He will get our love and our service.

God has ever promised to reward the generous giver (9:6). He enriches us with spiritual graces as well as with material things. These gifts strengthened the ties of brotherhood between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. *Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!* (2 Cor. 9:15)

This is the reason for our giving, *for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.* God himself delights to give.

Someone asked Captain Levy of Philadelphia how he was able to give so much and still have so much left. "Oh," said he, "as I shovel out, He shovels in; and the Lord has a bigger shovel than I have."

Paul's Apostleship

(Read 2 Corinthians 10-13)

The charge against Paul by some in the church was that he was a coward. He was bold in his writings, but was weak in personality. The New Testament gives us no suggestion as to what Paul looked like. To imagine that this man, who turned city after city upside down, was weak is absurd. He was a powerful and dominating person. He was a man of outstanding gifts and had a keen and inquiring mind. Beside this, Christ lived in him and worked through him. He was hidden behind the cross.

His enemies said that no apostle would work with his own hands and support himself. They pointed to the other apostles, but Paul explained that he had the right to receive pay, yet refused it lest his example be abused by those false teachers who would commercialize the ministry. He declared that at least he founded his own churches and did not go around troubling churches founded by others, as they were doing.

Wrong Standards Of Measure

They measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among them, are not wise.
(2 Cor. 10:12-18)

We all have a tendency to take a wrong standard for measuring character. We compare ourselves among ourselves. We conclude we are "as good as the average." But average Christians are not what the Bible requires. Let us pray Wesley's prayer, "Lord, make me an extraordinary Christian." Like the businessman who compares his weights and measures with the great government standards, we have a true test when we compare ourselves with the standard of Christ. When a man five feet six inches tall compares himself with a man five feet three inches tall, he concludes he is of quite good size. But how he shrinks when you place him beside a man six feet two! Are you comparing yourselves with average Christians or with Christ in your character, self-sacrifice and consecration?

Paul in Third Heaven

He was caught up into "Paradise," even to the third heaven. You recall that Jesus went into Paradise at His death. (Luke 23:43) There Paul had been given marvelous visions and revelations, and heard things that could not be put into speech (12:4). No doubt no human language could describe the glory. It would have been like trying to picture a sunset to a man born blind. Paul had nothing to compare it with that we could understand.

It seemed as though because of these heavenly experiences God allowed Paul to suffer a physical weakness. The Lord knows the danger of pride of heart after such an experience, and so He permitted "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." He himself called his affliction "a thorn in the flesh." (12:7) There have been many speculations as to what this "thorn" really was. It would appear that God had left out just what it was that all might know that the grace which was sufficient for Paul in his trouble would be enough for any thorn given to man.

Why Thorns?

Many wonder why God does not remove "thorns" from the flesh when we pray to Him. We must learn that God always answers prayer, but sometimes the answer is "No." He knows it will be better for us to bear the thorn than be without it. "Thorns" in the flesh have made many a man lean on Christ.

Dr. Moon, the brilliant man whose blind eyes made him give to the world the system of reading that others with blind eyes might know the joy of acquiring knowledge, came to the realization

that his “thorn” was a blessing. Sometimes a “thorn” is a warning to keep us from sin and failure. God proved to Paul that no matter what his weakness was, His strength was sufficient.

Someone said to a humble Christian woman, rich toward God: “Are you the woman with the great faith?” “Oh, no,” said she; “I am the woman with a little faith in a great God!”

A minister one day buried his only child. He went into his study the next day to prepare his message for Sunday, but he could not. His grief was too great. Through his tears, which would insist upon coursing down his cheeks, his eyes fell on these words: “My grace is sufficient.” It seemed to read this way: “My grace IS sufficient.” He wrote it that way on a card and hung it in front of his desk. He learned to know a God who is always present. Every word is important. Examine it word for word.

My—means God.

Grace—unmerited favor. I bring Christ what I have, my sin. He brings me what He has—His righteousness. The exchange is made. He takes my sin and gives me His righteousness. This is grace, wonderful grace!

Is—the present, always.

Sufficient—enough and to spare. *Our sufficiency is of God* (3:5). Here is where Spurgeon laughed out loud. “To think,” said he, “that our little cups could exhaust the ocean of His grace.”

We are satisfied with Jesus. Is He your personal comfort? God gives us unusual strength for unusual tasks. Paul says, *When I am weak, then am I strong*. (12:10)

It is when we are going through the sorrows of life that we discover our real friends. Suffering and trouble have done more than anything else to let men know what a great God they have. What a great God Daniel knew he had, when he was in the lions’ den! What a great God the three young men in the fiery furnace knew as their champion!

There is strength and courage in the heart in which Christ is dwelling.

2 Corinthians closes with the benediction which today brings to a close many a church service. Here it is. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen* (2 Cor. 13:14).

