



# Corinthians

# Weak

# is strong

Studies in the book of 2 Corinthians

**PART FOUR:** Weeks 24-31

Group Applications

Personal Study





# Week 24

## 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 (ESV)

**I**, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— 2 I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. 3 For though we

walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

### Context

- **10:1** When Paul speaks of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, he is pointing to the way in which Christ walked humbly before men with kindness and compassion despite his incredible power and wisdom. Meekness is not weakness, but rather power under control. In fact, the word “meekness” (*praÿtēs*) is often translated as gentleness and is described as one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. Paul comes with all the thunder and authority of an Apostle, but he does not lord it over the Corinthians to fuel his own ego trip, but rather takes painstaking measures to ensure that he does not wound them beyond what is necessary—only inasmuch as it pushes them towards holiness and love for each other.
- **10:3** Paul does a little wordplay here—he is apparently being accused by false teachers in Corinth of “walking in the flesh” or living by his worldly lusts and passions. He takes this accusation and flips it on its head. He says he is walking in the flesh physically speaking—he lives in a body of flesh and is a physical human being. In that sense, Christians all “walk in the flesh.” But Paul makes a distinction in the next phrase when he says that “we are not waging war according to the flesh.” In other words, yes, we are “in the flesh” human beings

in a fallen world, and we do not live according to what we are now, but what we have become in Christ. This short phrase is a portrait of the Christian life—we are in the flesh physically, but spiritually we live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **10:4** Paul furthers his point: he does not walk according to the flesh in the way the false teachers accuse him of doing because he's not even fighting on that level. He knows his is a spiritual battle and not a physical one. In John 18, the Apostle Peter sliced off the ear of the servant of one of Christ's enemies in an effort to protect Jesus, but in response, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Jesus knew the battle he was going to fight was not a physical one against political enemies, but a spiritual one against sin and death.
- **10:5** This is the only instance of the New Testament using the word "stronghold." Paul here is referring to the system of ideas, arguments and false teachings set against Christ. Whenever people go into battle, the most important thing is to know where you are shooting and who your target is. Paul's battle is his preaching of the word of God against human opinions, philosophies and arguments so that the message of the gospel can go forth. This is an

important reminder on why theology and doctrine are so important—we are in a spiritual war against ideas. Every Netflix show, blockbuster film, song lyric and advertisement is putting forth a lofty opinion or argument that either aligns with Christianity or wars against it.

- **10:5-6** Paul's goal, however, is not just to defeat his spiritual enemies, but to take them captive and make them obey Christ. The warlike image here is of an army destroying the walls and defenses of a kingdom, and then taking the people inside captive and forcing them to work for the cause of the conqueror. In the same sense, Paul is saying that things like philosophy, mathematics, economics and science can be conquered, taken captive, and used to serve the purposes of the kingdom of God. Paul did not view "secular" culture as a forest to be avoided, but a wilderness to be conquered, subdued, and brought into submission to Christ.

# Personal Study

- Read Ephesians 6:10-20. Explain how it reinforces what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

---

---

---

---

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. How does this shed light on Paul's mindset in dealing with slander and accusation?

---

---

---

---

- How can you apply the principles of 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 to how you deal with hostility and criticism?

---

---

---

---

- Where in your life do you see the kind of warfare that Paul speaks of taking place? In what ways can you improve your effectiveness in these spiritual battles?

---

---

---

---



# Group Application

- What are some arguments and “lofty opinions” that you hear thrown at Christianity today?

---

---

---

- How does the Apostle Paul encourage us to engage the world and its arguments and “lofty opinions?” (See 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 for additional help.)

---

---

---

- Paul commends us to be meek, gentle, and humble, yet bold and confident when we address someone in the wrong. How do we balance these seemingly opposite characteristics? What are common challenges to being meek and gentle within conflict, especially when you are in the right?

---

---

---

- When should Christians care what others think of them? When should they not?

---

---

---

- Describe a time when you either shared your faith or corrected someone who was in error. How can you apply this chapter to the next time you speak with a person who has an argument against Christianity? Is there someone today that you need to pursue? If so, ask the group to pray for you.

---

---

---

# Short Reading

## **From Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction by Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen<sup>1</sup>**

Some people say that philosophy is not practical. Nothing could be further from the truth. As we noted above, not everyone should become a professional philosopher, just as not every Christian should become a professional theologian. But just as a basic knowledge of Christian doctrine is indispensable, so a basic understanding of Christian philosophy is of enormous practical value. Our societies are shaped according to particular philosophies, and the result is that, no matter what areas of life we serve in, an understanding of philosophy is helpful.

Take nurses and doctors, for example. In countries like Canada and the United Kingdom where there are national health systems, medical professionals are being stretched to the limit and becoming increasingly mechanical and impersonal. How is it that Western health care has become this way, and how should Christians operate within it? What does a doctor do when his or her Christian faith conflicts with

a course of treatment a patient wants and perhaps demands? A Christian philosophy and history of health care are key elements in beginning to orient oneself in this system. At the very least, they will alert one to the fact that it does not have to be this way.

Athletics and sports are great gifts, and many of us enjoy the entertainment they provide. But in our world they are also locales of idols, and many young people find themselves pushed into living for their sport and making winning everything. A philosophy of sport will provide a healthy orientation toward the values and limits of sport and orient the Christian healthily in what is often a distorted area of our world.

An energetic youth pastor is wondering how best to develop the youth ministry in his growing church. Numbers at Friday night meetings range from fifteen to sixty. Does he try to compete with alternative entertainment, or what exactly does he do to build a lasting youth ministry? A philosophy of the institutional church and its distinctive characteristics, as well as its relationship to other spheres of society, will help this youth pastor in discerning the biblical focus of youth ministry.

Some recent converts are worried about their children, who are attending a local government school. The children's language and behavior are becoming more and more

<sup>1</sup> Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen (2013-10-15). *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction*. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition (p. 9-10).

uncontrollable. What should the parents do? Again, a basic understanding of philosophy of education is of enormous help to such parents as they seek to form the lives of their children.

As a professor of philosophy, Craig is often asked by students why they should consider a major in philosophy. What will they do with it, and how will it help them get a job after university? It is unfortunately true that philosophers are not in great demand in our societies. In ancient Greece, the sophists were like the rock stars of the day and could charge considerable sums for their instruction. How times have changed! Of course, if you plan to become a philosopher, then a major in philosophy is essential, but a good plan for other students is to pursue majors in their subject of choice and minors

in philosophy, provided they have access to a good, Christian philosophy department. Jean Vanier is world renowned for his founding of L'Arche, whose communities are now spread throughout the world. It is less well known that Vanier holds a doctorate in philosophy on Aristotle and well into his L'Arche work published a book on the value of Aristotle's philosophy. We have also found that students who go on to graduate school with a grounding in Christian philosophy tend to cope better than those without such training.

And so we could continue. Because God is the Creator and because his order is comprehensive in that it relates to all of life, there is not an area of practical human life for which a Christian philosophy will not provide helpful insight.

# Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Week 25

## 2 Corinthians 10:7–18 (ESV)

**L**ook at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. 15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, 16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. 17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

### Context

- **10:7-12** Paul deals with his critics on two levels. First, he points out that he is not overstepping his bounds by exercising authority and influence for

his calling as an Apostle is from God. Second, he points out that people who need to commend themselves for an ego boost are ignorant and without understanding, so the Corinthians ought to be careful in listening to these guys.

- **10:7** Paul's appeals for unity have been vast and deep. He has referenced his message, his character, the history of their relationship and now, he points to the common ground of union with Christ. In the midst of all Christian disagreement is the fantastically significant reality that we are bound together eternally. We are family. If anyone is Christ's, so are we. This means that community is not a superfluous nicety in the Christian life. Where believers allow division and enmity to exist between brothers and sisters, it is a rejection of the inherited union in Christ.
- **10:8** Paul understands that God has given authority to him in order to build up the church. This is a crucial point not only for the church at Corinth, but for us as well. Paul recognizes that his Apostolic authority is not meant to be lorded over the Corinthians, but used to serve and build them up. He does not throw away the idea of authority as many in the modern church may be tempted to do, but recasts it in a biblical light, as God's ordained means by which he orders and protects the church.
- **10:10** Apparently the false apostles that were criticizing Paul's ministry pulled no punches when it came to insults. The first century church had just as many issues with politics and division as the

modern day church. Paul's opponents mercilessly attacked his physical stature and speech while also slandering his character by saying his bark was bigger than his bite. Perhaps here, more than in any other of his letters, we see Paul's methods of dealing with relational conflict in a God-honoring way.

- **10:13-17** The Greek word for boast (καυχάομαι) means exactly what you'd think: To brag or glory in oneself. It is a consistent theme for Paul throughout his writing. Writing in six different books, he uses this word 34 times. James is the only other NT writer to do so, using it only twice. It makes a person wonder if pride was a particular temptation for Paul as success can often be harder to handle than failure.
- **10:17-18** Ultimately, Paul recognizes that the only approval that matters is God's approval. This is a powerful argument against the self-promoting agenda of the false apostles, because here Paul draws a line in the sand. If you want to be on the right side of things, you'd better side with the guy that is approved by God and not the guy who is the most charismatic, eloquent or politically powerful.



# Personal Study

- Read 1 John 4:6. How does this passage relate to 2 Corinthians 10:7?

---

---

---

- » What is Paul claiming about his ministry in this passage?

---

---

---

- » Why is Paul so adamant about defending his authority?

---

---

---

- » How would you describe Paul's tone in these verses?

---

---

---

- » Why does he write in this way?

---

---

---

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. How do these verses inform Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 10:7-18?

---

---

---

- What are your temptations when others unfairly criticize you?

---

---

---

## Group Application

- Share a time when you were criticized. How was it helpful or unhelpful?

---

---

---

- What is the difference between unfair criticism and constructive criticism?

---

---

---

- Are there times when unfair criticism can be useful? If so, in what ways?

---

---

---

- What are some ways you can respond with integrity to people in your life who are unfairly criticizing or attacking you?
- 
- 
- 

- What are some areas in which you are tempted to boast in yourself and not in the Lord?
- 
- 
- 

## Short Reading

### **The Secret to a Happy Life** by R.C. Sproul<sup>1</sup>

James is sometimes called the “New Testament book of Proverbs.” That’s because of passages such as James 4 that give us a series of loosely linked aphorisms of practical, godly wisdom. This chapter begins with our universal concern about conflict:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive,

because you ask wrongly, to spend on your passions. (James 4:1-3)

The world is marked by warfare. There’s global war and national conflict; there’s warfare in the church; there’s warfare in the community; there’s warfare in the home—there’s conflict all around us. James says that these quarrels, fights, disputes, and contentions come from within, from the fallenness of our hearts. The motivation for these conflicts is envy, or covetousness, which is a transgression we rarely hear about in our own day.

Conflict is the fruit of covetous hearts that want what others have. Now, it’s not inherently wrong to want something we don’t have. James’ statement that we do not have because we do not ask implicitly calls us to ask God to give us our desires. We should feel no shame when we desire good things as long as our desire does

---

<sup>1</sup> Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2008. Print.



not make those good things into idols. The warning against covetousness comes into play when James acknowledges that sometimes we ask wrongly for what we don't have. Sometimes we ask for good things in the wrong spirit.

What does this mean? Consider that we ask for things because we believe they will make us happy. This turns into covetousness when we believe that we have an inalienable right to pursue pleasure as the source of happiness. Maximizing pleasure is our culture's chief

goal, but happiness and pleasure are profoundly different.

I'm not opposed to pleasure. I enjoy pleasure. But remember, sin is tempting because it can be pleasurable—in the short term. We sin because we think it will feel good. Every time we sin, we believe the original lie of Satan, who tempts us that we will be happy if we get the pleasure we want. Hedonism, which defines the good in terms of the pleasurable, is the oldest philosophy to oppose God.

## Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

20 horizontal lines for writing.

# Week 26

## 2 Corinthians 11:1–15 (ESV)

**I**wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 2 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. 5 Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. 6 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by

accepting support from them in order to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. 11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

# Context

- **11:1-3** When Paul speaks of presenting the church at Corinth as a pure virgin to Christ, he is referring to a Jewish father's responsibility to protect his engaged daughter from sexual immorality until her wedding day. Paul is saying that he has this fatherly love for the church and wants to make sure she is devoted to the real Christ rather than the false Christ his critics are presenting. For Paul to fail in doing this is to allow his engaged daughter to fall in love with another man.
- **11:4** Paul's words here echo his forceful warnings to the churches at Galatia against the Judaizers, a party within the church that claimed Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be Christians. In both cases, Paul has no patience with false teachers and feels zero remorse for calling them out for what they are. He wants it to be clear -- they are not giving a modified gospel, a more nuanced gospel, or a "fresh take" on the gospel, but a completely different gospel with no hope.
- **11:5-6** Paul brings in his response to the so-called "super-apostles." He concedes that he may not light it up as a public speaker, but he has something the super-apostles do not: true knowledge of Jesus Christ and his gospel. Furthermore, Paul not only knew the gospel, but he preached the gospel with full clarity and held nothing back. One of the marks of a cult is that the leader hides information from his followers and only dispenses it when they fulfill his requirements. Paul does no such thing. He has made it known from the beginning who Jesus is and what the gospel means.
- **11:7-11** It is ironic that Paul is considered by his critics to be an ineloquent man, because he writes with sharp wit. He asks the Corinthians who are doubting his credibility if he was sinning in providing the gospel free of charge. It's almost like Paul is saying, "I guess I'm the bad guy for sacrificing for your sake." He goes out of his way to show how absurd their distrust of him is. He "robbed" the church of Macedonia that could have used the money and made sure he did not burden Corinth with any of his needs so that he could demonstrate his love for them.
- **11:13-15** False teachers generally do not parade around wearing hats saying "heretic" on them. Rather, as Paul points out, they show up dressed like righteous and godly men who just love Jesus and the gospel, in the same way Judas cared so much about the poor. Paul wants Corinth to be discerning and not naive. False teachers will tell you what you want to hear and will talk all day about Jesus, but it's not the real Jesus. And by the way, they're just working out of Satan's playbook. Be on the watch.

# Personal Study

- Why do you think Paul's critics called themselves "super-apostles?" What does this tell you about their character?

---

---

---

- Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. How does this enforce Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 11:6?

---

---

---

- Would Paul have been out of line for asking Corinth to support him? Why or why not?

---

---

---

- Pray and consider whether God may want you to help support an overseas missionary from the local church.

---

---

---

- What is one example from Scripture of a false teacher? What are some characteristics you need to watch for?

---

---

---

# Group Application

- What are examples of false gospels today? Why are they attractive?

---

---

---

---

- How did Satan tempt and deceive Eve in Genesis 3? How was Satan cunningly seeking to deceive the Corinthian church?

---

---

---

---

- What is Satan currently tempting you with? How can you resist him? How can your fellowship group help with this fight?

---

---

---

---

- Paul sought to humble himself in order to honor and exalt the Corinthians. What are some ways you can humble yourself so that others may be exalted this week?

---

---

---

---

# Short Reading

## **From The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians by D.A. Carson<sup>1</sup>**

Paul begins by telling the Corinthians how they ought to think of Christian leaders: “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God” (4:1). Two elements stand out, and both are tied to things Paul has already explained. (1) Christian leaders are “servants of Christ.” The language is reminiscent of the agricultural analogy in chapter 3 (though the word for “servant” is different). Christian leaders do not try to be independent gurus, all-wise teachers. They see themselves simply as servants and want other Christians to see them that way, too. But they are servants of one particular Master: they serve Jesus Christ. (2) At the heart of the commission they have received from their Master lies one particular assignment. They have been “entrusted with the secret things of God.” The expression ‘secret things’ (literally, mysteries) is the same one found in 2:7, “God’s wisdom in a mystery” (NIV, “God’s secret wisdom”). You will recall that in the second chapter of this book the nature of

the mystery was explored a little. Paul is not saying that the gospel is “mysterious,” but that in some ways it was hidden before the coming of Jesus Christ and has now been revealed. The gospel itself is the content of this mystery, God’s wisdom summed up under the burden of Paul’s preaching: Jesus Christ and him crucified.

There is a sense, of course, in which all Christians are “servants of Christ” and all have been entrusted with the gospel, “the secret things of God.” Nevertheless Paul makes it clear that he is still dealing primarily with leaders. He will shortly write, “Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos”—both leaders—“for your benefit” (4:6, emphasis added), thus showing that he is still maintaining the distinction between leaders and others that dominates 1 Corinthians 3. It is not that Paul, Apollos, and other leaders are servants of Christ while other Christians are not, nor is it that they are entrusted with the secret things of God while other believers know nothing of them. Leaders are not in a special, priestly class. Rather, what is required in some sense of all believers is peculiarly required of the leaders of believers. There is a difference of degree. That is why Paul will be able to say, “I urge you to imitate me” (4:16).

Those of us who want to be leaders in the church today, then, must begin by recognizing that there is no special, elitist

---

<sup>1</sup> Carson, D. A. (2004-02-01). *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Kindle Locations 1642-1658). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

qualification. This observation is entirely in line with the lists of qualifications for leadership given elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, when Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 sets out the qualifications for an overseer (“bishop” in older English), the most remarkable feature of the list is that it is unremarkable. It contains nothing about intelligence, decisiveness, drive, wealth, power. Almost everything on the list is elsewhere in the New Testament required of all believers. For example, the overseer must not be “given to drunkenness” (1 Tim. 3:3)—which certainly does not mean that the rest of us are allowed to get roaring drunk (Eph. 5: 18). Overseers must be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2); but then again, so must all Christians be (Heb. 13:2). The only elements in the list of qualifications for overseers that are not somewhere applied to all Christians are two: (1) “not . . . a recent convert” (1 Tim. 3:6), which certainly cannot be applied to new Christians, and (2) “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), which is bound up with the peculiar ministry responsibilities of the pastor/overseer/elder.

So what we must recognize, both from 1 Timothy 3 and from 1 Corinthians 4, is that the demands of Christian leadership, in the first instance, do not set a Christian apart into exclusive and elitist categories where certain new rules and privileges obtain. Rather, Christian leadership demands a focus of the kinds of characteristics

and virtues that ought to be present in Christians everywhere. That is precisely what makes it possible for Christian leaders to serve as models, as well as teachers, in the church of God.

In this context, then, the two elements of Christian leadership that Paul sets out are clear enough. Christian leaders are servants of Christ, and they are entrusted with the gospel, the secret things of God. If all Christians ought to serve Christ, how much more should their leaders do so unambiguously? If all Christians enjoy the secret wisdom imparted by the Spirit, how much more should leaders who have been entrusted with this great heritage handle it wisely?

It is important to think through what these elements mean. In fact, when they are properly understood, they merge into one. The expression rendered “those entrusted with the secret things of God” might more literally be rendered “[household] stewards of the mysteries of God.” True, the household steward held a position of trust, but in a society far more hierarchical than ours that position was commonly occupied by servants, even by slaves. The trust that is given them is given to them in their function as servants, as slaves; conversely, when they are called “servants of Christ,” the particular obligation laid on them as “servants of Christ” is the obligation to promote the gospel. It is everything that is entailed in being “entrusted with the



secret things of God.” What it means to be a servant of Christ is to be obligated to promote the gospel by word and example, the gospel of the crucified Messiah.

That is absolutely fundamental. There is no valid Christian leadership that does not throb with this mandate. In the West, we must repent of our endless fascination for “leadership” that smacks much more either of hierarchical models (I am the boss, and, for all below me on the ladder, what I say goes) or of democratic models (give the people what they want; take another survey, conduct another poll, and scratch where they itch). All valid Christian leadership, however varied its style, however wise its use of sociological findings, however diverse its functions, must begin with this fundamental recognition: Christian leaders have been entrusted with the gospel, the secret things of God that have been hidden in ages past but that are now proclaimed, by their ministry, to men and women everywhere. Moreover, they must beware of politely assuming such a stance, while their real interest lies elsewhere. This will not do. The servants of Christ have a fundamental charge laid on them: They have been entrusted with the gospel, and all their service turns on making that gospel known and on encouraging the people of God, by word, example, and discipline, to live it out.

From this fundamental insight into the nature of Christian leadership, Paul might have drawn out many possible corollaries. In fact, he chooses to trace out just two. Christian leaders must prove faithful to the One who has assigned them their fundamental task (4: 1–4). Paul’s logic is easy to follow. He has just insisted that Christian leaders are “entrusted with the secret things of God” (4:1). Any thoughtful reader can imagine the entailment: “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (4:2). But to whom? Not, ultimately, to the church. Those who are servants of Christ, those who are entrusted with the secret things of God, do not see themselves winning popularity contests— not even within the church’s borders. That is what Paul means when he says, “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court” (4:3). There is only one Person whose “Well done!” on the last day means anything. In comparison, the approval or disapproval of the church means nothing.

It is not even your own estimate of your service that is important. Feeling good about your ministry may have some limited utility somewhere, but surely it has no ultimate significance. You may think more highly of your service than God does; you may think less of your service than God does. But if you are constantly trying to please yourself, to make self-esteem your ultimate goal, then you are forgetting

whose servant you are, whom you must strive to please. So Paul candidly writes, “I do not even judge myself” (4:3). He does not mean that there is no place in his life for self-examination or self-discipline; his own writings contradict any such interpretation (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 13:5). What he means is that his own judging of himself cannot possibly have ultimate significance. As he puts it, “My conscience is clear” (4:4). That is, as he pens these words he is not aware of any sin or failure lurking in his life. Still, he does not know everything, even about himself. However clear his conscience, he could be self-deceived or grossly ignorant. Clear conscience, he writes, “does not make me innocent” (4:4). At the end of the day, there is only one opinion on his service that carries ultimate significance: “It is the Lord who judges me” (4:4).

Paul’s first corollary, then, is very simple. Christian leaders worthy of the name will constantly be aware that they owe fealty and devoted allegiance to only one Person: to the Lord who bought them. In derivative ways, of course, it is important for the Lord’s servant to try to maintain peace among the Lord’s people and to win their confidence and respect. There may be a place for an appropriate letter of commendation (e.g., Phil. 2:19). Still, a leader’s ultimate allegiance must not be to the church, or to any individual leader or tradition. It must be to the Lord

alone and to the “secret things of God” he has entrusted to him or her. And if that sometimes means there will be a clash of wills between that leader and the church, so be it; the foolishness of Christ crucified must prevail, even when the church as a whole follows some fork in the road that takes it away from the centrality of the gospel. What is far more tragic is the sad spectacle of so-called Christian leaders trying so hard for the approbation of peers and parishioners that their focus is diverted from the gospel and from the “Well done!” of the crucified Messiah.

Those who follow Christian leaders must recognize that leaders are called to please the Lord Christ—and therefore they must refrain from standing in judgment over them (4:5–7). In other words, if it is important for the leaders to see themselves as servants of Christ entrusted with a magnificent commission, it is also important for the rest of the church to see them as ultimately accountable to the Lord Christ, and therefore to avoid judging them as if the church itself were the ultimate arbiter of ministerial success.

It is easy to bleed this passage for more than it actually says. No thoughtful reader can suppose that Paul is abolishing all functions of judgment in the church. After all, in the next chapter of this epistle, he severely reprimands the church for failing to take decisive disciplinary action

in a case of immorality (1 Cor. 5). This disciplinary authority of the church extends even to leaders. In the last chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul clearly expects the believers in Corinth to exercise discipline over the false apostles before he arrives in town and feels constrained to take dramatic action himself. Casual gossip directed against the elders of the church should be ignored, but when critical reports prove true, there is a place for disciplining leaders (1 Tim. 5:19–20). Furthermore, surely no one can imagine that Paul here insists that Christians have no obligation whatsoever to “judge” themselves, to examine and test the reality and consistency of their allegiance to Christ. Although no Christian’s opinion of himself or herself has ultimate importance, that does not stop Paul from saying, in the right circumstances, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5).

If we roam more broadly through the Scriptures, it is easy enough to find passages that prohibit “judging” and then to discover still others that command it. For example, on the one hand we find Jesus saying, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matt. 7:1–2). On the other hand, he says, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” (John

7:24). This running tension is very strong throughout the New Testament. There is much that condemns what might be called “judgmentalism.” At the same time, chapter after chapter exhorts believers to be discerning, to distinguish right from wrong, to pursue what is best, to exercise discipline in the church, and so forth—functions that demand the proper use of judgment.

Getting the balance right in this area has never been easy. Perhaps it is rendered even more difficult today by the onslaught of pluralism. The brand of pluralism I am talking about teaches that all opinions are equally valid, so that the only opinion that is necessarily wrong is the one that says some other opinion is wrong. Applied to religion, no faith is permitted to say that some other faith is wrong; that is viewed as intolerant, bigoted, ignorant. In short, it is not pluralistic. Within this atmosphere, the passages in the Bible that condemn judgmentalism are regularly trotted out as if that is all the Bible has to say on the subject. In many circles today, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matt. 7:1) has become the best-known verse in the Bible, easily displacing John 3:16. What is regularly forgotten is that a few verses later Jesus tells his disciples, “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs” (Matt. 7:6)—which presupposes that somebody has to judge who the dogs and pigs are. In other words, pluralism has invested a tremendous

amount of energy and bias in only one side of the biblical presentation.

We may gain some poise and balance if we remember the kinds of people the two sides address. Prohibitions directed against judging have in mind self-righteous people who want to protect their turf. These people are usually fairly legalistic, have all the right answers, desperately want to elevate their “in” group above all others, and are constantly in danger of usurping the place of God. By contrast, biblical injunctions to be discerning or to judge well in some circumstance or other are directed against those who are careless and undisciplined about holy things, especially about the words of God. Such people regularly fly with the crowd rather than thinking through what allegiance to God and his truth entails in some particular cultural

context. It is utterly disastrous to appeal for judgment when forbearance is called for, or to prohibit all judgment when judgment is precisely what is needed. Both errors seriously damage the church and usually reflect a mind that is unwilling to think its way carefully through the balance and sanity of the Word of God.

So, what was going on in Corinth? It appears that some Corinthian believers were quite prepared to write off certain Christian leaders, simply because they preferred to follow some other leader as a guru. To elevate one leader and offer him or her the allegiance that belongs to God alone is bad enough; to write off all authority in any other Christian leader not only betrays a woeful lack of courtesy, but places the self-appointed judge in the place of God.

## Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Week 27

## 2 Corinthians 11:16–33 (ESV)

**I** repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 17 What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was

stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

# Context

- **11:16-21** This portion of Scripture shows the humanness of Paul. He was not a robotic spiritual guru, but a living, breathing man with thoughts, emotions, worries, fears and anxieties. He knows how to play the satire game and he knows how to persuade. He also has a genuine pastor's heart for the churches; in fact, he seems to even have constant anxiety over their well being and feels sympathy pains with them when they are troubled, and shows anger toward any who would harm them.
- **11:16-21** Paul decides to play the Proverbs 26:5 card and answers the fool according to his folly. He engages in the self-promotion game with the super-apostles to prove to the Corinthians that even by worldly standards they should trust Paul. Paul makes the point that Corinth already puts up with foolish talk from the super-apostles, so what's a few more boastful words from Paul going to matter? Paul's sharpest jab comes when he claims that perhaps he really is weak like his critics are saying— too weak to abuse, manipulate and enslave the church at Corinth like the super-apostles are doing.
- **11:22-29** Paul continues his “foolish talk” by explaining that he can go toe

to toe with any of the super apostles. Hebrew? Check. Servant of Christ? I'm an Apostle. Anyone else get lashed or beaten with rods? Nobody been to the local Roman prison for preaching Christ? How about shipwreck? Getting robbed? Being treated like a fugitive? In so many ways, how one suffers says more about their devotion to Christ than all the self-promotion and slick marketing the world has to offer.

- **11:30-33** Paul does not glory in his flaws, but has an appropriate view of himself. He does not deny that he has suffered nor does he shrink back from the unique call God had on his life, but he refuses to let his comfort and ego get in the way of his mission. He knows that the gospel travels through weak and brittle clay pots and that this is the way God displays his glory to the world. Paul is not teaching the Corinthians to despise glory, but rather to learn how to spot it.
- **11:31** It is incredible how Paul truly viewed his life as one lived out before the face of God. He carries himself with integrity because he knows there is no fooling God. This is in stark contrast to the super-apostles who think God cannot see their wicked hearts and deceitful words. Perhaps the difference between Paul and his critics was this: Paul had a genuine fear of the Lord.

# Personal Study

- Read Philippians 1:19-26. How does this shape Paul's mindset in suffering?

---

---

---

---

- Why do you think the Corinthians allowed themselves to be enslaved and abused by the super-apostles?

---

---

---

---

- How do you think the world would respond to boasting in weakness?

---

---

---

---

- Paul lived knowing his life was before the face of God himself. How would this perspective change how you approach the coming week?

---

---

---

---



# Group Application

- The Apostle Paul begins this passage by using sarcasm. Share a time when sarcasm didn't work out so well. When is sarcasm and satire appropriate in the church? When is it not?

---

---

---

- Paul endured much suffering for the sake of the gospel. Consider a time when you were afraid of obeying God because it would cost you. What were your fears? How did it go?

---

---

---

- Are there any hard "obediences" you need to pursue this week? How can your group pray and encourage you in this?

---

---

---

- In verse 28, Paul says he experiences the daily pressure of his anxiety for all the churches. What causes you anxiety?

---

---

---

- To what extent are you concerned for the local church? How can you and your group pray for the local church today?

---

---

---

---

# Short Reading

## From Tortured For Christ by Richard Wurmbrand<sup>1</sup>

It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners, as it is in captive nations today. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal: we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching; they were happy beating us--so everyone was happy.

The following scene happened more times than I can remember. A brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in, surprising him halfway through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to their "beating room." After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him--bloody and bruised--on the prison floor. Slowly, he picked up his battered body, painfully straightened his clothing and said, "Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?" He continued his gospel message!

I have seen beautiful things!

<sup>1</sup> Wurmbrand, Richard. *Tortured for Christ*. Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book, 1998. Print.

Sometimes the preachers were laymen, simple men inspired by the Holy Spirit who often preached beautifully. All of their heart was in their words, for to preach under such punitive circumstances was no trifling matter. Then the guards would come and take the preacher out and beat him half to death.

In the prison of Gherla, a Christian named Grecu was sentenced to be beaten to death. The process lasted a few weeks, during which he was beaten very slowly. He would be hit once at the bottom of the feet with a rubber club, and then left. After some minutes he would again be hit, after another few minutes again. He was beaten on the testicles. Then a doctor gave him an injection. He recovered and was given very good food to restore his strength, and then he was beaten again, until he eventually died under this slow, repeated beating. One who led this torture was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, whose name was Reck.

During the beatings, Reck said something to Grecu that the Communists often said to Christians, "You know, I am God. I have power of life and death over you. The one who is in heaven cannot decide to keep you in life. Everything depends upon me. If I wish, you live. If I wish, you are killed. I am God!" So he mocked the Christian.

Brother Grecu, in this horrible situation, gave Reck a very interesting answer, which I heard afterward from Reck himself. He said, "You don't know what a deep thing you have said. Every caterpillar is in reality a butterfly, if it develops rightly. You have not been created to be a torturer, a man who kills. You have been created to become like God, with the life of the Godhead in your heart. Many who have been persecutors like you, have come to realize--like the apostle Paul--that it is shameful for a man to commit atrocities, that they can do much better things. So they have become partakers of the divine nature. Jesus said to the Jews of His time, 'Ye are gods.' Believe me, Mr. Reck, your real calling is to be Godlike--to have the character of God, not a torturer."

At that moment Reck did not pay much attention to the words of his victim, as Saul of Tarsus did not pay attention to the beautiful witness of Stephen being killed in his presence. But those words worked in his heart. And Reck later understood that this was his real calling.

One great lesson arose from all the beatings, tortures, and butchery of the Communists: that the spirit is master of the body. We felt the torture, but it often seemed as something distant and far removed from the spirit which was lost in the glory of Christ and His presence with us.

When we were given one slice of bread a week and dirty soup every day, we decided we would faithfully "tithe" even then. Every tenth week we took the slice of bread and gave it to weaker brethren as our "tithe" to the Master.

When one Christian was sentenced to death, he was allowed to see his wife before being executed. His last words to his wife were, "You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don't know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don't have bitterness in your heart because they killed your beloved one. We will meet in heaven." These words impressed the officer of the secret police who attended the discussion between the two. He later told me the story in prison where he had been sent for becoming a Christian.

In the Tirgu-Ocna prison was a very young prisoner named Matchevici. He had been put in prison at the age of eighteen. Because of the tortures, he was very sick with tuberculosis. His family found out somehow that he was in this grave state of health and sent him one hundred bottles of streptomycin, which could make the difference between life and death. The political officer of the prison called Matchevici and showed him the parcel and said, "Here is the medicine that can save your life. But you are not allowed to receive

parcels from your family. Personally, I would like to help you. You are young. I would not like you to die in prison. Help me to be able to help you! Give me information against your fellow prisoners and this will enable me to justify before my superiors why I gave you the parcel.”

Matchevici answered, “I don’t wish to remain alive and be ashamed to look in a mirror, because I will see the face of a traitor. I cannot accept such a condition. I prefer to die.” The officer of the secret police shook Matchevici’s hand and said, “I congratulate you. I didn’t expect any other answer from you. But I would like to make another proposal. Some of the prisoners have become our informers. They claim to be Communist and they are denouncing you. They play a double role. We have no confidence in them. We would like to know in what measure they are sincere. Toward you they are traitors who are doing you much harm, informing us about your words and deeds. I understand that you don’t want to betray your comrades. But give us information about those who oppose you so you will save your life!”

Matchevici answered, as promptly as the first time, “I am a disciple of Christ and He has taught us to love even our enemies. The men who betray us do us much harm but I cannot reward evil with evil. I cannot give information even against them. I pity

them. I pray for them. I don’t wish to have any connection with the Communists.” Matchevici came back from the discussion with the political officer and died in the same cell I was in. I saw him die--he was praising God. Love conquered even the natural thirst for life.

If a poor man is a great lover of music, he gives his last dollar to listen to a concert. He is then without money, but he does not feel frustrated. He has heard beautiful things. I don’t feel frustrated to have lost many years in prison. I have seen beautiful things. I myself have been among the weak and insignificant ones in prison, but have had the privilege to be in the same jail with great saints, heroes of faith who equaled the Christians of the first centuries. They went gladly to die for Christ. The spiritual beauty of such saints and heroes of faith can never be described.

The things that I say here are not exceptional. The supernatural things have become natural to Christians in the Underground Church who have returned to their first love.

Before entering prison, I loved Christ very much. Now, after having seen the Bride of Christ (His spiritual Body) in prison, I would say that I love the Underground Church almost as much as I love Christ Himself. I have seen her beauty, her spirit of sacrifice.

# Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Week 28

## 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 (ESV)

**I** must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— 6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that

no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 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. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## Context

- 12:1-6 Paul displays an interesting reluctance, even when “boasting as a fool,” to speak of his own spiritual experiences. In fact, he distances himself from his revelations and visions because he is uncomfortable elevating himself. However, his reluctance to speak of being in the “third heaven” does not

mean it did not happen, but that he does not want his literally out-of-body experience to be a distraction for others. Aside from this brief mention of a trip to the third heaven, Paul rarely spoke of his spiritual experiences, choosing rather to instruct, encourage and rebuke the church rather than promote himself.

- 12:2 There is debate over what Paul actually means by the “third heaven.”

but most likely he is referring to paradise or the place where God dwells, what we would commonly refer to as heaven. The logic goes like this: the first heaven is the sky or atmosphere, the second heaven is outer space where the sun, moon and stars dwell, and the third heaven is God's realm. Regardless of whether or not this is what Paul means, we do know for sure he did not write a book about his experience or film any TV specials.

- 12:7 There is also debate over the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Some believe it to be a metaphor for Paul's inner turmoil, Paul's critics, or even a physical affliction or disease. Other commentators take the text literally as denoting an actual demon from Satan sent to harass and afflict Paul. Paul's reluctance to elaborate further shows that the point isn't what the affliction is, but how God works in affliction to display his divine power. Through his own life, he testifies to the counter-intuitive truth that God designs human weakness to be the conduit for demonstrating his power.
- 12:7-9 Paul wants the Corinthians to know that it is not his incredible supernatural experiences that

demonstrate God's power in his life, but rather God's grace in sustaining him through various trials that manifests divine power. This is a powerful corrective in an age where people desire supernatural experiences over daily faithfulness and endurance. It is interesting that God makes it a point to show that his grace is sufficient for Paul. God will give Paul everything he needs to make it through whatever trials come his way. And Paul finds comfort in knowing that ultimately his trials and sufferings, and even his thorn in the flesh, are from God.

- 12:9-10 Paul also demonstrates that if he is sustained by God through his sufferings, then his trials and hardships are clear evidence that he is on the right side of things. God would not sustain a man who was preaching a false gospel or trying to enslave the church. Suffering has a unique way of revealing the character of a Christian, and that is part of its design. 1 Peter 1:7 speaks of how trial and suffering proves the genuineness of a believer's faith, not only for himself, but also to all who witness him.

# Personal Study

- What would your thorn in the flesh be? What would your ideal solution to that thorn be?

---

---

---

- In what ways has God displayed his power in your weakness as you deal with your thorn?

---

---

---

- Read Isaiah 43. How does Isaiah reinforce the idea that God's power is made perfect in weakness?

---

---

---

- As you face trials in your life, what are you tempted to think of God? How can Paul's words in this passage help you in your temptations?

---

---

---

- Is there someone you know who is suffering under a persistent thorn in the flesh? What are some ways you can encourage them? What are some helpful questions you can ask them?

---

---

---



# Group Application

- Think about people in our church who are suffering. What evidences of God's power have you seen in their life? How can you encourage them today?

---

---

---

- In verse 8, Paul pleads three times for his thorn to be removed, but it is not removed. How does this affect our persistence in prayer? How does this work with the parable of the persistent widow found in Luke 18?

---

---

---

- What is your thorn in the flesh? How have you seen God use this thorn in your life?

---

---

---

- What truths and promises from this passage can encourage us in the midst of our suffering?

---

---

---

- How can your group pray for you as you deal with your “thorn in the flesh?” In addition for it being removed, how can your group pray for your heart as you deal with it?

---

---

---

---

# Short Reading

**From Heaven by Randy Alcorn<sup>1</sup>**

## **Is the Present Heaven a Physical Place?**

For the entrance of the greater world is wide and sure, and they who see the straitness and the painfulness from which they have been delivered must wonder exceedingly as they are received into those large rooms with joy and immortality.

– Amy Carmichael

After reading one of my books, a missionary wrote to me, deeply troubled that I thought Heaven might be a physical place. In our correspondence, no matter how many Scripture passages I pointed to, it didn't matter. He'd always been taught that Heaven was "spiritual" and therefore not physical. To suggest otherwise was, in his mind, to commit heresy.

My concern was not so much that he believed the present Heaven isn't physical. (Maybe he's right.) Rather, it was that he seemed convinced that if Heaven were physical, it would be less sacred and special. He viewed physical and spiritual as opposites. When I asked him to

demonstrate from Scripture why Heaven cannot be a physical place, he told me the answer was very simple: because "God is spirit" (John 4: 24). He believed that verse settled the question once and for all.

But saying that God is spirit is very different from saying that Heaven is spirit. Heaven, after all, is not the same as God. God created Heaven; therefore, he did not always dwell there. Though God chooses to dwell in Heaven, he does not need a dwelling place. However, as finite humans, we do. It's no problem for the all-powerful God, a spirit, to dwell in a spiritual realm or a physical realm or a realm that includes both. The real question is whether people, being by nature both spiritual and physical, can dwell in a realm without physical properties.

The physical New Earth will be our ultimate dwelling place, but until then we shouldn't find it surprising if God chooses to provide a waiting place that's also physical. For us to exist as human beings, we occupy space. It seems reasonable to infer that the space we occupy would be physical. If the present, intermediate Heaven is a place where God, angels, and humans dwell, it makes sense that Heaven would be accommodated to mankind, because God needs no accommodation. We know that angels can exist in a physical world because they exist in this one, not

---

<sup>1</sup> Alcorn, Randy (2011-12-08). Heaven (Alcorn, Randy) (Kindle Locations 1297-1312). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

just in Heaven. In fact, angels sometimes, perhaps often, take on human form (Hebrews 13:2).

If we are to draw inferences about the nature of Heaven, we shouldn't derive them from the nature of God. After all, he is a one-of-a-kind being who is infinite, existing outside of space and time. Rather, we should base our deductions on the nature of humanity. It's no problem for the infinite God to dwell wherever mankind dwells. The question is whether finite humans can exist as God does—outside of space and time. I'm not certain we can. But I am certain that if we can, it is only as a temporary aberration that will be permanently corrected by our bodily resurrection in preparation for life on the New Earth.

Why are we so resistant to the idea that Heaven could be physical? The answer, I believe, is centered in an unbiblical belief that the spirit realm is good and the material world is bad, a view I am calling Christoplatonism. (For a discussion of Christoplatonism's false assumptions, see appendix A.) For our purposes in this chapter, I will summarize this belief that looms like a dark cloud over the common view of Heaven.

Plato, the Greek philosopher, believed that material things, including the human body

and the earth, are evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and Heaven are good. This view is called Platonism.

The Christian church, highly influenced by Platonism through the teachings of Philo (ca. 20 BC–AD 50) and Origen (AD 185–254), among others, came to embrace the “spiritual” view that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied state. They rejected the notion of Heaven as a physical realm and spiritualized or entirely neglected the biblical teaching of resurrected people inhabiting a resurrected Earth.

Christoplatonism has had a devastating effect on our ability to understand what Scripture says about Heaven, particularly about the eternal Heaven, the New Earth. A fine Christian man said to me, “This idea of having bodies and eating food and being in an earthly place . . . it just sounds so unspiritual.” Without knowing it, he was under the influence of Christoplatonism. If we believe, even subconsciously, that bodies and the earth and material things are unspiritual, even evil, then we will inevitably reject or spiritualize any biblical revelation about our bodily resurrection or the physical characteristics of the New Earth. That's exactly what has happened in most Christian churches, and it's a large reason for our failure to come to terms with a biblical doctrine of Heaven. Christoplatonism has also closed our

minds to the possibility that the present Heaven may actually be a physical realm. If we look at Scripture, however, we'll see considerable evidence that the present Heaven has physical properties.

## **Heaven as Substance, Earth as Shadow**

In his seventeenth-century classic *Paradise Lost*, John Milton describes Eden as a garden full of aromatic flowers, delicious fruit, and soft grass, lushly watered. He also connects Eden with Heaven, the source of earthly existence, portraying Heaven as a place of great pleasures and the source of Earth's pleasures. In Milton's story, the angel Raphael asks Adam,

What if Earth  
Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things  
therein  
Each to other like, more then on Earth is  
thought?

Though the idea of Earth as Heaven's shadow is seldom discussed, even in books on Heaven, it's a concept that has biblical support. For example, the temple in Heaven is filled with smoke from the glory of God (Revelation 15:8). Is this a figurative temple with figurative smoke? Or is there an actual fire creating literal smoke in a real building? We're told there are scrolls in Heaven, elders who have faces, martyrs who wear clothes, and even people with

"palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7: 9). There are musical instruments in the present Heaven (Revelation 8: 6), horses coming into and out of Heaven (2 Kings 2:11; Revelation 19:14), and an eagle flying overhead in Heaven (Revelation 8:13). Perhaps some of these objects are merely symbolic, with no corresponding physical reality. But is that true of all of them?

Many commentators dismiss the possibility that any of these passages in Revelation should be taken literally, on the grounds that it is apocalyptic literature, which is known for its figures of speech. But the book of Hebrews isn't apocalyptic, it's epistolary. It says that earthly priests "serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" (Hebrews 8:5). Moses was told, in building the earthly tabernacle, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5). If that which was built after the pattern was physical, might it suggest the original was also physical?

The book of Hebrews seems to say that we should see Earth as a derivative realm and Heaven as the source realm. If we do, we'll abandon the assumption that something existing in one realm cannot exist in the other. In fact, we'll consider it likely that what exists in one realm exists in at least some form in the other. We should stop

thinking of Heaven and Earth as opposites and instead view them as overlapping circles that share certain commonalities.

Christ “went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation” (Hebrews 9:11). “Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself” (Hebrews 9:24). The earthly sanctuary was a copy of the true one in Heaven. In fact, the New Jerusalem that will be brought down to the New Earth is currently in the intermediate or present Heaven (Hebrews 12:22). If we know that the New Jerusalem will be physically on the New Earth, and we also know that it is in the present Heaven, does that not suggest the New Jerusalem is currently physical? Why wouldn’t it be? Unless we start with an assumption that Heaven can’t be physical, it seems that this evidence would persuade us that it is indeed physical.

The church is constantly being tempted to accept this world as her home... but if she is wise she will consider that she stands in the valley between the mountain peaks of eternity past and eternity to come. The past is gone forever and the present is passing as swift as the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz. Even if the earth should continue a million years not one of us could stay to

enjoy it. We do well to think of the long tomorrow. A. W. Tozer

These verses in Hebrews suggest that God created Earth in the image of Heaven, just as he created mankind in his image. C. S. Lewis proposed that “the hills and valleys of Heaven will be to those you now experience not as a copy is to an original, nor as a substitute is to the genuine article, but as the flower to the root, or the diamond to the coal.”

Often our thinking is backwards. Why do we imagine that God patterns Heaven’s holy city after an earthly city, as if Heaven knows nothing of community and culture and has to get its ideas from us? Isn’t it more likely that earthly realities, including cities, are derived from heavenly counterparts? We tend to start with Earth and reason up toward Heaven, when instead we should start with Heaven and reason down toward Earth. It isn’t merely an accommodation to our earthly familial structure, for instance, that God calls himself a father and us children. On the contrary, he created father-child relationships to display his relationship with us, just as he created human marriage to reveal the love relationship between Christ and his bride (Ephesians 5:32).

In my novel *Safely Home*, I envision the relationship between Earth and Heaven:

Compared to what he now beheld, the world he'd come from was a land of shadows, colorless and two-dimensional. This place was fresh and captivating, resonating with color and beauty. He could not only see and hear it, but feel and smell and taste it. Every hillside, every mountain, every waterfall, every frolicking animal in the fields seemed to beckon him to come join them, to come from the outside and plunge into the inside. This whole world had the feel of cool water on a blistering August afternoon. The light beckoned him to dive in with abandon, to come join the great adventure.

"I know what this is," Quan said.

"Tell me," said the Carpenter.

"It's the substance that casts all those shadows in the other world. The circles there are copies of the spheres here. The squares there are copies of the cubes here. The triangles there are copies of the pyramids here. Earth was a flatland. This is . . . well, the inside is bigger than the outside, isn't it? How many dimensions are there?"

"Far more than you have seen yet," the King said, laughing.

"This is the Place that defines and gives meaning to all places," Li Quan said. "I never imagined it would be like this."

## Does "Paradise" Suggest a Physical Place?

During the Crucifixion, when Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43), he was referring to the present Heaven. But why did he call it paradise, and what did he mean?

The word paradise comes from the Persian word *pairidaeza*, meaning "a walled park" or "enclosed garden." It was used to describe the great walled gardens of the Persian king Cyrus's royal palaces. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Greek word for paradise is used to describe the Garden of Eden (e.g., Genesis 2:8; Ezekiel 28:13). Later, because of the Jewish belief that God would restore Eden, paradise became the word to describe the eternal state of the righteous, and to a lesser extent, the present Heaven.

The word paradise does not refer to wild nature but to nature under mankind's dominion. The garden or park was not left to grow entirely on its own. People brought their creativity to bear on managing, cultivating, and presenting the garden or park. "The idea of a walled garden," writes Oxford professor Alister McGrath, "enclosing a carefully cultivated area of exquisite plants and animals, was the most powerful symbol of paradise available to the human imagination, mingling the images of the beauty of nature with

the orderliness of human construction.  
. . . The whole of human history is thus enfolded in the subtle interplay of sorrow over a lost paradise, and the hope of its final restoration.”

In the Judaism of the New Testament era, “The site of reopened Paradise is almost without exception the earth...The belief in resurrection gave assurance that all the righteous, even those who are dead, would have a share in the reopened paradise.”

Paradise was not generally understood as mere allegory, with a metaphorical or spiritual meaning, but as an actual physical place where God and his people lived together, surrounded by physical beauty, enjoying great pleasures and happiness.

God says, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). The same physical tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden will one day be in the New Jerusalem on the New Earth (Revelation 22:2). Now it is (present tense) in the intermediate or present Heaven. Shouldn’t we assume it has the same physical properties it had in the Garden of Eden and will have in the New Jerusalem? If it doesn’t, could it be called the tree of life?

We are told that after the Fall, God “drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24, NASB). It appears that Eden’s Paradise, with the tree of life, retained its identity as a physical place but was no longer accessible to mankind. It was guarded by cherubim, who are residents of Heaven, where God is “enthroned between the cherubim” (2 Kings 19:15).

Eden was not destroyed. What was destroyed was mankind’s ability to live in Eden. There’s no indication that Eden was stripped of its physicality and transformed into a “spiritual” entity. It appears to have remained just as it was, a physical paradise removed to a realm we can’t gain access to—most likely the present Heaven, because we know for certain that’s where the tree of life now is (Revelation 2: 7).

God is not done with Eden. He preserved it not as a museum piece but as a place that mankind will one day occupy again—and to a certain extent may now occupy in the present Heaven. Because we’re told that the tree of life will be located in the New Jerusalem, on both sides of a great river (Revelation 22:2), it seems likely that the original Eden may be a great park at the center of the city. If we know the tree that

distinguished Eden will be there, why not Eden itself? This would fit perfectly with the statement in Revelation 2:7 that the tree of life is presently in Paradise.

Though the rest of the earth fell under human sin, Eden was for some reason treated differently. Perhaps it had come from Heaven, God's dwelling place, and was transplanted to Earth. We don't know. But we do know this: God came to Eden to visit with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8), which he would no longer do after Adam

and Eve were banished from the Garden after the Fall. Whether or not Eden was created along with the rest of the earth, clearly it was special to God, and it remains special to him. The tree of life's presence in the New Jerusalem establishes that elements of Eden, as physical as the original, will again be part of the human experience. The presence of the tree of life in the present Heaven suggests that Heaven too has physical properties and is capable of containing physical objects.

# Notes

[illegible]



[illegible]

# Week 29

## 2 Corinthians 12:11–21 (ESV)

**I** have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 13 For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? 16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. 17 Did I take advantage of you through any of

those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. 20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

# Context

- **12:11-12** Paul strikes an interesting balance between straight talk and humility. He does not cower in fear of his critics, but stands his ground and says that he is not at all inferior to the so-called super-apostles. In fact, they are neither super, nor apostles at all, but Paul is the real deal because he performed the signs and wonders that are associated with the apostolic office. Yet Paul again refuses to self-promote and quickly adds that in the grand scheme of things, he is a nobody. He does not defend himself for the sake of his ego, but so that Corinth may be turned back to people who actually care about them.
- **12:14-15** Paul's integrity comes into play here again when he returns to his point about how he did not burden Corinth with any of his material needs. He provided the gospel free of charge to them because he is not after their stuff, he is after their hearts. He cares about them and not what they can give him. Paul likens his love for Corinth as that of a parent and a child. A parent does not ask his child for money in return for care, but the parent gladly serves his child regardless of what the child can give back.
- **12:16-19** It really is incredible that a man who suffered so much for a church would be called into question to such a great extent by that same church. Yet despite all things, Paul knows the Lord sees his heart. Paul has walked in integrity, and that is what allows him to bear the brunt of false accusation, because he knew the ultimate judge had the right verdict. Through it all, Paul's main objective was the building up of the church so that they continue in faithfulness and obedience to Christ.
- **12:20-21** Paul's greatest fear is not that his reputation becomes soiled, but that the Corinthians would not be repentant over their sin. And they had a lot of it. It is a humbling thing to walk through his list of sins because they are a part of so many churches today. It is a sober warning to the church that sin does not just affect individual lives, but the lives of those around and must be taken seriously so that it does not corrupt an entire community.
- **12:20** Paul has been patient up to this point waiting for Corinth to repent, but he gives a stern warning: they need to repent before he gets there or else God will use him as an instrument of correction and it won't be pretty. He finds no joy in having to be a rod of correction, but he is willing to do whatever it takes in order to protect the church.

# Personal Study

- What does it mean to mourn over your own sin?

---

---

---

- What does it mean to mourn over someone else's sin?

---

---

---

- How do Paul's guidelines in Galatians 6:1-5 inform how we are to deal with sin in the church?

---

---

---

- Consider someone you know who claims to be a believer but lives in unrepentant sin. In what ways can you pray for them? In what ways can you call them to repentance?

---

---

---

- Has anyone ever mourned for you over your sin? In what ways did that affect how you viewed your own sin?

---

---

---

# Group Application

- Have you ever been disappointed with how someone you loved is living? Share your experience. How did that make you feel?

---

---

---

---

- How do you think Paul would instruct us on how to deal with a loved one who is unrepentant in their sin?

---

---

---

---

- What are some ways in which the church can repent of quarreling, slander, gossip, disorder and the rest of the sins Paul mentions?

---

---

---

---

- What would it look like this week to “spend and be spent” for the souls of others?

---

---

---

---

# Short Reading

**In the spirit of “spend and be spent” the following is a sermon from John Piper.<sup>1</sup>**

## **Why “Don’t Waste Your Life”**

The focus of this weekend’s conference is the cry, “Don’t waste your life!” Why? The answer to that question requires some autobiography.

My father was an evangelist. That means I grew up in a home where heaven and hell were very real. He believed that all people go to one or the other, and it weighed on him mightily. So he preached.

I can recall one penetrating story that he told of an old man who was converted under his ministry. Soon after surrendering his life to the Lord he realized that his whole life up to that point had been spent pursuing ultimately worthless things, and he was found lamenting repeatedly, “I’ve wasted it, I’ve wasted it, I’ve wasted it.”

This idea of wasting my life was also manifesting itself in my life. I recently rediscovered a poem that I wrote during my senior year of high school (1964) titled “The Lost Years.”

*Long I sought for the earth’s hidden meaning;*

*Long as a youth was my search in vain.  
Now as I approach my last years waning,  
My search I must begin again.*

It is in my blood to fear wasting my life. I said it then in high school, and I say it again tonight at 62 years old. (And I feel even more vulnerable to wasting it the older I get because of the increased temptation to spend more time on the couch.)

Along with the fear that I might waste my life, there is also a passion to make it count. There was a plaque in our kitchen when I was growing up, which now sits in my study at home. It reads, “Only one life ‘twill soon be past, / Only what’s done for Christ will last.” I passionately want my life to last. I want it to count.

So I have a passion to not waste my life and a fear that it not happen. And there is a massive assumption behind this passion and this fear.

There is a reason, a purpose, a why that we exist that we do not create. It is given to us by our Creator. Our calling is to find it out and to do it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Piper, John S. “The Essence of the Unwasted Life.” <http://www.desiringgod.org/>. Desiring God, 28 Mar. 2008. Web. 15 Mar. 2016

In my college days, as I explored more, I simply could not embrace the vogue of existentialism.

The mantra of that movement was “Existence precedes essence,” which upheld the idea that there is no objective reality outside of me that defines my essence and to which my existence should conform. I define myself by choosing the way I exist. (This movement stemmed from thinkers such as Camus, Sartre, and Nietzsche, with his claim that God is dead. Cf. April 8, 1966 *Time* Magazine cover: “Is God Dead?”)

But I could not reduce the greatest realities to chemical reactions. Whether beauty, or love, or evil, or goodness, I couldn’t conclude that these were no more than a chemical reaction on a par with a complicated spider web.

Even the problem of evil, the problem of suffering had the reverse effect on me. Instead of making me doubt the existence of God, the very fact that it was a problem—that evil was morally repugnant—prevented me from writing it off as nothing more than a purely biological response.

In the midst of the most horrific evil and suffering our heart screams, “No! This is evil!” At that very moment the naturalistic, atheistic heart fails.

The purely naturalistic mind must say that this outrage we feel on account of evil is the same kind of thing as a headache. It is physical. It is chemical. It is a sophisticated working of nerves like the instincts of beavers who know how to build dams.

I could not embrace that. Neither can you in any consistent way. Therefore, I held to Reality with a capital R. God had me trapped. I had to conclude that something outside me created me and defines me.

If I do not find out what the Reality is that created me and defines me, then I will have wasted my life.

### **Jesus Our Ultimate Reality**

What that Reality is was settled for me early in my life, and I have never forsaken this gift. The Reality that created me and defines me is Jesus Christ. Paul affirmed it: By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-18)

I came to trust Paul’s witness. He saw Christ. He was commissioned by him. And either Paul is a liar, a lunatic, or he is an authorized apostle and reliable witness. In

my opinion, there's nobody more real than him, apart from Jesus Christ. Can you say that Romans was written by a fool? So I came to trust Paul.

Then there were the claims of Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

The high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:61-62)

No one ever spoke like this man, but as he spoke its power and its congruence to my life made it undeniable to me that Jesus was indeed the greatest Reality behind my life.

And that leaves us with the big question:  
Why do we exist?

What counts ultimately in life?

What is our purpose for being?

What is God's design for our lives?

What is the wasted life?

What is the Unwasted Life?

### **Jesus and Paul Agree: It Can Be Wasted**

Jesus believed there was such a thing as a wasted life:

"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (16) And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' (18) And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' (20) But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21)

Notice that the fool didn't commit any major crime. He was just sitting on his pile. Paul believed there is such a thing as a wasted life too:

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1Corinthians 15:17-19)

If there is no resurrection from the dead, then my Christian life is ridiculous! How many Americans could say that? Paul is



saying that to be a Christian should be foolish and pitiable in the eyes of the world.

Both Jesus and Paul assume a Reality that defines what a wasted life is. A life can be wasted, or not.

### **Paul's Life: To Magnify Christ**

What then is the essence of the unwasted life? It is a life lived to magnify Christ.

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored [magnified, made to look great] in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:20-21)

You and I are on this planet for a few years, all for the same ultimate reason but in various forms. This reason is that we would live and die to make Christ look valuable as he really is.

When Paul says that to die is gain, he means that Christ is more valuable than anything this world can offer. It's like what the psalmist said in Psalm 63:3: "Your steadfast love is better than life."

The key question then becomes, How can I use my possessions and body and time and career, etc. to show that Christ is precious beyond everything?

We are to magnify Christ, not like a microscope magnifies things but like a telescope magnifies things. Microscopes make small things look big; but telescopes make seemingly small things look like they really are: Huge!

The final joy of heaven will be to magnify the Lamb:

[I heard] the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelation 5.12-13)

The reason magnifying Jesus is the ultimate purpose of the universe and our lives is that Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of God.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (7) If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him

and have seen him.” (8) Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” (9) Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:6-9)

In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

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. (John 1:14)

We exist to display the majesty of Christ because Christ is God. The universe exists to make Christ known. That’s why God made it. And we have been called to join him in his self-glorification.

### **God’s Life: To Magnify Christ**

To see the radical nature of this divine purpose for Paul—to live to magnify Christ—we have to pose the question: Is

this Paul’s idea or God’s? Is Paul radically Christ-exalting and God-centered simply because he thinks that it’s the right thing to do? Or is he this way because God is radically Christ-exalting and God-centered? It matters in all I do that God is God-centered and Christ-exalting, not just Paul. Our call to magnify Christ is a call to join God in magnifying Christ. Our call to live for the glory of God is a call to join God in living for the glory of God.

### **God creates for his glory.**

Isaiah 43:6-7 “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”

### **God elects Israel for his glory.**

Jeremiah 13:11 “I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.”

God saves them from Egypt for his glory. Psalm 106:7-8 “Our fathers rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name’s sake that he might make known his power.”

## **God restrains his anger in exile for his glory.**

Isaiah 48:9,11 “For my names sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you... For my own sake, for my own sake I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”

## **God sends his Son, Jesus Christ, to earth for his glory.**

Romans 15:7-8 “Christ became a servant to the circumcision to show God’s truthfulness... and in order that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”

John 17:1 “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee.”

## **God sends his Son the second time for his glory.**

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 “He comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed.”

That’s enough to give you the flavor. This is the way God is. He is utterly committed to preserving and displaying the greatness of his glory and the honor of his name in all that he does.

Therefore, in Philippians 1:20 Paul is not merely making his life’s aim to magnify

Christ. He is joining God in his own God-centeredness. He is joining God’s ultimate purpose for the universe. He aims to magnify his own glory—and Jesus is the apex of that glory.

## **Why Assert God’s God-Centeredness?**

But why does it matter to see God’s God-centeredness when my life is at stake? Why not just say that Paul made it is life’s aim to magnify Christ, and so go do the same? Why draw in this the fact that Paul was joining God in his infinite commitment to glorify himself and his Son?

Because we won’t know the depth and seriousness and greatness of our calling to join God in his own God-centeredness unless we see that it hangs on God’s unwavering allegiance to the value of his own glory.

Five reasons for why it is important to point out God’s God-centeredness:

- I. God’s unwavering allegiance to his own glory shows the fullness of how righteous and just and trustworthy God is. What is righteousness for the One who defines it? It is valuing what is valuable in proportion to its value; treasuring what is the greatest Treasure in proportion to its worth; esteeming what is infinitely worthy of esteem with a passion fitting that esteem.

This is what God does perfectly. It is right. And anything short of it would be unjust, and blasphemous. God is not an idolater. He is unwaveringly faithful in upholding the value of his name and his glory.

2. God's unwavering allegiance to his own glory shows the immeasurable extent of God's happiness. He has been infinitely happy in beholding the beauty of his own infinite perfections in the image of his Son and in knowing and delighting in the other persons of the Trinity for all eternity.
3. God's unwavering allegiance to his own glory shows us how easily we are deceived in thinking that we love God when in fact we love ourselves above God. Is your zeal for God owing to his zeal for you, or is it a joining him in his zeal for his own glory? Are we God-centered because God is man-centered? If so, then aren't we simply self-centered, and God is useful to that end? God's passion for his glory exposes this subtle preference for ourselves over the value of God.
4. God's unwavering allegiance to his own glory is the key to helping us see and experience what it means to be truly loved by God.

For many years I have sought to understand how the God-centeredness of God relates to his love for sinners like us. Most people do not immediately see

God's passion for the glory of God as an act of love. One reason for this is that we have absorbed the world's definition of love. It says: You are loved when you are made much of.

God's love for us is not mainly his making much of us, but his giving us the ability to enjoy making much of him forever. In other words, God's love for us keeps God at the center. God's love for us exalts his value and our satisfaction in it. If God's love made us central and focused on our value, it would distract us from what is most precious, namely, himself. Love labors and suffers to enthrall us with what is infinitely and eternally satisfying: God. Therefore God's love labors and suffers to break our bondage to the idol of self and focus our affections on the treasure of God.

5. God's unwavering allegiance to his own glory shows us that our own passion for God is not merely our own but is in fact the Spirit-giving passion of God for God shed abroad in our heart. We are not left to ourselves to work up a passion for the glory of God. God's Spirit is the actual personal presence of God's very love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father.

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:26)

## Summary

How is Christ magnified in Philippians 1:21? By treasuring Christ so much above life that to lose everything but Christ in death is to gain.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. (Philippians 1:23)  
Therefore, measured against all that life can offer, death is gain because it brings more of Christ. This is the way we need to be to magnify Christ.

# Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Week 30

## 2 Corinthians 13:1–10 (ESV)

**T**his is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— 3 since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. 5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize

this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. 7 But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 10 For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

### Context

- **13:1** Paul seems to anticipate further conflict and accusation of Corinthian community members. He had previously established practices of church discipline, but now wants to make it explicitly clear what process should be followed for the confrontation of sin.

Though the wording of this verse is direct, it belies a longsuffering pastoral heart. Paul has dealt with this church for a long time!

- **13:2** There is a principle in scripture of gracious confrontation of sin with a mind toward patience and restoration. However, it does not mean that repentance is optional or that sin is a

mere trifle. Paul makes it clear that the purity of the church can require harsh removal of members from the group. The sin, which makes this kind of harshness necessary, is referred to in the previous chapter. They are “those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.”<sup>1</sup>

- **13:3-4, 9** Even in the closing verses of this book we see Paul returning to themes of power and weakness by referencing an apparent critique of his ministry (Christ was not speaking in him). Commenting on this mix of strength and weakness, NT Wright explains the paradox well:

Somehow the combination of weakness and strength which we see in the gospel must enrich and inform all our pastoral work. Often it is only the wounded who can heal. Often it is only those who have themselves received the sentence of death (1:9) who can sit as judges. And if judgment of any sort still sounds

peculiar (someone is bound to say ‘how very unchristian!’), ask yourself which New Testament you’re reading.<sup>2</sup>

- **13: 5-6** There is a kind of personal testing in the faith that Paul hopes will solidify the Corinthians assurance. He hopes they will pass the test and so prove to themselves that they are children of God and prove that his ministry among them was genuine. After all, they are the “letter” of Paul as we’ve seen him reference numerous times previously.
- **13:10** All spiritual authority is granted for building up. Leaders were given to equip saints for the work of ministry... for the building up of the church. However, the building up of fallen people in a fallen world is not an exercise in denial of hardship or absence of candid critique. Paul has the Corinthians in mind, and their growth in godliness, even as he is forced to use severe tactics.

---

1 The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), 2 Co 12:21.

---

2 Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 141.

# Personal Study

- For context of the Corinthian church, read 1 Corinthians chapter 5. In what ways does Paul instruct the church to handle unrepentant sin?

---

---

---

---

- Examination of self in relationship to the faith is a tricky game to play. What sort of methods could you employ to ensure this examination doesn't turn into an endless cycle of self focus and regret?

---

---

---

---

- What role does the Holy Spirit play in this examination according to Romans 8?

---

---

---

---



# Group Application

- Share about a time when you had a big test. How did it go?

---

---

---

- The Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians to examine and test themselves to see if they are in the faith. Why do you think this is important? What criteria should they use?

---

---

---

- Paul warns the Corinthians on multiple occasions. What is his purpose for these warnings? What role do you think warnings should have in our lives?

---

---

---

- Paul speaks of Christ's presence in the life of a believer. According to this passage, what are some specific ways that the presence of Christ helps believers?

---

---

---

- Paul desired to use his authority for the purpose of building up rather than tearing down. Think back upon this letter and list some ways that Paul built up the Corinthians.

- 
- 
- 
- What is one particular application point from the sermon that you'd like to put into practice this week? How can the group help you?
- 
- 
- 

## Short Reading

**From an article by Dr. Mohler in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*<sup>1</sup>**

### **Holiness And The People Of God**

Throughout the Bible, the people of God are characterized by a distinctive purity. This moral purity is not their own achievement, but the work of God within their midst. As the Lord said to the children of Israel, "I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44a). Given that they have been chosen by a holy God as a people carrying His own name, God's chosen people are to reflect His holiness by their way of living, worship, and beliefs.

---

<sup>1</sup> This particular article written by Dr. Mohler is Chapter 8 in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*©, John H. Armstrong, General Editor. [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998].

The holiness code is central to the understanding of the Old Testament. As God's chosen nation, Israel must live by God's Word and law, which will set the children of Israel visibly apart from their pagan neighbors. As the Lord said through Moses: "Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers" (Deut. 6:17-18).

The nation is reminded that it is now known by God's name and is to reflect His holiness. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). God promised His covenant faithfulness to His people but expected them to obey His Word and follow

His law. Israel's judicial system was largely designed to protect the purity of the nation.

In the New Testament, the church is likewise described as the people of God who are visible to the world by their purity of life and integrity of testimony. As Peter instructed the church: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Peter continued, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

As the new people of God, the church is to see itself as an alien community in the midst of spiritual darkness—strangers to the world who must abstain from the lusts and enticements of the world. The church is to be conspicuous in its purity and holiness and steadfast in its confession of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Rather than capitulating to the moral (or immoral) environment, Christians are to be conspicuous by their good behavior. As Peter

summarized, "Just as he who 'called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Pet. 1:15).

The apostle Paul clearly linked the holiness expected of believers to the completed work of Christ in redemption: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21-22). Clearly, this holiness made complete in the believer is the work of God; holiness is the evidence of His redemptive work. To the Corinthian congregation Paul urged, "Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor 7:1).

The identity of the church as the people of God is to be evident in its pure confession of Christ, its bold testimony to the Gospel, and its moral holiness before the watching world. Nothing less will mark the church as the true vessel of the Gospel.

## **Discipline In The Body**

The first dimension of discipline in the church is that discipline exercised directly by God as He deals with believers. As the book of Hebrews warns, "You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not

make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" (Heb. 12:5-7). As the passage continues, the author warns that those who are without discipline "are illegitimate children and not true sons" (v. 8). The purpose of discipline, however, is righteousness. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (v. 11).

This discipline is often evident in suffering—both individual and congregational. Persecution by the world has a purifying effect on the church. This persecution is not to be sought, but if the church is "tested by fire," it must prove itself pure and genuine and receive this suffering as the Lord's discipline, even as children receive the discipline of a father. The fact that this analogy is so foreign to many modern Christians points out the fact that discipline has disappeared in many families, as well as in the church. Children are treated as moral sovereigns in many households, and the social breakdown of the family has diminished its moral credibility. The loving discipline portrayed in this passage is as foreign to many families as it is to most congregations.

God's loving discipline of His people is His sovereign right and is completely in keeping with His moral character—His own holiness. His fatherly discipline also establishes the authority and pattern for discipline in the church. Correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God.

The second dimension of discipline in the church is that disciplinary responsibility addressed to the church itself. Like God's fatherly discipline of those He loves, the church is to exercise discipline as an integral part of its moral and theological responsibility. That the church can fall into moral disrepute is evident in the New Testament itself.

The apostle Paul confronted a case of gross moral failure in the Corinthian congregation that included "immorality of... a kind that does not occur even among pagans" (1 Cor. 5:1). In this case, apparent incest was known to the congregation, and yet it had taken no action.

"And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?" Paul accused the Corinthian congregation (v. 2). He instructed them to act quickly and boldly to remove this stain from their fellowship. He also warned them, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you

know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are” (vv. 6-7a).

Paul was outraged that the Corinthian Christians would tolerate this horrible sin. Incest, though not literally unknown in the pagan world, was universally condemned and not tolerated. In this respect the Corinthian church had fallen beneath the moral standards of the pagan world to whom they were to witness. Paul was also exasperated with a congregation he had already warned. Mentioning an earlier letter unavailable to us, Paul scolds the Corinthians:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.” —VV. 9-13

The moral outrage of a wounded apostle is evident in these pointed verses, which

call the Corinthian church to action and the exercise of discipline. They have now fallen into corporate sin by tolerating the presence of such a bold and arrogant sinner in their midst. Their moral testimony is clouded, and their fellowship is impure. Their arrogance has blinded them to the offense they have committed before the Lord. The open sin in their midst is like a cancer that, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.

In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers similar instruction, combining concern for moral purity and doctrinal orthodoxy: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul instructs the Thessalonians to follow his own example because “We were not idle when we were with you” (2 Thess. 3:7).

### **The Pattern Of Proper Discipline**

How should the Corinthians have responded to this public sin? Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of delivering this sinner unto Satan and removing him from fellowship. How is this to be done? To the Galatians Paul wrote that “if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). This teaching is clear, indicating that spiritual

leaders of the church are to confront a sinning member with a spirit of humility and gentleness, and with the goal of restoration. But what are the precise steps to be taken?

The Lord Himself provided these instructions as He taught His disciples: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

The Lord instructed His disciples that they should first confront a sinning brother in private. “Show him his fault,” instructed the Lord. If the brother acknowledges the sin and repents, the brother has been won. The fact that the first step is a private confrontation is very important. This limits the injury caused by the sin and avoids a public spectacle, which would tarnish the witness of the church to the Gospel.

In the event the private confrontation does not lead to repentance, restoration, and reconciliation, the next step is to take witnesses. Jesus cited the Deuteronomic law which required multiple witnesses of a

crime for conviction. Yet His purpose here seems larger than the mere establishment of the facts of the case. Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a brotherly context.

If the brother does not listen even in the presence of one or two witnesses, this becomes a matter for the congregation. “Tell it to the church,” instructed Jesus, and the church is to judge the matter before the Lord and render a judgment that is binding upon the sinner. This step is extremely serious, and the congregation now bears a corporate responsibility. The church must render its judgment based upon the principles of God’s Word and the facts of the case. Again, the goal is the restoration of a sinning brother or sister—not a public spectacle.

Sadly, this congregational confrontation may not avail. If it does not, the only recourse is separation from the sinning brother. “Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector,” instructed the Lord, indicating that the separation is to be real and public. The congregation is not to consider the former brother as a part of the church. This drastic and extreme act is to follow when a brother or sister will not submit to the discipline of the church. We

should note that the church should still bear witness to this man, but not as brother to brother, until and unless repentance and restoration are evident.

## **The Power Of The Keys**

What is the church's authority in church discipline? Jesus addressed this issue directly, even as He declared the establishment of the church after Peter's great confession: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). This "power of the keys" is one of the critical controversies between evangelicals and the Church of Rome. Roman Catholics believe that the pope, as Peter's successor, holds the keys, and thus the power of binding and loosing. Protestants, however, believe that the Lord granted the keys to the church. This interpretation is supported by the Lord's repetition of the matter in Matthew 18:18, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Here the context reveals that the power of binding and loosing is held by the church.

The terms binding and loosing were familiar terms used by rabbis in the first century to refer to the power of judging matters on the basis of the Bible. The

Jewish authorities would determine how (or whether) the Scriptures applied in a specific situation and would render judgment by either binding, which meant to restrict, or loosing, which meant to liberate. The church still bears this responsibility and wields this power. John Calvin, the great Genevan Reformer, believed that the power of binding should be understood as excommunication, and loosing as reception into membership: "But the church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus."

Calvin's interpretation is fully in agreement at this point with Martin Luther, whose essay on "The Keys" (1530) is a massive refutation of papal claims and Roman Catholic tradition. Luther saw the keys as one of Christ's great gifts to the church. "Both of these keys are extremely necessary in Christendom, so that we can never thank God enough for them." As a pastor and theologian, Luther saw the great need for the church to bear the keys, and he understood this ministry to be gracious in the recovery of sinning saints. As Luther reflected:

For the dear Man, the faithful Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ, is well aware that His beloved Christians are frail, that the devil, the flesh, and the world would tempt them unceasingly and in many ways, and that at times they would fall into sin. Therefore, He has given us this remedy, the key which binds, so that we might not remain too confident in our sins, arrogant, barbarous, and without God, and the key which looses, that we should not despair in our sins.

What about a church leader who sins? Paul instructed Timothy that a church leader—an elder—is to be considered “worthy of double honor” when he rules well (1 Tim. 5:17). When an elder sins, however, that is a matter of great consequence. First, no accusation is to be received on the basis of only one uncorroborated witness. If a charge is substantiated by two or three witnesses, however, he is “to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Tim. 5:20). Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause an even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation. As James warned, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (Jas. 3:1).

The scandals of moral failure on the part of church leaders have caused tremendous

injury to the cause of Christ. The stricter judgment should be a vivid warning to those who would violate the Word of God and lead others into sin by example. The failure of the contemporary church to apply consistent biblical church discipline has left most of these scandals unresolved on biblical grounds—and thus a continuing stain on the church.

The Bible reveals three main areas of danger requiring discipline. These are fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. Each is of critical and vital importance to the health and integrity of the church.

### **The Recovery Of The Third Mark**

The mandate of the church is to maintain true gospel doctrine and order. A church lacking these essential qualities is, biblically defined, not a true church. That is a hard thing to say, for it clearly indicts thousands of American congregations who long ago abandoned this essential mark and have accommodated themselves to the spirit of the age. Fearing lawsuits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unchallenged, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of biblical Christianity. They do not taste the true unity of a church



grounded on the truth and exercising the ministry of the keys.

John Leadley Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual of the nineteenth century, noted: "It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it." If so, and I fear it is so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure.

At the end of the twentieth century, the great task of the church is to prove itself to be the genuine church revealed in the New Testament—proving its authenticity by a demonstration of pure faith and authentic community. We must regain the New Testament concern for fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. We must recover the missing mark.

# Notes

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Week 31

## 2 Corinthians 13:11–14 (ESV)

**F**inally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you.

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

### Context

- **13:11** Paul gets specific in what he sees as a fruitful and unified church: a church that loves is first a church that rejoices. They seek to restore broken relationships and comfort each other through suffering. They agree with each other in the faith and are thus unified in the truth, and they seek to live in peace with each other. These are simple exhortations but they are the lifeblood of the church and the source of her vibrancy. In our age, many people seek production value, worship style, age demographic or cultural trendiness rather than the bread and butter qualities of genuine love and care expressed in a body of believers united in Christ.
- **13:12-13** The holy kiss Paul refers to is a special gesture reserved for special family reunions. Paul is using this common cultural expression of affection to say, in effect, that the church is a family and ought to greet and treat each other as such. He wants to stress that there is not only familial love on a local church level, but also between local churches as he mentions that the rest of the saints, some thousands of miles away, send their love to Corinth.
- **13:14** Paul finishes with a Trinitarian exhortation: that the grace of Jesus, the love of the Father, and the fellowship created by the Spirit are all active in the church. It is interesting to see that the community of the church is meant to reflect the community of the Trinity. This is Paul's only benediction that

features all members of the Trinity and it comes at the end of a letter dealing with intense strife and division. It is a helpful reminder to us that the Trinity works within the church to create a unity and bond of love that reflects the nature of God himself.

- **13:11-14** Despite all Paul has to endure from the Corinthians, he still loves them and desires their maturity and unity in Christ. He does not grow cynical or

angry with them, but by the grace of God he spurs them on to love and good deeds. Throughout this entire letter, Paul understands how central community is and that without community the Christian life falls apart. We ought to view the church the way Paul did – as a beautiful creation of God, full of sinners yet day by day, through ups and downs, growing in the grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

## Personal Study

- How would you summarize the message of 2 Corinthians in one sentence?

---

---

---

- Are there people in the church with whom you have not reconciled? What obstacles stand in the way of that reconciliation? How can you remove those obstacles?

---

---

---

- Why do you think Paul gives the exhortation to rejoice? How would you compare how a Christian rejoices to how a non-believer rejoices?

---

---

---

- In what ways does the Trinity impact how the church operates?

---

---

---

---

## Group Application

- What are some things you learned from the 2nd Corinthians series that you did not know before?

---

---

---

- In what ways did you apply 2 Corinthians to your life in the past year?

---

---

---

- Consider Paul's exhortation for believers to restore relationships, comfort each other, agree and live in peace. In what ways has your fellowship group grown in these areas? In what ways can you or your group continue to grow?

---

---

---

- Consider also Paul's exhortations as they relate to our church as a whole. What evidences of God's grace have you seen at Four Oaks? In what areas can Four Oaks grow in love and unity?

---

---

---

# Short Reading

## From The Mark of the Christian by Francis Schaeffer<sup>1</sup>

Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign — a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back.

### What Is This Mark?

At the close of his ministry, Jesus looks forward to his death on the cross, the open tomb and the ascension. Knowing that he is about to leave, Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to come. It is here that he makes clear what will be the distinguishing mark of the Christian:

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I

told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:33-35)

This passage reveals the mark that Jesus gives to label a Christian not just in one era or in one locality but at all times and all places until Jesus returns.

Notice that what he says here is not a description of a fact. It is a command which includes a condition: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” An if is involved. If you obey, you will wear the badge Christ gave. But since this is a command, it can be violated.

The point is that it is possible to be a Christian without showing the mark, but if we expect non-Christians to know that we are Christians, we must show the mark.

### Men and Brothers

The command at this point is to love our fellow Christians, our brothers. But, of course, we must strike a balance and not forget the other side of Jesus’ teaching: We

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Mark of the Christian*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1970. Print.

are to love our fellowmen, to love all men, in fact, as neighbors.

All men are our neighbors, and we are to love them as ourselves. We are to do this on the basis of creation, even if they are not redeemed, for all men have value because they are made in the image of God. Therefore they are to be loved even at great cost.

This is, of course, the whole point of Jesus' story of the good Samaritan: Because a man is a man, he is to be loved at all cost.

So, when Jesus gives the special command to love our Christian brothers, it does not negate the other command. The two are not antithetical. We are not to choose between loving all men as ourselves and loving the Christian in a special way. The two commands reinforce each other.

Very often the true Bible-believing Christian, in his emphasis on two humanities — one lost, one saved — one still standing in rebellion against God, the other having returned to God through Christ — has given a picture of exclusiveness which is ugly.

Christians are not to love their believing brothers to the exclusion of their non-believing fellowmen. That is ugly. We are to have the example of the good Samaritan consciously in mind at all times.

## **A Delicate Balance**

The first commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second commandment bears the universal command to love men. Notice that the second commandment is not just to love Christians. It is far wider than this. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In I John 3:11 (written later than the gospel that bears his name) John says, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Years after Christ's death, John, in writing the epistle, calls us back to Christ's original command in John 13. Speaking to the church, John in effect says, "Don't forget this . . . Don't forget this. This command was given to us by Christ while he was still on the earth. This is to be your mark."

## **For True Christians Only**

If we look again at the command in John 13, we will notice some important things. First of all, this is a command to have a special love to all true Christians, all born-again Christians. From the scriptural viewpoint, not all who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that is especially true in our generation. The meaning of the word Christian has been reduced to practically nothing. Surely, there is no word that has been so devalued unless it is the word of God itself. Central to semantics is the idea

that a word as a symbol has no meaning until content is put into it.

Jesus, however, is talking about loving all true Christians. And this is a command that has two cutting edges, for it means that we must both distinguish true Christians from all pretenders and be sure that we leave no true Christians outside of our consideration. In other words, mere humanists and liberal theologians who continue to use the Christian label or mere church members whose Christian designation is only a formality are not to be accounted true.

But we must be careful of the opposite error. We must include everyone who stands in the historic-biblical faith whether or not he is a member of our own party or our own group.

But even if a man is not among the true Christians, we still have the responsibility to love him as our neighbor. So we cannot say, "Now here's somebody that, as far as I can tell, does not stand among the group of true Christians, and therefore I don't have to think of him any more; I can just slough him off." Not at all. He is covered by the second commandment.

### **The Standard of Quality**

The second thing to notice in these verses in John 13 is the quality of the love that is to be our standard. We are to love all

Christians "as I," Jesus says, "have loved you." Now think of both the quality and the quantity of Jesus' love toward us. Of course, he is infinite and we are finite; he is God, we are men. Since he is infinite, our love can never be like his, it can never be an infinite love.

The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? Jesus says, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians.

If people say, "You don't love other Christians," we must go home, get down on our knees and ask God whether or not they are right. And if they are, then they have a right to have said what they said.

### **Failure in Love**

We must be very careful at this point, however. We may be true Christians, really born-again Christians, and yet fail in our love toward other Christians. As a matter of fact, to be completely realistic, it is stronger than this. There will be times (and let us say it with tears), there will be times when



we will fail in our love toward each other as Christians. In a fallen world, where there is no such thing as perfection until Jesus comes, we know this will be the case. And, of course, when we fail, we must ask God's forgiveness. But, Jesus is not here saying that our failure to love all Christians proves that we are not Christians.

Let each of us see this individually for ourselves. If I fail in my love toward Christians, it does not prove I am not a Christian. What Jesus is saying, however, is that, if I do not have the love I should have

toward all other Christians, the world has the right to make the judgment that I am not a Christian.

It is true that a non-Christian often hides behind what he sees in Christians and then screams, "Hypocrites!" when in reality he is a sinner who will not face the claims of Christ. But that is not what Jesus is talking about here. Here Jesus is talking about our responsibility as individuals and as groups to so love all other true Christians that the world will have no valid reason for saying that we are not Christians.

## Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## **Four Oaks Community Church**

---

### **Killearn Campus**

4500 W. Shannon Lakes Dr.

### **Midtown Campus**

526 E. 8th Ave.

850.385.0004 | [fouroakschurch.com](http://fouroakschurch.com) | [info@fouroakschurch.com](mailto:info@fouroakschurch.com) | [@fouroakschurch](https://www.instagram.com/fouroakschurch)

© 2015-2016 Four Oaks Community Church. All rights reserved.