



## 2 Corinthians chapter 2

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 13th February 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** 2 Corinthians 1:15-24

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

### Introduction

This evening we're continuing our verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians, Paul's second letter to the church in the city of Corinth. A city in modern day Greece, that at that time was so widely considered to be immoral, that an immoral person - wherever they were from - would be called a Corinthian. Such was its reputation.

But God had plans for that city, and told Paul that He had much people there. And indeed a young church was planted and grew. But roll forward 7 years or so since Paul had left there, and sadly, the church had become too accepting of sin.

But Paul, as the founding pastor of that church, had a deep love for them, and upon hearing the problems that had crept into the church, wrote to them, out of love, to correct them. Many listened, some did not. Those that did not, questioned his authority - something that Paul will address at the end of this letter. However, even those that listened needed further correction, for they went too far in dealing with sin - and that's something Paul will address in the middle of this second chapter. But also his reasons in not yet visiting were questioned - which he started to address at the end of chapter 1, and will continue at the start of chapter 2.

## Overview of 2 Corinthians

As a quick reminder, we can summarise this book by breaking it down into 3 parts - though many topics are covered - with...

- Chapters 1 to 7 - Christian living
- Chapters 8 to 9 - Christian giving
- Chapters 10 to 13 - Christian guarding

## Overview of chapter two

And this specific chapter this evening can also be summarised by breaking it down into 3 parts:

- Happiness, not heaviness (1-4)
- Restoration (5-13)
- Triumph (14-17)

And as usual, we'll come back to these at the end of tonight's study.

## Chapter two

So as we get started, again for context, let's read the last two verses of chapter 1:

### **2 Corinthians 1:23-24**

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

That is, Paul didn't want to come to them in heaviness of heart, but in happiness. He loved these people. He didn't want to visit and spend all his time correcting their behaviour, as permissible as that would be - he wanted to come and encourage them, and be encouraged by them. And so he notes:

### **2 Corinthians 2:1-3**

But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all.

So, we see here that Paul addressed the difficulties, divisions and sin in the church in his first letter to the Corinthians, with the hope that he would then be able to visit with these things already dealt with. Which is why he was so desperate for news of their spiritual state - as we'll see in verse 13.

And his desire for their holiness, was because he loved them. And we should take note of this order - that we correct people because we love them, not correct them so that we can love them. Not about wanting to enforce the rules, but with sincere desire that others' relationships w/the Lord be exemplary - for their benefit, and the benefit of all.

We continue...

### **2 Corinthians 2:4**

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Look at these words! Anguish of heart. Many tears. The love. We're really seeing Paul's heart. This isn't a man who wants to beat up the sheep. This is a man who loves them.

It is a truly difficult thing to correct others. We don't feel warm and fuzzy when we do it - at least we shouldn't! But it's a necessary part of love. Just consider the relationship between a parent and child. They correct them - just as much as they encourage them. They discipline them, as well as congratulate them. This is a reality that is hitting home even more to me, now that I'm a father - that while I'm looking forward to all the fun that I'll have with my son in the years ahead - he doesn't need merely another buddy, for he'll have plenty of those I'm sure - but what he needs me to be is his dad. To be a father that instructs, corrects and where necessary, rebukes him. And I'll do that, because I love him.

Similarly, Paul, has a heart for this church in Corinth - and he is demonstrating his love for them in doing the very difficult thing of correcting them. And that is the job of every pastor. Not correcting through or because of mere opinion, but by magnifying God's Word. By pointing to Him.

Writing on this topic, J Vernon McGee notes:

A great many people today fall out with the preacher when he preaches a message that is rather severe. Sometimes correction from the Word of God will really bear down on the congregation. Some people think that a pastor should not do that. May I say to you, my friend, that a faithful pastor must do that. The command is: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1–2). Any man who stands in the pulpit today has a tremendous responsibility to rebuke what is wrong. Many of the saints don't like this. Paul tells them here that his rebuke was not because he was opposed to them, but because he loved them. A faithful pastor shows his love by preaching the Word of God as it is rather than "buttering up" the congregation.

**J Vernon McGee**

And I would go further, that this is not solely the responsibility of the pastor. I came across this simple list during the week that I think is a good start on the responsibilities we have to each other:

Your local church:

1. Teaches you truth.
2. Confronts your sin.
3. Accepts you as family.
4. Holds you accountable.
5. Aids your sanctification.
6. Keeps you God-focused.
7. Provides gospel fellowship.
8. Helps you profess your faith.

**Dustin Benge**

But now, here in his second letter, having explained his reason for not visiting as yet, Paul considers their response to his first letter...

## **2 Corinthians 2:5**

But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe.

So that is, the church, at least many of them, had obeyed Paul's instruction - and had dealt with the man noted in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 as sleeping with his stepmother. Back then, Paul wrote:

### **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

And now he writes:

### **2 Corinthians 2:6-8**

This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

That is, the church had now finally dealt with the sin that they were failing to deal with previously - but had overstepped the mark. They had removed him from the church, taking away the rights and privileges which he had in the church (as they'd been instructed to do), but despite his repentance, they were not letting him back in. They'd taken it too far. And so Paul is exhorting them to love him and forgive him too.

And so we must forgive others too. We can't hold grudges against someone because of what they once did. We are not a higher tribunal than God. Of course, the clear example of this is Jonah - who was told to preach to the people of Nineveh, but was upset when they repented! But just as God had mercy on Nineveh when they repented, so must we have mercy on those who turn from their sin following correction.

How do we re-affirm our love? I don't think it's terribly complicated - and can start with a coffee, text, note/card through the door, flowers, a meal. Just something that says, we love you - we love that you're seeking and obeying the Lord, and you're welcome here. You're welcome home.

We must see others as God sees them - and not invent new rules or ways to punish them. We should be going after restoration, not retaliation.

Paul will also write this to the church in Galatia:

### **Galatians 6:1**

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

But continuing in this letter, Paul writes:

### **2 Corinthians 2:9**

For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

And so Paul points out that while he asked them to deal with this individual's sin, that's not all he was addressing - but also that their failure to deal with it was disobedience on their own part.

## **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**

Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

And this is what it comes down to – Satan wants to separate us from our Shepherd. We looked at this just this morning in our study of John chapter 10. There's nothing he wants more. And Paul says we must not be ignorant of his devices. What are those devices, the tools, the tricks that he'll use?

We'll there's two big ones – persuasion, and condemnation.

First – he'll start planting those seeds... "It'll be OK". "What I'm doing is not as bad as ...." fill in the blank. Quickly, that turns to the person saying "the Bible says not to judge" and "only he who is without sin should cast the first stone". And before you know it, you've rationalised your own sin, or the sin of others. And it ruins the individual's walk with the Lord, and harms the church. It separates them from the Shepherd.

But there's a second trick Satan has up his sleeve, in reserve for the moment that the conscience kicks in – the moment where sin is seen for what it is. And he whispers "God doesn't love you", "He can't forgive you now", and "you're not good enough to go to church". Having pulled the individual away, the last thing he wants is for them to go back.

These are very real strategies the devil uses – and we must not help him out with either of these things!! We must not make excuses for sin, or fail to deal with it. But also, we must not condemn those seeking the Lord, because of their past failure. If Jesus can forgive (which He does!), when it cost Him so much, so MUST you. MUST you.

Paul loved this church in Corinth. I hope you come to love this church in Deal in the same way – not the building, not our set of meetings – but the people. Indeed, I hope the spiritual state of all those here increasingly weighs on our hearts as it did on Paul's – for we read:

## **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

That is, Paul, having written his first letter in response to hearing of the difficulties and disobedience there, is aching for news of how they are doing. He truly wants to hear of them walking with the Lord. And knowing Titus was the messenger that would bring this news, he, as we read here, had no rest in his spirit.

Now I wonder, do we love each other that much? If someone here walked away from the Lord, would it break your heart? Or perhaps more likely, if someone here was completely apathetic – coming to church merely out of routine – would it bother you? There are people in this church that have not even once been to a prayer meeting, a home group, a Sunday evening service, prayer breakfast, men's or ladies Bible study. Does that not bother you? It bothers me – but I'll be honest, not as much as it should. We should be on our knees praying for these folks.

This wasn't just Paul's attitude. We read in 3rd John:

### 3 John 1:4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Be honest, how much joy does it bring you to see others walking in the truth?

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. If you see someone languishing in their faith, encourage them. If you see someone disobeying the Lord, correct them. If you see someone seeking the Lord in repentance, be sure to forgive them, and build them up.

Paul continues...

### 2 Corinthians 2:14

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

We have a big verse on our hands here. How? You might wonder. Well, a little cultural background of the time greatly helps here, one that all commentators I read or listened to pick up on - for it is such a picture of what has happened for us.

At this time, the Roman Empire was in full swing. With their military prowess, and pomp & ceremony. And the allusion Paul makes is to the triumphal entries a victorious Roman general would make to the city of Rome, following a large and decisive victory. It's recorded that that these ceremonies were so grand, they could start in the morning, and continue late into the night. The general would ride on a chariot drawn by white horses, while he wore a crown and in one hand held a branch of laurel, the emblem of victory. The spoils of war would be brought into the city and paraded, musicians would play, sacrifices would be offered, as would incense - one suggest I heard was that this was to the extent that it would even be hard to see the parade for it, and there would be no escaping the smell of it.

Now consider these verses again - for Jesus is our victor, He has defeated death, led captivity captive, and saved you and I. His accomplishment is magnificent; He has given us eternal life!! But - just like not all will love the smell of incense, not all will love the fragrance of what He has done. And if we bear Christ, we'll bear that fragrance. Some will love it - just as in the joy I hope we have when we meet other Christians - but some will detest it, and hate us for it. We read...

### 2 Corinthians 2:15-16

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

Why is it some hate the fragrance of what Jesus has done? It's because they know He is the only way to eternal life, and they do not want to accept that.

Going back to the Roman triumphal processions for a moment - something I didn't mention earlier, was that there were two groups of captives that would be brought into the city. One group, would be freed and become Roman citizens. But the other group, would be thrown to the wild beasts and destroyed.

We are that group that have been saved, and our now citizens of Heaven!! But whereas the fragrance of Christ's victory is the most wonderful, sweetest thing to us - but to those who refuse to accept Christ's salvation, they have turned their back on their only hope - and the smell of salvation is offensive to them.

But considering the glorious salvation we have, the most magnificent victory in Him, Paul asks - "who is sufficient for these things?" That is, who is sufficient to be used by Jesus? He'll answer that in verse 5 of chapter 3. But in closing this chapter, we see him note who is not sufficient.

### **2 Corinthians 2:17**

*For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

And so Paul rebukes those that have questioned his motives, stating that he has never done this for personal gain, but out of obedience to the calling God put on his life. And that is how we are to handle the Word of God too.

Jon Courson comments: This is crucial for every Sunday-school teacher, preacher, Bible study leader, music minister, or anyone else who deals in any way with the Word. We are not to corrupt the Word with our own agenda or axes to grind.

I would add that we must always preach the Word for others benefit, not our own - though there is enormous blessing in doing so. And for those in paid ministry, you must be in it for the outcome, not the income.

Recently, the pastor and elders individually read through our statement of faith that is on our web site - I encourage you to do the same - and one phrase in particular jumped out at me.

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its message can be applied to an individuals life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.

That is our aim. That is what we must do. And for any of you that ever teaches, now or in the future - be it your own children, the whole church family, the men's or ladies groups, Sunday School, or our children's and youth groups - may that be your aim too. I think we can take the "we" off the front of that, changing it from a statement into an instruction.

This chapter is very much connected to the next, but tonight we'll close here.

## **Summary**

Looking back at what we've covered, we began with Paul stating his purpose for delaying his visit:

- Happiness, not heaviness - he wanted it to be a joyful reunion (1-4)
- Restoration - don't give the devil a helping hand (5-13)
- Triumph - what a glorious victory Jesus has won! (14-17)

## **Application questions**



Of course, as with any chapter, there are many questions we can and should ask our selves - but just a few to get started with this week as we reflect on this:

- Are we too slow to correct?
- Are we too slow to forgive?
- Does the spiritual state of others both us?
- Have we truly grasped the scale of Jesus' victory?

**Let's pray.**