

47. Jesus in 2 Corinthians

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Not many people in America, even around the world, do not know Dr. Billy Graham, the evangelist of the century. God used this great man of God, a humble man to bring many people to Himself. This man of God kept his life so simple and so transparent to everyone, that even the notorious tabloids could not find anything bad about him. Does it mean that he is a perfect man? Far from it. He would be the first one to deny it.

We find another well-known godly man almost 2000 years ago, a contemporary to our Savior Jesus, who was once a blasphemer and a persecutor of Christianity in his ignorance and in his misguided zeal for God. His name was Paul and his new title was an apostle of God.

A. ABOUT THE AUTHOR PAUL

Philippians 3:5-6 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul, formerly known as Saul of Tarsus should have been the prime candidate for a high priest position. He had everything going for him. But on the Damascus road in Acts 9, God used that road to strike Paul down by blinding him so he could lift him to incredible heights – as an apostle, evangelist, pastor, missionary, and finally, martyr. No one was more committed to the cause of Christ than the apostle Paul.

Aside from his impressive resume, Paul penned 13 New Testament letters. If you add the Book of Hebrews as his, it would be 14. He traveled extensively, plowing new mission fields and planting a number of churches in the regions of the Roman Empire. The letters he wrote grew out of his travels and set forth the basic theology of the Christian faith.

Was he a perfect man? No. Not according to his own testimony.

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

B. ABOUT THIS BOOK

2 Corinthians which is written by Paul somewhere around 55 A.D., is much different from his other letters. This letter is the most biographical and least doctrinal of Paul's epistles. It tells us more about Paul as a person and as a minister than any of the others. It was unedited and unguarded. It had been published essentially without his permission, if you will. He undoubtedly had no idea it would be preserved for centuries to follow.

We learn from this letter that Paul was not a highly polished silver goblet, sitting on a shelf, to be admired and observed, but not touched. Rather, he was a used, mis-used, and broken piece of pottery – an ordinary “jar of clay”.

We can have a couple of glimpses of his honest confession of struggles from this Book. It is refreshing to see a spiritual giant is no different than the ordinary people like us.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure,

above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,

That was not all. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-11, he shared more of his struggles:

2 Corinthians 4:8-11 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

The Greek word for 'perplexed' in verse 8 means "without a way." That's how Paul felt. Yet because of God's grace, Paul was never utterly lost or without hope. The Lord our God always preserved him, and Jesus is ready and willing to do the same for us.

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This letter offers a great deal of personal insight into Paul's life that is not present in any other NT Book.

However, in chapters 8 and 9, his letter also clearly reveals God's plan for His people to give to others. Several realities about Christian giving become clear in these two chapters: Christians give generously according to, and at times, beyond their financial abilities; Christians give their money across racial and national lines; Christians who make commitments to give should follow through with those promises; and Christians should give cheerfully, rather than under compulsion.

D. SURVEY OF THE BOOK

Why did apostle Paul write this second letter to the Corinthians?

There are a number of reasons Paul wrote this letter:

1) A public reason

Paul was still disturbed about some of the Corinthians' conduct so he wrote to correct them – ornery people that they were. The first letter didn't seem to do it. For some of them, Paul couldn't seem to warn them enough to get them back in line, so he wrote them again in another effort to correct their lifestyle.

2) A personal reason

Paul was being criticized, and he needed to defend his integrity. You'll notice that his enemies were challenging his authority as an apostle as well as his personal integrity. In memorable fashion Paul offered a spirited self-defense and boldly confronted his critics in the last four chapters of this Book.

3) A practical reason

Paul had been promoting a fund raising effort on behalf of the needy in Jerusalem, and the Corinthians had made some commitments to the project but had seemingly lost all their momentum. So Paul encouraged them to get back on the project with renewed compassion for the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

4) A doctrinal reasons

Paul wanted to explain in greater detail some of the doctrines the Corinthians had misunderstood, possibly because of the false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church.

2 Corinthians has basically three sections:

- 1) **Chapter 1 – chapter 7:** Paul is defending his conduct and his unique ministry as an apostle.
- 2) **Chapter 8 – chapter 9:** Paul is urging the Corinthians to finish readying their collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem.
- 3) **Chapter 10 – chapter 13:** Paul's validation of his apostolic authority.

We find four points that the apostle Paul wanted to relay to us:

1) Great people are not immune to difficult times.

Even though Paul was a great man with a great ministry, even though God's hand was obviously on his life, and even though his ministry was centered in God's perfect will, life was difficult for him.

2) Hard times bring tensions that are easily interpreted as unfair contradictions.

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. 4 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; 6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

3) All of us can get easily distracted by the benefits of being with God. In result, we can forget the relationship with God. Because of that, God often allows us to have reminders to rely on Him.

God took Paul from the darkest of valleys to the brightest of mountaintops – from the Roman prison up to Paradise in heaven in chapter 12. But after giving Paul a heavenly revelation, God gave the apostle a humbling reminder.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In spite of his fervent and repeated prayers for the removal of this thorn in the flesh, God said, "No" to the apostle Paul.

Paul was not the only one who had the thorn in the flesh:

Ask Abraham. He will point you to the sacrifice of his son Isaac at the Mount Moriah.

Ask Joseph. He will direct you to his dungeon because of the false charge.

Ask Moses. He will date his blessing back to the forty years of silence from God before the Exodus.

Ask David. He will tell you that his songs came from the night in the wilderness.
Ask Job. He will remind you that God answered him out of the whirlwind.
Ask Peter. He will tell you about his three denials of Jesus.
Ask John. He will show you his flimsy hut in Patmos Island where he received the revelation of Jesus Christ.
Ask one more – the Son of Man. He will answer, “From the cold ground on which I was lying – the Gethsemane ground. I received my Scepter there.”

I wonder when the word of faith movement people are going to get this picture?
They think that everything they claim should come true because God is obligated to us. Fat chance!!!

4) Humanity plus difficulty brings humility and maturity, not inferiority.

We live in a time when weakness is despised. If we can't shine in every area, we feel inferior and inadequate and resolve to try all the harder.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Living in unity requires us to humbly forgive one another and to follow our leaders.

We can hurt each other, but we need to forgive those who wrong us as the Lord has forgiven us.

2) Stewardship in our life is more than about money. More importantly, it is about our time for the Lord and others.

We should not only give to God from our paycheck, but our very lives should be a reflection of Him. We should give ourselves first to the Lord, then to the church and the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.